

Larry Wilson\_Fall\_2011

This interview was conducted by Debo Powers.

Debo: My name is Debo Powers and today is October 15, 2011. I'm interviewing for the first time Larry Wilson. This interview is taking place at 286 Kintla Ranch Road north of Polebridge, Montana. This interview is sponsored by the North Fork Landowners Association and is part of the North Fork History Project. So Larry tell us a little bit about your early background, where and when you were born.

Larry: [Chuckles] I was born in Kalispell in 1937, and except for a short period after I graduated from college I went to Arizona thinking I wanted to get out of Arizona. Two years convinced me I wanted to come home, so I came home and started teaching in Columbia Falls in 1960. In 1972 I quit teaching...1974 I guess. In 1974 I quit teaching and went into the logging business and I retired from that in 2002, and here I am.

Debo: And here you are. So how did you get to the North Fork? How did you find out about it?

Larry: It's interesting. This project caused me to think about the first time I was here, because I always thought when my dad bought Kintla ranch and that was when we really came here. But the first time that I can remember when we came to the North Fork was during World War II and I'm not sure of the year, '42 I think, maybe '43, but I was 4 or 5 years old. And my dad had just been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and had to leave and we came home and we camped at the mouth of Whale Creek. And I was pretty small so my dad carried me when we went fishing at Whale Creek and he caught two 15-pound bull trout that day that we kept alive for the whole time that we were camping there and then took home and smoked. And at that time the old homestead barn was sitting near the mouth of Whale Creek, and we died a dead coyote inside. Little kids aren't turned off by dead coyotes, so my dad helped me and we saved the skull and bleached it and I had it in my room until I graduated from college I guess.

So was the first time in the North Fork and then after the war in 1947 my dad bought Kintla Ranch, and that really started where we lived here. When he sold it in 1953 the next summer the new owners of Kintla Ranch didn't operate it as a dude ranch and hired me as a caretaker, and the money that I earned as a caretaker allowed me to buy this property from Tom Reynolds. So basically I've been here since 1947.

Debo: When your family owned Kintla Ranch did you operate it as a dude ranch?

- Larry: Oh yeah. My dad was a game warden at the time so my mother really operated Kintla Ranch. We had a wrangler, a cook, and two girls that did housekeeping and waiting tables and sometimes a handyman.
- Debo: And you had guest houses so people came up and stayed.
- Larry: At that time Kintla Ranch had gee, six housekeeping cabins where people could come and rent the cabins and cook and stay there on their own and we had eight cabins up around the lodge for guests who ate at the lodge. I think they were pretty expensive those days, \$10 a night I think.
- Debo: That's great. What age were you when your family owned Kintla Ranch?
- Larry: They bought it in 1947 so I was 10.
- Debo: 10. So as a young boy you probably had a good time around the ranch.
- Larry: Oh yeah, this is a great place for kids.
- Debo: Yeah, I bet.
- Larry: Burt Monahan was still on his homestead and we would go visit him and ride horses anywhere, played kick the can on horseback. Matt Brill came and helped. Anytime we had pack groups Matt and Meta came and helped, so I knew the Brills, Burt Monahan. The Holcolms and Wurtz's were all still here living on the North Fork at that time.
- Debo: When you had guests come up you took them on hikes?
- Larry: Well we took them on day rides. Mostly then the guests that we had were not like the MacFarlands. At MacFarlands they were western cowboy type dude ranch based on horseback riding. The Kintla Ranch was more a longstanding clientele of people that had been coming here for 20-something years and they came to fish mostly, but we took day rides and occasional pack trips for people to fish at Kintla Lake and upper Kintla Lake, hike into Frozen Lake. There was no road then, and they fished a lot in Canada also. At that time the border was open. A man, a Canadian who acted for the U.S. and Canada and he could sell Canadian fishing licenses, so we would drive up there, get some fish. Wasn't much floating the river in those days.
- Debo: That's kind of new isn't it. When you were a young boy and you were living in Kintla Ranch did you go to school up here?
- Larry: No. In the winter we went to Kalispell and I went to school in Kalispell. That was kind of a change because during the war I went to 13 different elementary schools for six grades, and then when we came home to stay after the war then I attended school in Kalispell.

- Debo: How many months a year was your family up here?
- Larry: Well my mother would come as soon as the road was open, and then my little brother and I would come as soon as school was out, and my dad would just be here on weekends and during his vacation time from the State.
- Debo: Because he worked for the State?
- Larry: Yeah, and we stayed until school started although my mother stayed longer because we had the hunting concession in Canada at that time, so we ran a hunting camp until the end of October at least and the snow wasn't too deep until the end of November.
- Debo: You had the ideal way to grow up.
- Larry: Yes.
- Debo: You were a lucky man Larry Wilson. What was the North Fork like during that time when you were young?
- Larry: Well I get out of people who say it's like it was now and it isn't. At that time the homesteaders were still here. They were just beginning to get old, and of course they sold to retire many of them. That was the only real asset they had was their land. And so slowly summer people came on the scene. The very first I think in 1948, the second year we were here, maybe it's 49, the Foremans came and they were the first of the real summer people that we knew on this side of the river. There were some summer people that you will be interviewing I think that were park and plays that we never thought about that was not part of our social life I guess. But the park and plays were also summer residents and many of them then later bought the land like the McNeils and Mosses and Walters and had cabins then on this side of the river.
- Debo: Edwards and Harts.
- Larry: Was Hart a summer employee at the park?
- Debo: No, he wasn't a summer...but he was up here in summer, yeah. Okay, well you knew a lot of the homesteaders then.
- Larry: Oh yeah, they were neat.
- Debo: Tell me about some of them.
- Larry: Well, Bart Monahan was a bachelor homesteader up here. He lived in a little cabin on property that the Chrismans own now and in a very little cabin about 8 x 12 feet inside, and the interior of his cabin was black from [00:08:43] from the lodge pole pine that he burned for firewood.

Debo: Ooh.

Larry: He was one of the neat guys that I really liked. He was always friendly and would sit and talk. He was you know getting quite old at that time, but he took one bath a year and that was always on a sunny day in May. And he was pack his galvanized tub out under the under hang of his porch, build a fire under it, heat water, take his bath and put on brand new long johns in May, which he...and he cut the buttons off and sewed up the front, and the only buttons remaining were the trapped door and he didn't take them off until the next May.

Debo: Wow.

Larry: So if you touched his bed your hand would be black because everything was just coated solid black. We never ate there. [Laughs] So I don't know how he ate, but he was one of the neat guys, and Charlie Wise was another at the time. We knew him. He was a bachelor. His wife had died of the flu epidemic in 1918 up here. He homesteaded was is now Square Peg Ranch and his wife died as I said of the flu. His little daughter choked on a button and he carried her in his arms from Polebridge to town.

Debo: To Columbia Falls?

Larry: Yeah, clear to Columbia Falls. Well I'm not sure. I would have to look that up again. There was no road to Columbia Falls probably in 1918, so he probably went down to the park, got to Belton, got on the train, went to White Fish where there was a hospital. But whatever, his whole family died and he was by the time I knew him quite elderly and the caretaker of the oil well in Canada just across the border. But he always he treated all of us kids like we were adults. He gave me my first shot of whiskey. My mother was not happy about that since I was only 11 years old I think.

We used to have dances every month, the first Saturday of every month, which became NFIA meeting nights. We would have a meeting followed by a dance and the dance lasted until after midnight, and sometimes it would start up again after midnight and went until daylight, just dependent on the band because we always had live music then. And there was no drinking in the buildings. At that time the dances were mostly at [Quarter] Circle [MC] in the Park or Kintla Ranch alternating months and the men would drink outside. There was no drinking in the building. But boy, Ruth Sondreson when she would catch Lloyd drinking she would whop on him good and then go and make him go to the car and stay there.

Debo: [Laughs]

Larry: But the homesteaders, Frank and Ella Wurtz you know were just super people. I still have a pair of her moccasins that she made from moose hide. My dad always had them. That's what...he wore socks then moccasins then his packs in the winter so that when he got into the tent or in camp at night he could take off his boots and wear his moccasins. The Holcolms you know were tremendous people. Nobody who ever met Lena could forget her smile I'm sure. When Pa Holcolm would come out he would always say, "Well come and sit a spell." And when you went into their kitchen because that's where he always went to sit then Ma Holcolm would always say, "Well you've got to have a bite to eat," and she'd bring out something. And they had a big monstrous garden. They canned all their own vegetables. They canned their meat, just amazing people, amazingly tough people those homesteaders. You know Frank Newton was a packer for the Forest Service. His wife was the daughter of another homesteader, so yeah, they were just neat.

Billy Adair was still there but I never really knew him. At Polebridge the first people I really knew was an old smiling Ben Rover who never smiled and his wife Annette and they had the post office at Polebridge, and she was infamous for reading everybody's postcards. And when people complained she just said, "Well if you want it private you put it in an envelope and seal it. If you write it on a postcard it's for everybody to read," and she did. She was always commenting on postcards that people received.

Debo: Was the post office at their cabin?

Larry: No, no. That was not even there then. They lived in what is now the saloon.

Debo: Okay. And it was in that spot?

Larry: And the post office was in the store.

Debo: Okay.

Larry: There was also a post office at that time at Moose City. Madge Cooper...Madge Terrion was the postmaster. Madge was not a homesteader. The homesteader at the border...the homesteader was Frank Klute and Madge retired from the railroad as a telegrapher and she bought Frank Klute's place. And I don't know whether he moved, he died or what, but Madge was there and she always believed that oil would be found on the North Fork, so she was the real classic case of land poor. She had several thousand acres scattered around the whole North Fork, property that's now attached... Let's see who owns it today? I think Jim Gatus bought some of it from Stolz that Madge owned and Peter Guinn owned some. Both of the homesteads at Oil Creek and the Community Hall belonged to Madge, and Madge and Ollie donated the land that the Community Hall sits on. And she had thousands of acres of oil leases in Canada, and that's where the name of the City came from. She had it

all laid out that that big hay meadow there that's now an airstrip would be laid out as a town when the oil boom came, and so she had it all laid out and planned. But of course it never happened in her lifetime anyway. And she died, I don't know, I must have been 25 or 26 years old because I was teaching school in Columbia Falls when she died, and Ollie then stayed on the North Fork and worked for the Foremans for several years and lived and their lake cabin which is Ed Peterson's homestead house for two or three years and then he moved to town and lived with me until he died. He didn't die at my house; he died of lung cancer in a VA hospital, but he was a World War II vet.

And Ralph Thayer of course owned the property just south of me and he was one of the last homesteaders to die actually. Somebody asked me gee didn't he ever marry? I think he married five or six times. He had lots of wives; he just outlived them is all. When he was in the soldiers' home and knew he wasn't coming...he went to World War I. He had just started building the cabin at the Ford Ranger Station when he left for World War I and they didn't finish it until he came back and then he finished it working for the Forest Service. He was probably one of the more famous early rangers up here. He ran like a deer and laid out most of the trails that are on the North Fork on the Forest Service side. And one time running through the woods he jumped over this big downed large tree and lit right in the middle of a grizzly bear, and just kept running and got up a tree but the grizzly got him by the leg. And didn't quite pull him out of the tree but pulled his boot down. Injured him pretty badly, but he managed to walk – I can't remember exactly now, six or nine miles out to where somebody picked him up and he didn't run as fast after that. He died relatively recently, only 20 years ago or something now. His homestead cabin is owned by Nancy Hubbell today and his homestead is divided into many parts. The Herrods are on there, Brooks, Green, Novak, [Okals], Halseys.

Debo: He had a big piece of land.

Larry: He had 160 acres and most of them now... Well the Novaks and Okals I know each have 20 acres now. I don't know what Annemarie's got, and Green has more than 10 but I don't think it's 20. I'm not sure, but yeah, it's broken up pretty badly. The last year he was alive... At first he sold his homestead house and 40 acres to the Hubbles. I don't know why or how, but they bought it and then he had the 120 left and he called me from the soldiers' home one time and offered me the property for \$1,000 an acre, which is a little bit low at that time but not way low. I said, "Geez, why did you call me?" He said, "Well I thought maybe you would buy it and you wouldn't subdivide it." I said, "No, I don't have that kind of money. \$120,000 – if I bought it I would have to subdivide it so you don't want to sell it to me." She he sold it to Johnny Matheson that had purchased his original 40 and to...to Johnny and his partner at that time, Ed Ernst. They were horse loggers. As soon as Ralph was dead they subdivided it into 10-acre parcels, so that's why it got all broken down.

What other homesteader? Well Tom Reynolds wasn't a homesteader but he had been here longer than anybody. He's the one I bought this property from. He purchased it during the depression for \$1 an acre. That was the back taxes owed and he sold it to me for \$10 an acre. And then he got to thinking, well I think I was 14 or 15 when I bought it and he was afraid the people up here would think he took advantage of me, so he threw in a Model T truck with a spare engine. I sold the truck that fall for enough to pay for the land.

Debo: Really?

Larry: So the land was really free.

Debo: Oh that's fantastic.

Larry: Yeah. The interesting thing was it had a spare engine and the Model T truck that it came out of was sitting on the property and it had been there for years and years and years. When we were kids we would walk from Kintla Ranch out to the main road to get the mail and we would play in that truck, and about five years after I bought this property the truck disappeared. I later found out something had seen Frank Evans loading it up. So I called Frank and he said, "Well Tom Reynolds gave it to me." I said, "Well, I don't think so since it wasn't his anymore. It was mine and on my property." But it was kind of a landmark where it sat but Frank took it. I think he fixed it up or used it as parts of several to put together one and his son I think still owns it, so that was probably better than if it just sat there and rested anyway.

Tom and Marie Peterson were here when we came too and they lived where Mary O'Hare owns their house now, and they lived here year around. He used to work out but by the time I was here she was a lot younger than Tom and when he was ill he had degenerative heart disease and they would take him out for most of the winter. But while they were living here she would snowshoe from their homestead which is about eight miles out to the main road and meet the mail and then snowshoe eight miles home. For all the people that lived on Trail Creek at that time they had a little cabin just 6 x 6 or something that sat right at the junction at Trail Creek Road and the main road which is a little sheet metal stove in it that they could sit and wait for the mail. Once the mail came then you could answer your mail sitting in that one little cabin and put it in the mailbox and the mailman on his way down would pick it up and then snowshoe home. But high school schools in the mid 50s just put a cable around that little cabin and pulled it up the road and it all fell apart and it's never been replaced.

Debo: Oh. That's too bad.

Larry: Although Tom Marx who owns that site now has told us many times that we could rebuild Uncle Tom's Cabin if we wanted to but we never have.

- Debo: Is that what it was called?
- Larry: That's what it was called, Uncle Tom's Cabin.
- Debo: Did the mail come twice a week like it does now?
- Larry: Twice a week, just like it does now. It was a little different, we had mailbags and you put your outgoing mail in a bag that the mailman would take to town and you picked up your mail in the other bag, and it was quite a contest up here who had the best looking mailbags. They were all sorted in town and they would put your mail in a bag and you would take that bag out, put your other bag with the outgoing mail in the box for the mailman to take to town. And if you didn't have any outgoing you still sent the empty bag in. I always wondered what happened to all those mailbags.
- Debo: Did people actually decorate them?
- Larry: Oh sure.
- Debo: So you got your own mailbag back each time?
- Larry: Yes, every time. You then provided... You had to provide your own and ours said Kintla Ranch on it. Most others had Reynolds or Peterson or whatever their names were and they were made from a variety of things. At that time everybody bought feed in 100-pound bags and the feed bags were flowered patterns and stuff and people used those for mailbags and pillow cases and women even made skirts out of flour bags, feed bags.
- Debo: Yeah. That's interesting.
- Larry: And diapers, because there were no throw-away diapers in those days. What other homesteaders were here then? Ed Peterson was here but nobody saw much of him. He was gone by about 1950 or '51. He had shot and killed Billy Kruse up here in 1932 and he was found innocent by reason of self-defense but he always real shy after that, and I met one of his great-nephews or something this summer that was here, so hopefully we're going to get some pictures of him, Ed and his brother Emil which is the property the Foremans own now.
- Debo: You mentioned the Newtons, Ethel Newton.
- Larry: Well Ethel was I think a Henson. She was a Henson. She was a granddaughter of Vance who homesteaded down there on the flat where [Iola Mason] owns now, that was the Vance homestead. And the Hensons were the ones responsible for the name Polebridge. Billy Adair built the mercantile what we call now the Polebridge Mercantile in 1914 or so it opened, and it was called Adair. If you look at the old maps that's what's on it, Adair. But the Hensons felt that he was charging too much and so they built another store that was



located about halfway between the merc and the bridge and I've got some old pictures of it in the homestead somewhere.

Debo: Which side of the road was it on?

Larry: It was on left hand side right you know where the Loop Road is?

Debo: Hmm.

Larry: Where the Loop Road comes around it was just past that meadow and of course the remnants all burned in '88 in that Red Bench Fire. Up until then you could see the collapsed building still there. That's how she got the post mistress job which had previously been Kintla Post Office in the park and they closed it and moved down to Polebridge and Ms. Henson is the one who named Polebridge. She named it of course after the bridge. And they ran that store... It was never open when I was up here so it closed sometime.

Debo: This is the same store that the Adair's had?

Larry: No, this was the store that the Hensons had, the other store.

Debo: And she called that one Polebridge?

Larry: Yeah. That was the original Polebridge and then when it closed and then Adair finally got the post office, the mercantile, and after Adair sold then it became known as the Polebridge Mercantile.

Debo: Do you know what year that was?

Larry: Well about 1948 the Rovers came I think, '48 or '49. That's when smiling Ben showed up.

Debo: He never smiles uh?

Larry: He never smiled. I never saw him smile.

Debo: Did everybody call him smiling Ben or just you?

Larry: I don't know. Just me for sure. I know I did. All of us kids did and he and Annette sold that place four or five times. Well, they didn't actually sell it, they leased it for a year and then people were supposedly going to have an option to buy, but he made them buy the inventory and he didn't move out until about the first snow, and then the people were trapped there for the winter with no customers, or a precious few because there were still a few homesteaders around that bought a few things in the winter. The mail stopped there but they couldn't make a living at it then Ben and his wife would cancel the lease in the spring and come back for the summer themselves.

I've got a newspaper article that was written by a lady in Yuma, Arizona who she and her husband with their little kids had spent a winter at Polebridge. One of the customers of the Rovers.

Ladenberg was not a homesteader but I think it would been his great uncle was one of the original employees of the Anaconda Company that came to file for coal rights and homesteads that they would then sell to the Anaconda Company. But since the coal didn't pan out they ended up some of them keeping theirs and Mickey Burn was his name, he kept his and bought a bunch of others and so ended up with that big place.

Also of the original people up here was Pat Walsh's uncle. Pat was the son of a sheriff for many years in Flathead County and his older brother was one of the first people that came up here with the oil people moving...building I don't know what kind of roads to move in big steam engines to power the drilling plants. And if you go to Kintla Lake or at the head of lower Kintla Lake you will find the oil boilers still laying there in the water, and it came up here pulled by horses. It's hard to imagine.

Debo: It is hard.

Larry: And across the border in Canada, only about three miles from the border is another oil well that also has a big steam boiler. It's still sitting there I'm sure. It's been ten years since I've been across the border here, but at that time the oil [29:35] still stood too in most of the buildings.

Debo: So if you hike up to upper Kintla and you said lower Kintla.

Larry: Lower Kintla.

Debo: You can find it?

Larry: Oh yeah. It's sticking right up in the edge of the water.

Debo: Oh. That would be good to take a picture of that.

Larry: Oh yeah. I'm sure there are pictures of it. I don't know if I have any anywhere or not but probably. It's been quite a while since I hiked Kintla. We used to horseback ride up there a lot to upper Kintla, to camp. But the park was easier to enter too then. You could camp anywhere you wanted and you didn't have to have permission and check in. If we decided we were going to go to Bullet Pass we would just saddle the horses and go, and I don't know if that would fly today.

Debo: It wouldn't today.

Larry: No. You've got to pay a fee to camp on our land.

- Debo: Because there's so many people I guess.
- Larry: Yeah.
- Debo: Well original homesteaders use the Inside Road to come up, right?
- Larry: Until 1954 the Inside Road was a better road than the main road. In 1954 the spruce beetle epidemic hit the North Fork and the spruce were all infested, and so the Forest Service improved the road from Columbia Falls to Whale Creek Road, and that's when they began building the side roads – Whale Creek Road. I don't know about Red Meadow, but they log heavily at Red Meadow. All the drainages run on Trail Creek too. And the Forest Service remained involved for many years while heavy logging went on up here and that improved the road so that it was better than the Inside Road. If you travel the Inside Road today it's about like it was.
- Debo: It's about like it was back then?
- Larry: Back then, right. And my mother and Ruth Sondreson were the big speed demons on the road because Ruth was cooking for a logging crew and my mother was cooking for the guest ranch and so weekly they made trips to Belton to buy groceries. They didn't go to Columbia Falls very often because the road was better to Belton. And they would of course feed breakfast, get in the car and run like mad for Belton, get their groceries and get back in time to cook dinner. Well when my mother once made the trip in 2½ hours that was considered a record.
- Debo: Ooh. [Laughs]
- Larry: If you've ever been up Anaconda Hill and all those narrow roads...you know it's a narrow road, but the road...the cars weren't as good but there weren't many of them on the road either. I've always been a counter and when we came up the road we would count the cars we met and 20 was a big...you know it must be the 4<sup>th</sup> of July or something to have 20 cars on the road. This summer... I still count cars and this summer I averaged 30 cars between Canvas Bridge and Polebridge every day until after Labor Day, and 10 or 15 from Polebridge to here. And since I go through the park I never counted the ones to Columbia Falls because that road is too rough now.
- Debo: So what was the road like when you first came up here as a young boy?
- Larry: It literally had grass growing in the middle of the road, and when you met somebody you both had to get over. And when logging trucks came you sometimes had to back up to find a place to get because they couldn't back up. The first time after we bought Kintla Ranch and we came here the thing I remember it was after dark when we got here, and the North Fork Road down to Kintla Ranch which is a mile and a half you couldn't see the sky because the

branch of the trees overlapped the whole road. It was that way almost to the border. You know grass in the middle. It was rough. Flats were common of course, but the biggest thing I remember is people who had banged their oil pan and knocked a hole in their oil pan and lose their oil. So there were all kinds of interesting remedies for how you fixed that. You drive a wooden peg and then you wouldn't leak enough oil, you could make it to town, or take it off. Now Matt Brill would always patch his. He took the oil pan off. Put a bolt through with leather washers on both sides of the hole, seal it up that way and keep going.

Debo: Those were the days.

Larry: Yeah. It's really kind of fun. I complain about the road sometimes too, but the road was a lot different then than it is now. The closest thing they have to the original road, of course the Inside Road is about the same as it ever was, but on the North Fork side only from probably Holton's north to the border it's pretty much on the same roadbed, some mud problem, some drainage problem and it's very nearly like the road was then, except over the years with power graders and stuff they have widened it so it's not a one-way road. It's basically a two-way road. But still on the original track and the road in many places is the lowest part of the terrain so the water melts there. But see people then [laid] in their groceries. Madge Cooper Terrion at the border would always have all of her groceries in by October 15<sup>th</sup>.

Debo: For the whole winter?

Larry: For the whole winter, because you didn't know. You know any time after the 15<sup>th</sup> of October it could snow and you would be stuck and the road when it was [snowed 35:30] full was not plowed all winter until late spring, and then if there were logging jobs the loggers would plow it. On occasion the county would bring bulldozers and open the road. Trail Creek Road, the year that Tom Peterson died, whenever that was, the 60s, Lloyd Sondreson brought his bulldozers up. Tom had spent the previous month at Polebridge because he wanted to be on the North Fork to die and Lloyd Sondreson plowed Trail Creek to Tom's house so he could go home and he died about a week later in his own house that he built. And then of course Marie lived for many years after that and wrote her book. She was killed in a car accident just outside of Columbia Falls. The homesteaders were tough.

Debo: So they could be snowed in for the whole winter basically.

Larry: Oh yeah, they expected to be snowed in for the whole winter. When I was in high school and college we would come up the road as far as it was plowed wherever that might be. I can remember the year I was a freshman in college it was plowed to Trail Creek Road for a logging job; the loggers kept it opened and then we snowshoed to the border to visit Madge and Ollie. Madge always

had peanut butter and Ollie loved peanut butter but he didn't get to have any until some of us kids were there, then she would bring out the peanut butter. But we would hike to just across Coal's Creek and then cut across the hay meadow to the house and when we got within sight of the house we would shoot a hole in the chimney to let them know we were coming. She would have the peanut butter out and the cocoa on by the time we got to the house.

Debo: [Laughs] So you didn't go to school up here but there were some schools up here.

Larry: No, not then.

Debo: Not then, the schools were over at that point?

Larry: The schools closed during World War II. I think when you talk to Naomi she can tell you. I think she was a 1<sup>st</sup> grader the last year there was a school up here. Her grandmother taught at the school. So that would have been '43, '44, somewhere in that area. And of course it was only grades 1 through 8 when it was here. And it's interesting, the Land Use Planning Committee receiving input from the new landowners in the 80s, they didn't want to encourage a school up here because that would bring more people, which might cause the road to be paved, but might cause all kinds of disasters I guess. But it gives people something to talk about.

Debo: So there were no schools up here except for...

Larry: Jerry [Warnigs] Boarding School, yeah.

Debo: Yeah.

Larry: And I'm not sure when he opened. It's been a while now, 80s maybe.

Debo: I think so, yeah. So the social life up here, you said there were square dances once a month.

Larry: That was only in the summer, but well in the summer they alternated between Kintla Ranch and Quarter Circle MC, but of course both of those operations closed in the winter and nobody... Somebody might stay at either place but the roads weren't open, the roads weren't plowed. And so in the winter the homestead families for years had gotten together for social events. Holcolms was one of the most popular places because Lena had a piano, and so they just moved all the furniture you know and danced, did square dances or whatever in that small... If you go there it's a pretty small living room by today's standards, but the thing I remember in the 50s were canasta parties. Everybody played canasta. It's kind of a rummy game played with seven decks of cards and it's a fairly lengthy game and a lot of people can play and if you need more people you put double canasta together and you can play as many as you want

to. So there were card parties that went around from house to house, and then as now all the women are good cooks I guess. There were a lot of dinner parties, but cards were a big thing. In the homestead days they were heartier. We have our beach party now on New Year's Day no matter what.

Debo: I've been there.

Larry: Yeah. We go down and build a fire and have hot dogs and beans and spend two or three hours on the riverside. Well in the homestead days they would gather at the mouth of Trail Creek usually in February and they would camp there for a week catching White Fish to can. They would smoke them and can them and the women would be doing that with tents set everywhere and that's a two-mile walk in there today and it was then too. Everybody snowshoed in and brought all their stuff and set up and had a big community camp, smoked fish.

Debo: It was probably cold.

Larry: Well, yeah, probably. It's nasty here in the winter sometimes. It was a certain weekend in February; it was the height of the big fishing thing. But people didn't go to town. The only time...if people went to town somebody was really sick or somebody died. Mitt Connelly's grandfather died up here at his son's homestead which is now owned by [Hoylands]. What was his name? Austin Wickert was the homesteader and his father died and various locals, including Charlie Wise was there for the whole thing, they took a week to get his body to town in the winter.

Debo: A whole week?

Larry: A whole week. They wrapped him up and they broke trail for horses part of way, pull him on a sled out of there initially. From Polebridge down I know they used horses and a sled. I'm not sure where the horses actually started to pull but ended up it took just nearly a week.

Debo: I wonder why they didn't just bury him up here.

Larry: Well there was four feet of snow on the ground.

Debo: Oh four feet of snow; yeah, that would be a problem.

Larry: Yeah. And he was froze stiff. They just left him on the sled at night of course, he didn't care, and they would go from one homestead to another, so no doubt some days they could have made it further but they stopped at homesteads and that's what people did then. You just stopped wherever you could for the night. Adair started his whole business by having an overnight place for people to stay. When Matt and Meta Brill got married they came by horse and wagon up the Inside Road, stayed one night at Sullivan Meadows, one night somewhere just north of Polebridge, Big Prairie probably, and were sure they could make

it home to Kintla Ranch the third night, but the [river 43:05] was running high and they didn't make it in time and it got dark and it was raining hard, so they slept under the wagon the third night before getting home.

Debo: What time of year was that?

Larry: That was in June, so the river was high and you don't just jump into it.

Debo: And people used to take horses and wagons across that river huh?

Larry: Yes, but June is not a good time. That's why they had the flying machines and the cable cars that people could ride across and so you would arrange for people to pick you up from the other side. But you know in the homestead days there were 14 homesteads in Big Prairie and that was the initial settlement on the North Fork. But in 1910 that ended when it became Glacier Park and the park didn't harass the homesteaders at first. It took them a couple of years to get going and then they started pressing on the homesteaders and stopping them from hunting and trapping. Most of the homesteaders made their living by working for the park and of course there was the summer, and trapping, and working on their homestead in the winter. And the women were left home all summer many times. Meta Brill was a notable exception because she cooked at Lake McDonald Lodge and so did Matt so they were gone together. But you hear the stories of the big fires in the late 20s the Holcolms buried a lot of their possession when they abandoned the place because they were afraid it would burn. It didn't, but they didn't find all their stuff afterwards either because they couldn't remember where everything was, so I don't know what they were missing.

The only treasure I know about on the North Fork was in the winter of 1946 or '47 Kintla Ranch Lodge burned to the ground, and the guy who had been managing it that year disappeared about three days later and all of the income from the hunting season disappeared with him. So he always maintained it was in the lodge when it burned, but I don't think so, because the story was that there were 200 silver dollars included in the checks and money. I've been over that site with a metal detector and never found any silver dollars. But we did find the silver, Matt Brill's...or Meta Brill's good silver in a metal box under the ashes.

Debo: Oh.

Larry: Since I've been here there's been three major floods. Well relatively speaking we thought the '48 flood was a big flood. It flooded oh about waist-deep in all of the river cabins at Kintla Ranch. It took a lot of clean-up, but the big flood of course was '64 where parts of the main road were gone. The valley was really flooded and houses were damaged up here but not washed away, even in '64. The road was washed away in some places and John Frederick's hostel

was wet and there were other places that got wet. But the most devastating flood up here probably was '95 or '96 and it was not really a flood anywhere but here and it was mostly caused by a big log jam below Polebridge that backed the water up. And so it was backed up at Kintla Ranch where it did not flood in '64, cabins flooded again. But they didn't flood for very long, three or four hours and the damn broke and the water receded, but it was a lot of clean-up. I don't think the hostel was ever really clean until Oliver moved in. He gets in every crack and cranny.

So flooding is not a big thing although this last spring a lot of people worried about flood insurance, but I wasn't one of them because I'm a mile from the river and up two benches. And so it's neat to live on the river, but you have to understand the risks if you do that. Fires, well North of Trail Creek the 1910 fires burnt a lot of the North Fork and then there were no fires until the 20s and then there were no big fires again the years I worked for the Forest Service in '55 to '60. We were praying for a fire to get the overtime and we had a couple of little fires and not much overtime, but not many fires up here. I think the spruce beetle epidemic you know removed so much of the spruce that that eliminated major fires for a long time. And then in 1988 we had the Red Bench Fire which was gosh, beyond anybody's belief and it was nearly 50,000 acres. And then the Moose Fire came in 2001 and Robert and Wedge came in 2003. And so now about 70% of the North Fork been's burned over again, so it will take 20 or 30 years.

I don't know, people say well if you fight fires you just postpone big fires, and my feeling is if you manage the forest you don't ever have big fires because if you properly manage you would have [mixed] edge trees in every drainage. And we so with those big fires people were all against the big clear-cuts, but when you drive out of here and get out on the bluff there where you can see all the open mountains and stuff and look kind of southwest you will see a big green patch, 100 acres or more and that big green patch was right in the middle of the Wedge Fire, but it had been clear-cut 25 years before and the trees were just second growth trees and they were 15 or 20 feet high. And that big fire when it came into it burnt [hot] on the edge and then just slowly went to the ground as it went in and didn't penetrate over about 100 yards.

The same thing is true, fire briggs that were built behind the Ford Ranger Station. And if you do that so that you never have too much old timber and not too much young timber decide what... I don't have an answer to that, what is the right mix, I don't know. 10% old growth, that's I think a rule today or 6% old growth forest. Well it seems to me if you set it up like a [bell curve], okay 6% those are the As and you had 6% that are bare ground just being ready for replanting and then you set percentages of forest in each drainage now, it can't be forest-wide, it's got to be just in each drainage, so if you've got old growth, you've got mature timber, you've got stuff that's ready for commercial thinning, stuff that's ready for pre-commercial thinning and newly planted, and



all those stages of forest laid out property will prevent a fire that starts on a White Fish Divide go into the Continental Divide because that's what they do here. They blow from west to east.

But I haven't been hired to be dictator yet, so it might not happen. Actually that's not an original idea with me. The first person where I heard it was the forest supervisor at Flathead National Forest named Ed Brannon and that's what he wanted to set up in the forest plan, and I don't know if they ever got a forest plan done. They're still fighting about it I think.

Debo: So when you got this property then what happened here? Did you build this cabin yourself?

Larry: Oh yeah. It's a cabin [51:25]. It was 12 x 15 inside, that was the homestead cabin and that was the only building here.

Debo: Was it already here?

Larry: It was still here.

Debo: And it was a original homesteading cabin?

Larry: Yeah.

Debo: Whose was that?

Larry: It was a fellow by the name of [Rhue]. I never met him. They were long gone. During the depression they left and the land went back to the county for taxes and Tom Reynolds bought it. And he used that little cabin when he was here cutting wood, but it had a sawed roof and he had tacked cardboard and I don't know what all to absorb, you opened the door and it just stunk horribly because it was moldy and they didn't have a stove. We took the roof off and put a 2 x 4 solid roof on it and used it for several years until I could afford to build this place. And when I built this cabin let's see, it was about early 1960s. I think Len Ogle's parents put the foundation blocks in for this cabin in the early 60s. And then I was teaching school in Columbia Falls and I hired Ollie Terrion to be the builder. I had an old John Deere tractor and all the logs here were standing dead lodge pole that came not just from this property from all my neighbors. Everybody said ooh, they're standing dead, take it you know, you can have them. And so we drug the logs in with the tractor and put up a gin pull and built this cabin and only got...things like putting on the roof my students from town came up and I didn't have to work at all. I just set up a kitchen outside, because every boy I ever had in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade I would bring them up in groups of 5 and we would stay in that little 12 x 15 cabin and that's why I needed a bigger cabin.

And the kids that I had had previous years, the football team when we put the roof on it all the lumber went on this roof in one day, in about three hours actually. The whole football team was here and I would have them out of school and so they came up. They won a football game on Friday night, the first time they had won a football game in quite a while. They came up here and I cooked and they put the roof on.

Debo: I bet they had a great time.

Larry: Oh there were so many kids here that they stood on the scaffolding... We built the scaffolding the weekend before and so the guys on the roof could just stand there on the scaffolding and kids from below would hand up the lumber. It was 1 x 12 boards and they just stood in one place and nailed down their little section of the board and another board was coming up and they just kept going and it just was all on in no time.

Debo: That's great. What year did you finish your cabin?

Larry: Uh...

Debo: Of course cabins are never finished.

Larry: I'm not sure. Mid 60s, probably early 60s, about '63 or '64, somewhere in there it was finished, not as it is today. What you see here of this log was done then. And then we had a boys camp here for several years, another schoolteacher in Columbia Falls and I. and over time when I stopped teaching and started logging we would do most of our work up here and one time I had a crew of 25, and so we built the kitchen on it and needed a shower, so we built the shower on and then didn't even think about a toilet, just didn't think about it. We had used the outhouse for so many years you just didn't think about it. But I was up here one winter shortly after that alone and got sick with the flu, and I'll tell you, going from bed to outhouse, or from bed to boots to warm coat to outhouse and then back, boots off and then the bed, boy that was a real trial. And so the next year I put another addition on the back of the kitchen and we have a septic system and toilet now, in addition to the shower. The shower was an unheard of really neat modernization.

Before that the crew would go... Well when we were working here we would eat breakfast at 5:30 in the morning. The guys would be on the job by 6 and then they would be done by 2, is when they quit normally at the latest. Sometimes if things went well you know they got their job done earlier, then they would fish, swim, so baths were in the river or Trail Creek. We used to lay in the water under the Trail Creek Bridge and it was kind of dangerous if you were really tired because I was getting up at 4:30 then. By mid afternoon I was really dragging sometimes and I fell asleep a couple of times down there

laying in the water and woke up really cold. That waster is cold. It felt good on 90-degree days.

Debo: On the days when you were logging did you stay up here year around?

Larry: Different years. Yeah, some years we did. The year we logged the Foremans we were here all winter. Mostly what I tried to do is get jobs in the valley for the winter, come here in the spring and stay until... We always stayed her until Thanksgiving logging and it depended. You get an open winter and we could stay longer, we would stay on the job until we had to move to town, but we would cut posts and logged over most of the North Fork. We did all the property that's down Morris's, several of the neighbors there, [Fishal's], Ladenberg's. We worked on Ladenberg's right up to the day he sold it to the government and I think we worked on Fishal's for five years and Ladenberg's for five or six. We were logging on Fishal's in '88 when the Red Bench Fire came through. But yeah, we didn't stay all winter usually. It's a long winter.

Debo: It is a long winter.

Larry: Because if you log properly you don't want to leave high stumps, so we always promised landowners we would cut stumps lower than eight inches. If there's four feet of snow on the ground that means a lot of digging before you can saw the tree down, and then it's dangerous too because you've got that well, the hole that it's in. The lip of it can cause a tree to change how to fall, so exciting times though.

Debo: Yeah. Well tell me about the North Fork Improvement Association. When did it start?

Larry: The North Fork Improvement Association started in 1947 and it was started to improve the road, bring telephones and electricity to the North Fork, and to give the landowners a voice in fish and game regulations, and I hate the changed name. I almost never joined again after they changed the name to the Landowners Association. People in California have Landowners Associations you know, and if people aren't smart enough to know that the Improvement Association was the Landowners Association which was one of the arguments for changing it they're not very bright and shouldn't be here anyway. But every year I think I'm going to put in a proposed amendment to change it back and keep doing it every year until it changes, which is basically what the people did that got it changed to the Landowners Association. They tried it once and it failed badly and the second time I said oh this is dumb and I didn't argue about it and it passed.

But I think you will find as you talk to long-time landowners that there's a lot of resentment about that name change still to this day, even though it's not your fault, or any of the officers' today's fault. It happened by a vote of the

membership, but the old-timers don't like it. And the idea was to like I say to improve the road, bring electricity and phones and have a say in fish and wildlife things that matters. Well we do that still and we've gone through a lot of changes from bitter battling. For a period of time the local people didn't join the Improvement Association and it became mostly a social thing up here. And that wasn't because... The social thing was organized and carried out mostly by summer people and the locals weren't here for that. You know their social lives were different. They were working, didn't have the time that the summer residents had, or whatever the reasons.

It wasn't that anybody was fighting with anybody initially, but over time then the summer residents were concerned about more and more subdivision, and so they started a drive to zone the North Fork. Well that got the locals interested and so then we had several years where the two groups showed up and we would have 150 people at election night. People who had never been to a meeting for years joined and came to vote. It was the locals versus the summer residents and the locals won. I don't know if that would happen today if they could win today, but the locals won. My dad was a big ring leader in that whole process and Gus Sonnenberg because they were against zoning, because most of the locals, there was still a large number of the locals whose major assets were their land, and they didn't think that it was quite right that the summer residents had come in and brought these subdivisions up and now they wouldn't have a chance to do the same thing when they wanted to.

And there was some reason on their side and there's also some reason on the other side that okay, when is the area just changed so much that you can't stand it anymore it's not the same. Well I don't know where that is. It's changed now so it's not like it was in the homestead days, but in many ways we have many similarities today. People by and large, even people who disagree get along. People who dislike other neighbors will still stop and help them if they are stuck on the road and part of it's because we rely on each other as well as you know, if you don't have to talk to somebody or see them it's easy for you to decide they're no good. And we have some of that here, but the homesteaders had some of that too. They had people that fought. You know Billy Kruse was considered a jerk by everybody up here except Tom Reynolds who thought he was a great guy. And Tom Reynolds outlasted almost everybody else so Billy Kruse became a better guy. [Laughs]

But now we've got a pretty good balance. And over time we made peace. About the mid-80s Len Ogle and I became heavily involved in the association. We were back to back presidents and our big goal was to unite the community, and we did that with the help of John Frederick and Mike Connors who worked for the Forest Service and we set up the Inner Local Agreement. Okay, we were unhappy with the government. And those first meetings were quite contentious because North Fork residents were mad at the agencies. They didn't like the Whale Scenic River thing, didn't like everything, hardly

anything we liked. They weren't fixing the road right. They weren't grading it often enough. And we had I think two meetings and then an agency said, "Hey wait a minute. We listened to all your gripes, now you need to listen to some of ours too, so we'll set up a second meeting." So we turned it from a once a year meeting on the North Fork to a twice a year meeting, so the one on the North Fork is hosted by the private groups and the one in the town in the winter is hosted by the agencies. And the idea originally was that then the agencies could snipe...shoot back you know and talk about their concerns with what the landowners are doing wrong.

And it has kind of evolved from that to...for a while I wasn't sure we should continue it even. It became such a good ole boy thing, everybody slapping each other on the back and talking about how great things are and not addressing the issues. And if you address the issues the meeting can be quite long, especially with an argumentative type thing. But I think the current trend is that if the landowners will in advance decide what's bothering them, even if it's just one landowner, and that word gets to the agency that's involved so that the agency knows the questions before they come to the meeting and they come to the meeting to answer those issues that we have a chance. Otherwise we went people who want to interpret the Constitution of the United States and whatever, and it doesn't... Don't tell Duke I said that, because he feels so strongly about it and it just isn't the place, that's all.

Jimmy D. Herrera does not decide what the Forest Service is going to do; he just carries out what he's told. But if we have an argument with the Forest Service Jimmy is still the one to tell it to because he can pass it on. And if it continues to be a problem then we have the option of going above him and above them and above them until we get to the people that do it. But there's no sense badgering a patrolman in the border patrol about the way homeland security has wasted money. He doesn't know. He's just hired and does what he's told, so to me they are just like anybody else who wears a uniform and we should support them. Maybe we don't support the people who set the policies, but them we certainly support. We have a bigger government presence in many ways, but the Forest Service was the big neighbor up here you know during the logging times. And when they were logging then money went to the schools. Money was also spent on opening trails and that money has slowly disappeared with the logging money.

And I'm a big believer in sustained yield basis operate where you can cut the same amount every year, create a mixed edge forest like I was telling you about and there's always a constant supply of money and it's better for the wildlife because the wildlife still has the same amount of space. When we get to the point where we're just involved emotionally you know, God love the grizzly bear. Well some grizzly bears are good. They are like people; some of them are pretty good, some of them are really good, some of them are lousy

neighbors. And you know I'm against grizzly bears in the house except like this one.

Debo: That's a beautiful bear right there. Is there a story behind this?

Larry: Not really. My dad shot him when they were legal to shoot down on the Kintla Ranch right by the barn.

Debo: Do you have any good animal stories, like animal encounters?

Larry: The best – well I told you the one about Ralph Thayer jumping over a log and landing on a grizzly bear.

Debo: Tell me that again.

Larry: He was running out of the woods; it's on the tape so you've got it already. One of the best stories is Bonnie Ogle's mountain lion story. Before they had their cabin built they used to stay here a lot and we were in the winter. I'm not sure what time, Thanksgiving time I think, and that was before we had the indoor toilets. And Bonnie with her flannel nightgown and her winter coat and her winter boots went to the outhouse and she was gone a long time, to the point where we were thinking about yelling out there did you fall in or something. And she came back in the kitchen door and said, "Oh beautiful!" "Beautiful what?" "Cat. She said a mo...mo...mountain lion." And we ran out and the mountain lion was just walking off through the trees.

Well she was in the outhouse sitting on the seat and the mountain lion stuck his head in the door. She had the door wide open. You could see the doors, protected from the house by branches from the spruce tree, just stuck his head right in and looked at her. And she will tell you, she knew she couldn't get down the hole. There was no place to run. She just sat there and finally – who knows, it probably seemed longer to her than it really was, but finally she said it backed up and walked out of sight. So she got up ready to run for the house and when she got to the door of the outhouse he had turned around and his head was peering around the corner at her again. So she froze again and then ran to the house when the cat turned. And I took my rifle; I was going to shoot the damn cat. No, no, no. He was a beautiful cat, she wouldn't let me shoot at him, so he safely got away.

But probably the scariest stories on the North Fork don't involve grizzly bears or wolves, but things like – well Mark [Heaton] can tell you, he's had this experience this hunting season, nothing like coming around a corner and being face to face with a skunk. That's scarier than anything. Open this door to go outside at night to go to the bathroom and see a skunk right outside the door. Ugh. You will be surprised how you can control your bladder after that. But there have not been a lot of grizzly bear attacks up here.

Debo: There haven't.

Larry: You know Jerry Desanto was mauled by a bear at Kintla Lake. Ralph Thayer and God when was that? Who knows, 20s maybe. I've got it in the Forest Service records. Robbie Barnaby got mauled about five years ago down by Moran, but bears don't bother you really. I've come to be a believer in bear spray for defending yourself from bears. It's just a matter of aim you know. A rifle bullet is half inch across. A bear spray is 5 feet across immediately. Well your chances of hitting him in the face are a lot better with bear spray and it's very effective, and I'm glad other people had to test me, not me.

I have never had an encounter with a grizzly bear, and I walk quietly through the woods. I don't yell or ring bells or anything. When I go for a walk in the woods I go because I want to see things and so...and my dad was a big believer when you hunt that if you could hear yourself a deer could hear you for half a mile, so you better go really slow. It would take my dad 15 minutes to get out of sight from the front door of the cabin here when he was going hunting. So I go really slow and the older I get the slower I go. And now I'll go out a way from the house to the ATV and carry my folding chair then I'll just sit. But you would be surprised; if you sit for 15 minutes you will see something. It might just be a bird or a chipmunk or a fast moving caterpillar, but that's also how you see bears and deer and moose and they won't bother you. Bears don't hunt people; people hunt bears and other animals too. So I don't know many scary stories up here really.

Debo: So how about what do you think about how has it changed? How has the North Fork changed? You touched on it a little bit during this interview.

Larry: Well it has become more modernized. We have cars that have air-conditioning, ride better and a better road. The road is much better. Well, no one would argue that the last two or three years it's become much much better than it was. We have better communication you know. In the homestead days the only communication they had was there were two phone lines, one that came up the Inside Road, there was a park line and a Forest Service line and those were #9 wire you know, like two tin cans on a wire is what they really were. And you could talk on them, but if the lines were all open, Ford Ranger Station was a switching station kind of, so when I worked there a big part of the day was how you set up communication with the lookouts. Thelma Lookout, Cyclone Lookout, all the ones down the line. Because if you left those lines open then the ringing circuit wouldn't ring and you couldn't hear other; it became too faint. So you would shut off the line to the phone line or the line to the border for a while so you could talk to somebody at Polebridge. And then Polebridge would call you and you would ring the border and hook them together and turn everybody else off, but not everybody because everybody was on one line.

So Kintla Ranch our phone ring was two longs and two shorts. But whenever the phone rang everybody rang to the phone and you listened in. And of course the more people that listened the weaker the signal got. So when my mother was calling Belton to put in the grocery order to have it ready for when she went to get groceries very often she would have to say, "Will some of you hang up so I can get this through to Belton?" And they would, but otherwise people just listened. That was part of the social I guess, listening in to other peoples' phone conversations like any party line.

Debo: They have a radio thing now where everybody...

Larry: Oh yeah see and that's a big change. We now have, I think there's probably at least two networks of radios up here. [Ed Santangi 1:15:08] and those people use I don't know, it's a marine band or something, but there's a group of them that talk to each other. On the north end here almost all of us are search and rescue members and so we operate on search and rescue frequencies and respond to rescues, and it gives us a network. We give a portable to Nancy Hubble. She's 80-something years old. She's here all alone so we give her a radio and if she doesn't call us every morning, and we have check-in at 8 in the morning. And so let's see, the Trail Creek group checks in. Mark and Margaret are kind of in the middle. John Frederick and Oliver are on the network but they don't often report in but they are a link that we can call to get on a regular phone line. And of course Lee Downs now is just gone, but he was our south end, so we had communication on the whole North Fork.

When it was extreme fire season we would check in twice a day and we had different places that different members went to watch for smokes and lightning strikes and whatever, so that really works. How many are on that [Ed Santangi] and those other people are on I don't know, but they do pretty much the same thing. Although it was funny, Ed [Santangi] doesn't belong to the North Fork patrol or to the Trail Creek irregulars, [reporting... 1:16:34 in locally] is really upset because Len and I didn't tell him about what was going on with the [Ninko] Fire two years ago. Well, we were the ones that after 10 o'clock at night got in our car, drove down, talked to the Forest Service people, looked at the fire and listened to their plans and then notified all of our people you know. If he wants us... We don't owe that to everybody. We're glad to share it, but if you want to know what we know about fires you call us and we will tell you everything we know about fires. But if you think we're going to go house to house it just gets beyond what you can do. It was 2 o'clock in the morning time we got done with the people we knew that were in the radio and get down there and talk to those people and come back.

And so I was a little you know surprised that he would attack us in a public meeting, because he never said a word to any of us before that. The best way to communicate is to talk to your neighbors.



Debo: That's right.

Larry: It's not to just be mad because they didn't talk to you. But we have that communication. People have satellite phones now, you know. Whoever would have dreamt we would have television. I've got 250 channels on the television and I can watch the news and everything. When we first moved here it was very difficult to have any radio in the daytime. At night radio reception got better. And the thing my dad hated to miss was the Joe Lewis fight. And the best radio we had was a car radio and he would run a wire from the car radio antenna to the barbed wire fence and get it all set up so he could listen to most of the fight because it would get strong and then get weak and hope there's wasn't a knock out before it came back and then it would come back.

Most homesteaders up here had dry cell battery radios with a dry cell about this long and this wide, about a foot and a half long, about a foot wide and four or five inches deep and they lasted quite a long time. They were a dry battery but you had to very careful. Most people up here would listen to 5 o'clock news or if they had one program they liked to listen to they would do that. As the winter wore on and the battery got weaker then they would warm the battery by putting it in a cook stove oven to warm it and that would make it better for a while. But you had to be real careful about those things because they would go dead just sitting in the house.

So now we can communicate. Law enforcement has good radios. We have alert landing sites up here. The helicopter can be here in 30 minutes weather permitting. The Border Patrol bless their hearts are up and down the road every day and they are also [paying] – what is it Operation Stone Garden? The sheriff's office, a sheriff officer stopped by here yesterday.

So our communication is much better. Our living facilities are much easier. We still have to have some back-up things, like I have electricity for the generator, but if the generator fails that doesn't mean I don't have heat or anything else. I've still got propane back-up, lights, refrigerator, cook stove, Coleman lanterns. I guess if push came to shove where most homesteaders had kerosene lamps and maybe, maybe they had an Aladdin lamp that was really bright, but you had to sit right beside those to run them because they get hotter and hotter and then they blow the [metal].

We have – just think about what the homesteaders would think if they saw Mike Eddie coming with his snow blower, eight feet wide blowing snow 20 feet into the air. They were just speww. When the snow came they just sat still. You got your wood in, you got your groceries in. You've got a full root cellar. You could survive the winter. And the only people you saw really were the people within walking distance, and their walking distance was more like Mark and Margaret's than it is mine. Mark and Margaret come on foot to the beach party and I don't know what it is, nine miles one way or so.

Debo: At least.

Larry: Yeah, and the rest of us go by snowmobile from my house or something. But those people got around by walking. Their stories – I've got some credited material written by one of the old school teachers at the Ford Ranger Station where she came to a party by foot to Kintla Ranch in the winter. I don't know if it was a dinner party or card party or what, but she was walking home and the wolves were howling and she was not too sure about that whether she was going to make it back home or not. Actually the wolves never attacked her but it made a good story. But you think she came...whether it was for dinner or cards or what it was, just a social evening, she came 5½ miles on foot on snowshoes to Matt Brill's, spent whatever time of the evening, walked back in the dark to Ford Ranger Station and had school the next day.

Debo: They were tough weren't they?

Larry: Yeah. Where she was responsible for getting [any wood and packing the water] and all of those things.

Debo: Yeah. Amazing.

Larry: I don't know what they were paid then. In 1960 my first salary in Columbia Falls was 4,225. But of course at that time I thought if I can just make \$5,000 a year I would have more money than I could spend.

Debo: Times change.

Larry: And times change and starting teachers salary in Columbia Falls is \$30,000 a year, but I don't think they live much better than we did on 4,225. That's just the economy of growth.

Debo: That's good. Okay. Larry is there anything you think I've forgotten to ask you?

Larry: I can't imagine. I've talked for how long? For hours now it seems.

Debo: Well thank you so much. This was great.

Larry: Oh I enjoyed it and we'll think of things that I missed or something.

Debo: We will. We will have a follow-up probably.

[01:23:14]

[End of recording]