

Lee_Downs_May__2012

This interview was conducted by Tom Edwards.

Lee: Well, I think I'll start out today and tell you about Charlie Hudson. He lived at Spoon Lake. He had a cabin there and he trapped out of there and in the summer time he rented boats. I think in the winter of '39 and '40 Frank Hall trapped with him up Canyon Creek. Kimberly Creek is side [00:00:24] and they had a cabin up there. Anyway, the story that Charlie tells that Frank was supposed to go over in the park, sneak into the park and trap and he didn't miss him until March he never come back and so he reported him missing. Of course Ralph Thayer, the Forest Service and I can't remember who was sheriff, before Dick Walsh, and anyway they looked up there and they looked around and they finally found part of the body that the bears had dug out of the snow and chewed it up and they found a boot with a foot in it and they never did find the skull. I know Ralph spent a lot of time up there looking for the skull and they never found his rifle or anything like that, so there's a lot of mystery there.

He was a pretty tough old guy. In fact, years ago the Forest Service every employee was a game warden, they were supposed to enforce the law. Anyway, it was after the 29 fire and Charlie shot a moose and it was visible from the North Fork Road, and snow on there. Anyway, the Forest Service guy come over there and started talking to him and he says you know I'm going to have to turn you in. And old Charlie says, "If you don't get the hell out of here you're going to be laying right alongside of this moose." He got away with it; they never turned him in. He had to have something to eat.

Tom: I guess he had to say something huh?

Lee: Yeah, he was a pretty tough guy.

Tom: Did you know many of the homesteaders?

Lee: Yeah. I knew Mike Burns and Walsh, John Walsh, I remember meeting him and I knew Dick a lot better. There was one that they called Dutch that lived up there on Big Prairie too. I remember he would walk out in the winter about December and we lived on the North Fork about 4 miles up. My dad had a place in there about where that taxidermy shop is. That's on part of his place. And he would walk out and I remember he would go to town and spend overnight and then the next day probably about noon or so he would come by and mom would make him coffee. And I remember he had a sack of hard candy. They were little Santa clauses about oh probably about 3 inches high and they were filled with strawberry jam. I've never seen anything like them since. And they were really good. I remember us kids got the sack when he stopped by.

- Tom: Did you know homesteaders on the upper end of the valley above Polebridge?
- Lee: Yeah, I do. Ralph Thayer. There was another one there.
- Tom: The Holcolms did you run into them?
- Lee: Yeah, I remember them. In fact I went to school with his granddaughter. She married a guy...where they've got the hall up there.
- Tom: The Matheson's?
- Lee: Yeah, Matheson's.
- Tom: We know you were involved in the North Fork patrol, were you involved in the Community Hall?
- Lee: Yeah.
- Tom: What can you tell us about that?
- Lee: Well we started that, what give us the idea, there was snow [catters], I think it was in Minnesota somewhere up there in the northern peninsula, and anyway they organized the snow catters were going out and they would loan the [cappins 00:04:25] and stuff to check them out and stuff and we kind of got the idea that way. Because when I first started doing it we did a lot of it with snow cats to get around to where the people were. The people weren't there in the winter, and it finally got so we'd go by and if there was no tracks going in we didn't disturb it. Because if you drove in with a snow cat then you couldn't tell if somebody skied in or walked in after it froze so we kind of quit that.
- Tom: You were president or head of the patrol for a number of years?
- Lee: Yeah, for 27 years I guess. We've got a real good guy there now.
- Tom: Mark [00:05:13].
- Lee: Yeah. He is very good, very thorough and very honest. I really admire him.
- Male: Yeah, I like Mark too.
- Tom: Yeah, we like him too. We stopped last week and were talking with Margaret and then saw Mark. He had been in town.
- Lee: He could fit right in with the old-time North Forkers. He would have fit right in.
- Tom: Did you serve on the North Fork Improvement Association, the Hall or was it all one together at one point?

- Lee: Well, I can remember when they built it. I was a property owner up there since 1953.
- Tom: Did they build it in 54?
- Lee: Yeah, I think so. I was working for Rex Brown up at Trail Creek and they had a big blow-down up there and the Forest Service had difficulty selling it and anyway they was asking a minimum bid of \$1 a thousand and nobody would pay it. And so they asked for bids and Rex Brown bid 50-cents and he was the only bidder.
- Tom: So that's where the logs came from for the Hall?
- Lee: No, I don't think they come from there. I can't remember who sawed them and it wasn't Lloyd Sondreson, it was another guy and he sawed them. He was kind of a local guy up there. I can't remember who it was. Yeah. I knew Ralph Day, he was the mailman for a number of years. He was Holcolm's son-in-law.
- Tom: Did you have good mail service the whole time you lived up there?
- Lee: Uh, yeah, after 78, yeah. I got my mail downtown here because I was all over the valley. I would be up to South Fork or over at Tally Lake or somewhere all the time logging or something you know.
- Tom: So whenever you were in town you would just stop by and got the mail on the way?
- Lee: Yeah.
- Tom: Coming or going?
- Lee: My ma picked up my mail for me.
- Tom: I see.
- Lee: Because if you go in that logging cabin she was there for 5 or 6 days a week. It's hard to get a haircut even. All the barber shops are cold. I remember my hair was long one time and I just took my knife and I cut it myself. And the guy says, "Where did you get that haircut?" And I said, "Oh that barber there in Martin City," and nobody would go get a haircut there. [Laughs]
- Tom: When you were in the logging camps and you were there did they have cooks?
- Lee: Oh yeah, sometimes. Sometimes we [batched], it just depends. We had to cook in a cookhouse and done real well that way. A lot of times I would out building a road and I would be by myself, sometimes just worked and helped put in pipes and that was it.

- Tom: So was having a cook a pretty time-saving thing? Did you get more work done that way or you just ate better?
- Lee: Yeah. In the summer time I usually worked daylight. When it was daylight I worked 10, 12, 15 hours a day.
- Tom: That way you didn't have to spend so much time in the woods?
- Lee: Well, you got the jobs done. You had time limits and when you'd get up there on them high bridges you don't have a long season, because you know when it hits the end of September you're just about done with road-building because you start getting snow and then you've got soft roads and you have to wait until it freezes up if you're going to use them that winter.
- Tom: Can you tell us your impression of the social life when you lived up the North Fork either one of you?
- Lee: Yes, it used to be they made their own entertainment. They would go around and have parties and after they got the Hall they was pretty active with that. They had the 4th of July fish fry. One stipulation you had to bring your own fish, but it wasn't too bad them days. You know a guy was allowed I think 10 fish. I think for a while it was 15 and then dropped to 10. Now it's pretty easy to get your limits, they've got it down to 3.
- Marietta: They can't get enough fish for a fish fry.
- Tom: That's right.
- Lee: Yeah, in the early days there was a lot of trappers and towards the end there in the late 30s the fish & game had a study. I've got a copy of it here somewheres if I can find it. It was done on the White Fish Divide. They even had snow cats. They called them snow machines, but they had a motorcycle engine in them and on good snow conditions they could go, but if it was a little bit adverse they weren't any good.
- Tom: Did you get involved in trapping at all?
- Lee: I trapped some, yeah. When you're working in the woods you don't have a lot of time for trapping you know. They had the drought so I didn't interfere much.
- Tom: Have you always been a hunter? Did you hunt for meat? How did that work for you?
- Lee: I didn't kill any...not even a grouse last year. That's about one of the first years I've never killed anything in my life. I've got a elk every year since I was 11 years old other than the time I was in the service.

- Tom: How did you preserve it or keep it or freeze it?
- Lee: My mom used to can it and Marietta canned it and then we cut and roasted. When it got real modern we got a deep freeze.
- Tom: You always had a deep freeze up there?
- Lee: Not up there. We had one in town and we would stop by and pick meat out of the freezer that way.
- Marietta: But we had a smoke house and we preserved that way too.
- Tom: So you smoked it and then canned it?
- Marietta: We did some that way, but when it come out of the smokehouse every neighbor in the North Fork was at our house. They could smell it cooking and they came for treats. The same way at the hospital. I was over there for almost a year. I had to make up a bunch of smoked stuff, jerky and bring it over to the hospital and would bring 10-15 pounds at a time. It would be gone before noon. Everybody in the hospital was in there getting their share of that stuff.
- Tom: Lee tell us about your smoker. Did you build it yourself?
- Lee: Yeah.
- Tom: Some of us have never had a smoker, so give us a little history on smokers.
- Lee: Well you've got to have a little stove you know and be able to control the heat and make... I would start the fire and I used green wood to make a lot of smoke to begin with.
- Tom: What kind of wood?
- Lee: Alder, I preferred alder to anything. It's really good. You can use any of the hardwood that you peel the bark off, birch and cottonwood and you can use that, but alder is the best. You don't have to peel alder. The alder doesn't have any resins in the bark like the other ones do.
- Tom: The common one I'm familiar with is where they take an old refrigerator and run the salt through that...
- Lee: Well, the last one I had was a 4-feet square.
- Tom: Oh, big.
- Lee: Yeah, and 7-feet tall and I got us a monitor on the wall and I know what my temperature is. I can just go look and see. And toward the end I like to get it up

to about 150-degrees for oh maybe 45 minutes or an hour and then your meat starts to get firm and you can take it out or dry it but when you bite it it's just like biting a rock, because you want it to keep a long time and that's the way you do it to get most of the moisture out of it.

Tom: What would be an average time for your smokehouse?

Lee: Oh it just depends on how you cut your meat. You know you can cut it thin and get it to dry out a lot quicker, but I like mine kind of chewy you know. I like a little moisture in it.

Tom: Did you prime it or anything or just smoked it as is?

Lee: No. I used the High Country jerky mix and they've got about oh 10 different flavors in it. I like the High Country. It's really good. Pepper makes it I think they call it.

Tom: Did you put it on as a dry rub?

Lee: Yeah. You've got to use a plastic or a stainless steel can and I just got a meat block and I put it down there and I just laid the meat on it, enough sticks on it and you lay it in a pan and 24 hours later, you should about 12 hours later turn it over so it's nice and even.

Marietta: It gets an even solution on it.

Lee: And smoke it. We used to try [O'Bryan 00:14:52] but that's a lot more difficult, a lot more work you.

Marietta: I had to teach him everything he knows on smoke.

Tom: Well I wanted to ask you because I've never canned meat. I assume you used a pressure cooker.

Marietta: You bet.

Tom: Could you tell us a little bit about how that works?

Marietta: You just get your...I pack raw meat in the jars and then a teaspoon of salt and a clove of garlic and put the lid on it, put them in, put the water in the pressure cooker, bring the pressure up to the temperature which was usually about medium and it would take about 4½ hours. Shut her off, take her off and take her up, she's done. And the kids would gobble it up and Lee would gobble it up. But back to the smokehouse when we were married I was making my living before we were married smoking jerkeys, bears, all this stuff for everybody, and I would [pure] them. Then I married him and I still was doing the smoked jerkeys and stuff for people for Christmas and Thanksgiving and

he decided he would take on the delivery of delivering them back to the people that brought them to my house to be smoked. Well he was coming home having a party. He was a little tipsy at times. He had fun at it and he brought in a good living.

- Lee: If I got an old bull we always used to get [su...00:16:22] and put a chunk in there about as big as a walnut and it gives it a little bit of fat in there.
- Marietta: In the jar we canned.
- Lee: To help break it down.
- Tom: And then you stored it in your cabin in a root cellar? You had a basement in your house right?
- Marietta: Up there, yes.
- Tom: How long could you store canned meat for?
- Marietta: I'll tell you a secret but it's going to go in the dump up there, I have canned chicken that's still fully canned that's been up there for 30 years that I moved from the South Fork. But I don't think I would want to eat it now. I mean it's fully canned.
- Lee: It's still good. I checked it the other day.
- Marietta: But there's no way after that length of time that I would want to eat it.
- Tom: How do you check it or how did you know?
- Marietta: I date them.
- Lee: You can tell.
- Marietta: I date my jars when I can. I mark it right on the top of the lid when they come out of the pressure cooker that day and we moved it from the South Fork up the North Fork. That was my I guess you would say my bad weather meals. If somebody walked in that I didn't know about or something or we had unexpected relatives pop in we'd have dinner. And it was easy to get a jar of elk meat, deer meet, sometimes canned grouse and then other times just whatever was there, the chicken. But my kids when I canned my chickens they were all involved with them and they thought they were some doggone pets. They didn't want to eat chicken with years. Rabbits was the same way.
- Lee: She used to can cakes too in the jars.
- Marietta: I still do.

- Tom: Are you talking fruitcakes or something else?
- Marietta: Just the cake.
- Tom: I don't understand that. Can you explain that a little better?
- Marietta: Well it's usually an applesauce cake. Just make up a double batch of applesauce cake and measure them out in my jars, fill the jar half full, put a piece of wax paper over the top glass on the lid, put the lid on it and the sealing ring, put it in the pressure cooker for about 25-30 minutes, a pressure of much have been about 7½ pounds and then it would come out fully cooked and fully sealed. Larry Wilson was really surprised. He come to my house. He was sitting there. I said, 'I suppose you want dessert?' Yeah, he wanted dessert and I said well I guess it will have to be canned cake. Never heard of it. I brought it out and he thought it was pretty good. He come back right regular there for a while.
- Tom: So how did you get it out? Did it just slide out?
- Marietta: It slides out. You just put a little bit of butter.
- Lee: Just took a knife and go around the jar.
- Marietta: You didn't have to do that.
- Lee: You have to use one that's got a tapered...like them freezer jars or something. They work perfect.
- Marietta: They just come out all by themselves. There's enough usually fat when you make up your cake. Mix it up, it will cook inside the jar and slide out. No, we canned just about everything.
- Tom: You learned that as a child?
- Marietta: I've been canning since I was 6 years old. My mother had polio when she was a child, couldn't do a lot of things, so good old Marietta was taught how to run the pressure cooker. The main story behind the pressure cooker was you never left that stove when that pressure cooker is on there. And I sat right there in front of the stove, have a book there and a timer and that's how I do it. It's time to take it off and give a big sigh, because I've heard of people blowing pressure cookers up clear through the roof of their house.
- We had a neighbor lady that liked to go down to Rex's every once in a while. She put her pressure cooker on the stove. She wasn't canning, she was just cooking a roast in it. It ran out of juices and blew the pan up right through her trailer house roof.

- Lee: Yeah, beans are bad in that. The neighbor lady was cooking beans in there because you can cook them faster and the bean got up there and plugged the...thing; it blew up and she had beans all over the kitchen.
- Tom: It's not funny.
- Marietta: No it's not.
- Lee: It's funny afterwards.
- Tom: [Laughs] So Tom Ladenburg was your closest neighbor when you lived in the North Fork?
- Lee: Yeah.
- Tom: You knew Roy Cooper.
- Marietta: Oh yeah.
- Lee: Roy Cooper. Frank Newton. Frank Newton had a real sense of humor. When you get to know him... I was moving up there and I said, "Well gee I have to build a smokehouse." "Oh don't build one; I'll give you one." We was out there and I was looking at a saddle I was going to buy from him and then we come back and he said, "There's your smoker any time you want it." It was made out of river rock and about 12 feet high and built in the back and he said just take it any time you want it he said.
- Tom: Were you able to move it?
- Lee: No. I would guess it would have been a good load for a dump truck. We was working six days a week and got off a little bit early on Saturday and you had to hurry to town. And I could remember we worked so much I couldn't even get in the stores to get a pair of shoes. I had to call a guy who owned the store, Moody, and then he would open the store and get me a pair of shoes. I used to wear them Red Wings and I'd wear out two pairs every summer.
- Tom: You were doing a lot of work then huh?
- Lee: Well you're walking on those spruce logs and the bark on them is real sharp and it just cuts the soles right off.
- Tom: It takes me 20 years.
- Marietta: To wear a pair out? [Laughs]
- Tom: I guess the moral of that story is you worked a lot harder than we do or did.

- Marietta: Yeah, well you know some morning...
- Tom: To wear boots out.
- Lee: Yeah.
- Marietta: He never worked close to home most of the time. It was out and away like when we lived up the South Fork he worked at Spotted Bear. And he would get up at 4 o'clock in the morning just to be up there in time to go to work. Coming home it would be the same way. He would work until dark, he still had to load up, come all the way back down to the house and he would usually get in and he would be on the telephone with all of his crew. The next day he would get up and we would start loading him up again and that would be on Sunday and he would be ready to head right back up the North Fork or South Fork to get him to go to work again. He spent a lot of time away from home.
- Lee: Yeah. On the roads and stuff that I dealt with they did away with them.
- Tom: Yeah.
- Lee: Skuklio and Hollow [00:24:00].
- Tom: Yeah. There was a commentary on today you know people think they have to commute a long way and a lot. They don't realize that ever sense the advent of the automobile, especially in Montana you guys started out close to home and just worked your way until you were commuting a long distance.
- Marietta: Can you imagine being little kids living up the North Fork which at his uncle's place, [00:24:29] up there and walking from there clear to Columbia Falls to school and walking home, little kids.
- Tom: So how far is that?
- Lee: Oh about 4 miles I guess.
- Marietta: One way.
- Tom: That's 8 miles a day.
- Marietta: And all the little animals, the big animals.
- Lee: Started out when I was 6 years old, carried a lunch and I never quit until I was 70 years old, carried a lunch all that time.
- Tom: Yeah. Did you pack your own lunches?
- Lee: No, my ma packed them for them...

- Marietta: Then we married I packed them.
- Lee: Yeah, there was times I did. To save walking I remember my Aunt Merta was going to school and my granddad had a place just by the tracks up the road here just a little bit where the North Fork Road takes off and we would pack our own lunches there and walk to school from there. But even from there it was a long ways.
- Marietta: I would get so sick and tired.
- Lee: He had a homestead on Hawk Creek, him and Hugh Kirken. They were old-time homesteaders. Anyway, I remember he moved to town and he was janitor of the school and he would see us kids walking and he would keep ringing the bell until we got there so we wouldn't be tardy. [00:26:09]
- Tom: How long was your school day then?
- Lee: Oh I think we got out about 3:30 or 4 o'clock unless Mr. Jenson wanted us to stay afterwards and sometimes if you had done something wrong you had to spend a half-hour or an hour after school you know and do arithmetic or whatever he wanted you to do. Elmer Jenson.
- Marietta: Talking about packing lunches, I packed for him and our six kids and I would get so sick and tired of packing lunches and we bought cheese in the little wrappers, single slices. One morning I got up and had all these lunches to pack. I just threw the cheese in the bread, bundled it up in a baggie and put it in the lunch pails and sent it.
- Lee: Heck that wasn't so bad, you should have had to eat them.
- Marietta: [Laughs] He come home [00:27:11]. I seen paper in these sandwiches.
[Laughs]
- Lee: Well the oldest daughter learned how to bake and she learned how to make a chocolate cake. And she had pretty good luck with them, but after about two months of chocolate cakes I says no more chocolate cakes. So then she made chocolate cupcakes.
- Marietta: And chocolate chip cookies. He got his fair share of chocolate and then some.
- Tom: When your kids get big enough then did you have quite a bit of help in the kitchen?
- Marietta: Oh each one of them, got two of them in the kitchen, two of them to something in the yard, two of them to the garbage, or two of them outside with the cow, steer, this sort of thing. We never had a lot of cow, just enough to keep our kids busy. And you never cooked anything unless you made two gallons at a

time, two gallons of spaghetti, two gallons of clam chowder, and you were lucky if you have enough for the next day left over.

Tom: So you raised cows on occasion I take it.

Marietta: Just for meat.

Tom: I was going to ask you if you used it for meat.

Marietta: Yep, just for meat. But our kids were so touchy; I mean everything was like their best friend. They didn't want to eat it after it was killed. They would kind of go on strike. I would freeze the rabbits in meat cartons and then while they were gone in school I would take them out, thaw them out, get them all fixed up and ready for supper. You would put them on the table and they would say, "This was Sweetie Pie" or this was "Fuzzy." They wouldn't eat it.

Tom: One of the questions we have on here, just kind of jumping around, in the North Fork itself were holidays any different than people in town would have had?

Marietta: Yes. I'll just put it this way, and I love my North Fork and I love my people, you have this side and this side. There's no down in the middle. But for the holidays everybody was close together, nice to one another. They did very nice. And to this day over at the hospital I was in I would have up to 18 North Forkers in my room visiting in one day, and some of them were people that I didn't consider friends but they came and visited, said hello, was real nice.

Tom: So I made the statement once and I want you to agree or disagree with this, I said what makes the North Fork special to me is the people.

Marietta: That's right.

Tom: That sounds to me like what you guys are saying.

Marietta: Yes. And then the outsiders started...out of state people starts moving in and stuff, right away you can feel every person kind of not really bristle, but just kind of get a little leery and the first thing you know you'd warm up to them. They're nice people. They moved out here to get away from back east because there's such stuffed shirts back there they don't talk to one another, never hug, never shake hands, nothing. But they come out here and you open your house up to them, right away, they're okay.

Lee: Yeah, about the first year they really enjoyed the North Fork and then they spent the rest of their life trying to change it to what they wanted.

Marietta: And it didn't work. They are ruining it now.

Tom: Well the same thing in the cities too, Columbia Falls and even White Fish. People want to change to where they left I guess.

Lee: In the early days when they come down to town a lot of people come with horses and wagons. And up the road, just about across road from the Glacier River on the old North Fork Road there was a campground that they used there, and they used that for years. In fact, there was a big tamarack log that was cut a into horse trough so they could water the horses there.

Tom: Is that Welcome Springs?

Lee: I don't know what they called it. It's on the old road and there was a bunch of big cedar trees around it and really a nice place, no underbrush, and that horse trough laid there for years and it had a little log hollowed out and chewed into a trough and that run in it. Something happened that that got kicked out and the trough just fell all to pieces. But that trough had been there I don't know, 20 years that I knew of and then all of a sudden it was gone.

We was logging back up there on the top and me and my dad was getting some cedar out and there was a little cabin there. I could have hauled it in the back of my pick-up. I could have got it and put it in the pick-up and I let it go and I went back about two years later and I says oh I'm going to get that and it was gone, somebody else got it. But it was made out of split cedar and he had it fitted together real nice. It was probably 4 feet high. You had to crawl in on your hands and knees, and for a door he had a piece of canvas nailed on the top and the side and that was eat and then bare grass all over the floor. One little shelf with a candle on it and a little stub of pencil and a piece of paper there where nothing was wrote on it. And I don't know whose cabin it was but it some old trapper.

There was a lot of trappers. I think Margaret [H...00:33:31] has got the book, *The Land of Giants*.

Tom: I've heard the title but I'm not familiar with the book.

Lee: Well, you ought to read it if you get a chance, but it's different than most of the western history you know. They always start off in St. Louis and come up to Missouri. They started on the coast and come up to Columbia and tell about all the trappers. They had a lot of Indian troubles. In fact I think they had more Indian troubles over there than we did on this side.

Tom: That's interesting.

Lee: But there's three or four references in there of the 1830s 1840s of guys coming up and coming into the Flathead area. And there was one, I think it was the Missouri Fur Companies. It's a book that's out of print and I loaned it out and never got it back, but I think it was in 1836 or 1838 with Smith went across

from Salt Lake across the dessert and into California and up the coast and up to Columbia. And when he got the Flathead house he was looking for his trappers and they told they were on the North Fork of the Flathead. And I found a trap in a tree that was completely growed in, into a tamarack tree. You could just see enough of it to see it was a trap. Don Gibble has it out there now. I gave it to him. His understand it goes to fish & game when he's done with it. But that trap, John Freddie looked at it and he finally got in there and he got a picture of the pan and he said the trap was made in 1830 to 1835, somewheres in there.

Tom: That's really old.

Lee: There used to be another trap just like in the Polebridge store and I don't know...through the years it disappeared. I don't know if somebody sold it or gave it away or whatever, but it had a different chain on than what you see on the traps today.

Tom: You brought up the Polebridge store. Could you go back and tell us about the first storeowner that you met or what dealings you had, many or few with the Polebridge store?

Lee: I remember Ted Ross real well. I was going by there quite a bit, and I remember one time me and Dewitt stopped by. Well we had worked six days in the woods and we said well we'll have a beer going to town, so we bought a six-pack of beer and Ms. Ross wouldn't sell me a six-pack of beer. She says, "You're nice a boy to be drinking beer." She wouldn't sell it to me and George bought a six-pack so we got a beer. She would sell it to him; he was older than I was.

Tom: I remember that they didn't want to sell beer at the store.

Lee: But they had to for income.

Tom: Right. They had to change their mind to stay alive.

Lee: He bought it from Ben Rover and Ben Rover told him, 'If you get a bear just shoot him with a shotgun and you'll never see him again,' and he says 'that's it.' And so Ted did that. Every time a bear would come in and he shot a bear and finally that bear get [giving] him and come hunting season and he shot a bear. When he was skinning it out he got a whole handful of shot. He was shooting the same bear all summer. [Laughs] Then he took it over to Rover and he says, "Ben look a there, you told me one time and look a there." Here had a whole handful of shot that he skinned off of that bear.

Tom: What year did he buy the store?

Lee: Ted Ross? It had to be 52, 53, in there. In fact, what was the boy – Bob, Bob Ross. When I was working for [Rex 00:37:36] he worked up there for a little

bit and he set [chokers] for me. And then he got drafted into the army. He had to leave before summer was over, I remember that. I gave him some good advice. I says, "Don't volunteer for nothing." [Laughs]

Marietta: Did you ever tell him the story about putting in the well for Ted Ross?

Lee: Oh. Yeah. Ted drove wells you know and he had a deal rigged up on the rear-end of his truck and a rope and a big weight and he would drive that down. And he pointed the pipe on the end and then when he got done he would drop a stick of dynamite down there and blow the end off. Well, he come down one day and he says, "You got some fuse?" I said, "Yeah, I've got some dynamite fuse," and so I gave him that. Pretty soon he's back, he says, "You got some dynamite?" He says, "It didn't go off and I can't get it out, the fuse won't lift it out." I says, "Well I've got a [kena 00:38:41] pack. It's a pound of explosives. It's not an explosive until you squire this juice in it and mix it up and it's like dough. I should have only used half of it but I says, "Well as long as I've got it mixed up we'll put it all down there." So we put it down there and he already had one charge in there. So we got off and we set that off and boy you couldn't believe the explosion and the cloud of smoke. And people come running out of their houses what happened? And we says, "Yeah, what happened?" We broke every mantle in Polebridge.

Marietta: And rattled my house 8 miles away down the road.

Tom: [Laughs] I'm going to inject here because not everybody that's going to hear this is going to understand what you just said. You broke every mantle and the Coleman lights because they are very fragile, and I would have thought you were going to say you broke every window. But actually what you said was more important than that, because that's...

Lee: Yeah, we broke all the mantles. And Bob Gomalde has got the place now. You know everybody in Polebridge has had trouble into their pump and stuff. He says, "I don't have any problems at all." He says, "I've got the best well in Polebridge."

Tom: [Laughs] So the wells were at the lot Ted sold the lots down South of Polebridge then?

Lee: Yeah. He's the guy that subdivided it.

Tom: I didn't remember that. I worked for him at age 15 or 16 and then hayed that field which is now the Polebridge subdivision one summer.

Lee: I remember you use to hay that years ago.

Tom: Yeah.

- Lee: And then that place where Donaldson is that was Hulie Stein had it, that Big Meadow... I thought Hulie Stein homesteaded, but he didn't. He bought it from the original homesteaders. They had that hay creek and there was flumes out there and where it went across the little dip they made the wooden trough...
- Tom: Flood irrigated.
- Lee: Irrigated all that land out in back. That is one heck of a farm. It's got 4 feet of topsoil on it. It's just fabulous.
- Tom: All on that hay creek drainage?
- Lee: Yeah.
- Tom: I'll be darn.
- Lee: And see hay creek isn't its original channel now.
- Tom: It's south of the original channel?
- Lee: Well, right there as you cross the bridge it followed just about along the edge of that meadow and then went back down by Chadwicks and went in. And in 64 Bob Olson owned that 80 acres then and it cut across and they had a lot of gravel in there and he wanted it for the gravel and the geological survey wanted to put it back in its original channel and he says, "No, no, no, leave it there." And after a couple of years he thought well maybe it was better back in the old channel," and they said it's too late now; it's going to stay where it is.
- Tom: So are you saying that it ran north to start with from the bridge or has it always run south from the bridge?
- Lee: No, it run through where the bridge is, but just as soon as you know where the house is there?
- Tom: Yeah.
- Lee: It turned to the left and if you look there's an old channel.
- Tom: Left, that would be north then.
- Lee: Yeah, right kind of to the east pretty much.
- Tom: Okay.
- Lee: It run to the north a little bit and then to the east. And then it swung to the south again.

- Tom: I didn't know that.
- Lee: That's the best farmland on the North Fork right there, that area there. [00:42:33] Arnett owned all of that at one time. He had 800 acres in there.
- Tom: How did he get so many acres? Bought out other homesteaders?
- Lee: Buying out homesteaders that wanted to sell out and he got it all.
- Tom: Now you knew him, Arnett?
- Lee: Yeah. He lived used to... He lived off here in [Bad Rock] and he had a farm and he was a [agronomist 00:42:57] you know.
- Tom: Okay.
- Lee: And anyway, he raised cattle and then he would winter them down here and then he would herd them up to the North Fork. And they would get right there just before you get to Fool Hen Hill on the right there used to be a logging camp there and it was a little meadow and he would stay overnight with them there the first night. But he would get a calf then he would put the calf in the back of the pick-up. Of course then the cow would follow the pick-up and she right along belong and herded along and would get up there. It took them two to three days to get there.
- Tom: So Ladenberg also ran cows up there? Yes or no?
- Lee: Yeah, he always had cows at different times you know, but he tried to run too many. You know that place, if you've got 40 head of cattle that's a lot because if you can't grow enough feed for them and you have to buy hay you're going in the hole. He would build a herd up to 100 head and start buying hay and then he would have to sell them off. It wasn't paying off.
- Marietta: He would have cows on the hills behind us in the snow, it would starve to death and cows that would get over in the park and one would come out in the spring just half starved to death.
- Lee: Well he thought they have them all in there. There's still 8 or 10. He didn't keep very good track of them. He didn't even know exactly how many he had.
- Tom: Well up country they would range up there above Polebridge by 5 or 6 miles. I don't know how far they would go for quite a ways up country.
- Lee: They were all over. Well it depended on his neighbors and people that weren't there for their grass you know. It's just not cattle country.

- Tom: Did anybody other than those two run any cattles up there that you can remember?
- Lee: Well, old Cooper used to pasture up there in the summer time, but he would buy in the spring and then he would sell in the fall. He didn't try to winter anything.
- Tom: About how many head did he run up there?
- Lee: Oh, see he had Donald's and Arnett's place in there. He had all of that leased.
- Marietta: How many cows?
- Lee: I don't know, he would run about 60 to 80 head.
- Marietta: But he kept track of them too.
- Lee: Yeah. Every evening they would want to get on the road you know because that pavement was there and that's warmer and the cows would get out there and lay down and eat and he would have to herd them off.
- Tom: Can you tell us about when he died? You were up there at that point.
- Lee: Yeah. Well, we heard a shot you know, me and my daughter and I says, "We ought to go up there." He was bothered by the bear, but anyway we got to working and didn't go up there and it's a good thing we didn't because they had stabbed him is what they had done.
- Marietta: You're talking about Roy Cooper now.
- Lee: Roy Cooper. That's who we were talking about wasn't it?
- Tom: Yes.
- Lee: Yeah. He got stabbed with a big chef knife. You know what they are? They are real long and pointed. And he was sitting on the couch and they stabbed him here in the neck and it come out his back and into the couch. You could see the spot where the knife went in the couch. And then Harper went over there. He was supposed to come over for dinner or something and he went over there and [00:46:38] come down because we had the [00:46:43] the North Fork at that time down at the lower end there.
- Marietta: The police radio.
- Lee: He said, "I think Cooper committed suicide. He's sitting there with his hand over his head and blood all over," so we called the cops and they come in. anyway, they could see it was murder so then they couldn't do nothing and it

took two hours to get a deputy up there. Yeah, they had his horses saddled and they were going to go north into Canada and Cooper told them they couldn't make it so evidently they took his word for it. Took all his guns and stuff like that and it was a bartender at Missoula and he called the cops and he says, "I think I just bought a hot gun," and he told them about it and it was one of Cooper's rifles. It was one of the only ones they recovered.

Tom: Beings we're on a subject of death do you remember anybody else that died in the North Fork that you knew?

Marietta: Frank Evans.

Lee: Well, there was...just where Cedar Lake is there's two guys buried about there that I don't know, it was in 1918 when they had that flu. And anyway, they hadn't been in for quite a while so they went up and checked and they were both dead in their bunks up there and they buried them out there. They can't even find where the cabin is anymore.

Tom: How did Frank Evans die?

Lee: He committed suicide.

Tom: Did you know him very well?

Lee: Yeah, I knew him pretty well, yeah. In fact I was probably one of the few guys that ever got any of his rose petal wine. He used to pick rose petals and make wine.

Tom: I got some.

Lee: Did you?

Tom: Yep.

Lee: Yeah, it was very fragrant.

Tom: Yes. It wasn't bad.

Lee: Yeah, it wasn't bad.

Tom: I forgot about that rose petal wine.

Marietta: What was her name?

Tom: His wife's name or his girlfriend's name?

Marietta: His girlfriend.

- Tom: Ginny.
- Marietta: Yeah, but she had another name. Moonbeam, Moonshine...
- Lee: Beam Blossom.
- Marietta: Beam Blossom.
- Tom: I don't remember that.
- Lee: Yeah. They stopped her one time. I was doing some clearing for him, cutting some brush off and when we got done he says, "I'll make you some sassafras tea." That's the only time I ever had any. It's really different. But I guess originally they used the root and he says, "I found out if you get the bark down close to the bottom of the tree and just use the bark" and it was quite tasty.
- Tom: He made from a plant up in the North Fork?
- Lee: No. He picked it up back east from where he was from originally. He called it sassafras tree. I remember he used the bark or the root, but the bark has got it too. He had chunks of it there and he would just kind of grind it up and make tea out of it.
- Marietta: Remember back when they used to make the bear boards for on your windows and stuff with all the nails in them?
- Tom: Yes.
- Marietta: And Charlie and Dorothy Ritter had been having trouble with a grizzly bear up there and they had them all around the house. And Frank Evans went there for something, I don't know what. Lee can probably fill you in on all this. But anyway, he stepped on one of those boards. He had to get all those nails in his feet.
- Lee: No, they were in his foot. They had a storm door and it was closed and he was trying to get their attention. He was pretty excited. Remember his Volkswagen burned up?
- Tom: Okay.
- Lee: And I guess it was on fire up there and he was trying to get their attention real quick trying to get the fire out and they had the bear board out there with spikes and they went through his boots and he was out there hollering. And he finally got their attention but it was too late to save anything.
- Tom: He was always doing some different things. I remember one time I spent the weekend or my day off up there with them and it must have been in the fall

because he had baked apples, and I don't know that I'd ever had a baked apple. I mean I had had apple pie, but he had this like a restaurant sized pan, maybe it was bigger than 9 x 13 and he had I don't know, 12 baked in there stuffed with brown sugar and they were pretty good.

Marietta: And raisins.

Tom: But the first one was good. The second was okay, and then I think we had one for breakfast the next day because without proper storage and just him living there you had to eat all the baked apples from the beginning to the end. That was the one thing that was out of place or different that I remembered from him.

Lee: See that house he had that was [Chance Bebes] homestead. He was there in the early days.

Tom: So I always thought it was the Adair homestead but they must have bought it?

Lee: No, that was [Chance Bebes] homestead.

Tom: Oh, I see.

Lee: Yeah. And it went up just about to the store and then back on the hill at some point. Yeah.

Tom: Well yeah it does. It goes up on the ridge there and right where the T is in front of the store that's where that fence line that's part of Polebridge subdivision now was their property line I think.

Lee: Yeah, he was quite a guy old Chance was. Well he married [Dee Ford]. I think that's where Rachael Sweet was and part of that was the Ford homestead and he married the Ford girl and then they moved to town here and raised their family down here in town. They was in Bad Rock first and then they moved into Columbia Falls. He was a government trapper, damage control guy. He went out and got grizzly bears and mountain lions and stuff like that. In fact I don't know where it would be where a guy would get it, but they made a movie of him capturing lions alive. They wanted them for the zoo or something. He would run them up a tree. I remember I seen the movie and he had a 2 x 2 with [00:53:28 eyes] screwed into with a little cable and a nose on the end and then he would put it around her head and locked it and pulled them out of the tree and sent them to the zoo.

Tom: Well, why don't you say we call it off for today?

Lee: [00:53:46]

Tom: Over your knowledge of the North Fork is that pretty fair assessment of how many came and went up there?

Marietta: Yeah.

Lee: They would have a family. They would have to get the kids to school, things like that. Like Dewey Parrish I remember him. They homesteaded up there. That was back in the Community Hall there, back in there. He was a great guy for finding bees, you know bee trees and honey trees. But the lower North Fork down here, from Columbia Falls to Canyon Creek there was a lot of cedar and a lot of them were hollow and that was the perfect home for bees. He would go along and he would find them. He would put out a bake station with sugar water and get the bees coming to that and then he would follow a bee for as far as he could see him and pretty soon another bee would come by and pretty soon he would find the nest.

Tom: So he was tracking bees?

Lee: Yep.

Tom: I would have never thought to do that. Shows how little I know about the outside world.

Lee: Yeah.

Tom: Did you ever find any honey and have an abundance of it?

Lee: Yeah. My dad and my granddad did I can remember. I remember they had the big cedar tree. I remember I was a little kid and they fell it down and broke it open and there was two hives in the same tree. You couldn't believe how much. We had washtubs full of honey and boy was that good honey. Of course with the kids around ours didn't last as long as grandpa's did. I can remember going to grandma's and she would have fresh bread and honey.

Well, in the early days I can remember lower North Fork where the shooting range is there my granddad had a homestead and my mother had a homestead there. The hills after the fire were just pink, were just pink with fireweed.

Marietta: Boy that makes good honey.

Lee: And then oh I don't know, probably about the first of June they would bring in several carloads of sheep and they would unload them here and they would start up the North Fork. And they would wind up...you know before fall as the summer progressed, as they opened up on the high ridges, they would be up there on the high ridges on the White Fish Divide and pasture the sheep in there.

And in winter basin, I can remember it was in 53 I think it was I was sitting there, and there was a little [00:56:31] in there and they had a big rock, had SD's Small Sheep Camp 1935. And I think that was about the last year, 36 was probably about the last time they brought them into the White Fish Divide.

Tom: So sheep had never been really big in the Flathead Valley have they?

Lee: No. I can't remember anybody having any sheep down there.

Tom: I can't either.

Lee: Fuzzy Barton, there was one guy had four or five [00:57:07], but they Fuzzy to pack groceries to the different camps and stuff to [00:57:18] had a couple of horses and he would take groceries to the guys all summer long. He said they brought him a rifle and all the ammunition and he was supposed to shoot every bear he saw. He claimed he killed several hundred bears. I don't know if he did or not. That's what he claimed. He... a road that went up Big Creek and followed it up and went up to Larsen's homestead. He had a couple of homesteads up there.

And then Hollow [00:57:52] there was no road then. There was a road on the state land but then when you got up there on North Coal and South Coal there was no roads in that area when I first went in. And there was a lot of game in them days.

Marietta: Lots of bears too.

Lee: And you know most of the people didn't want mule deer, they wanted white tails. They didn't really hunt them.

Tom: Is there a difference in your book between white tail and mule deer?

Lee: Oh if you get them in a rut I think I would prefer mule deer to white tail. I like them if you get them... If you get them in a rut you know they ain't very good.

Marietta: Haven't got enough garlic to cover it up.

Tom: [Laughs] Ha, good point. Bull trout were really big back in the early days. I remember my uncles talking about fishing at Big Creek and catching... They had pictures of really big... bull and [00:58:55]. Did you fish for those at all?

Lee: Well, let's see, Big Creek, Coal Creek, Trail Creek, and Whale Creek had been closed to fishing for as long as I can remember.

Tom: Oh.

- Lee: They was spawning streams and they always had them closed. In fact one year they did open it up for two weeks in a year, but it was right when the fish were spawning and they didn't know where they was spawning and they let fishermen go in and they had a check station at Big Creek and you had to tell them where you got the fish and things like that. But it was only for a two-week period, a very short period of time.
- Tom: Were you a big fisherman?
- Lee: Oh yeah, I did a lot of fishing.
- Tom: Did you can bull trout?
- Marietta: I canned them before we were married.
- Lee: My mother used to can them all the time. After I got to going to school you know we had a place, we stayed at grandpa's place down here and I just loved to go... You were allowed two a day. You know 4 or 5 6-pounders you could catch them, nothing to do it. Yeah, my dad was a fisherman and we would go fishing. In fact, my grandmother out [01:00:23] there was a cedar camp out there and my grandpa and grandma cooked there.
- Tom: Cedar...
- Lee: Where [01:00:31] was.
- Tom: So you say cedar camp, was that for cedar lumbar or shakes?
- Lee: No. They took out poles and posts. They would get an order for poles and then they would go through there and of course the poles are pretty... It's got to be really good timber for poles. It can't be no rot in them or no rot on the outside and things like that. And then the hollow ones you know if they had to shell one of them they would make posts out of them. In fact before the fire, right where the Blankenship Bridge is there was a patch of cedars there, great big stuff, 4 and 5 and 6 foot on the stump. My granddad logged that out before there was any roads going in there at all. That was about oh 1915 I think it was, somewhere in there.
- Tom: Early fires.
- Lee: Yeah. My dad wasn't big enough to be in the woods yet then. He was just a little kid, but granddad used to go in there and him and Corbett, that was his nephew, and they got that stuff up.

01:01:40

[End of recording]

