



## FINDING AID

# MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL HISTORIES

**1987-1995**

Prepared by  
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7/31/2019

Yellowstone National Park Archives  
P O Box 168  
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Catalog Number: MSC 206

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## ***HISTORY***

Born May 19, 1948 in Colorado, Marjane Ambler began a career in journalism in 1968. Ambler worked in various positions including as editor of the “High Country News,” an environmental publication, from 1974 to 1980.

In 1984, Ambler’s husband Terry Wehrman accepted a position as a “snow groomer” in Lake Village, Yellowstone National Park. The couple spent the next nine years living year-round in the interior of Yellowstone. Ambler worked as a volunteer during the early years and as an interpretive ranger during the summers of 1990-1993.

During her time at Lake Village, Ambler began to collect the recollections of the other park employees and family members within her small social circle, as well former park employees who experienced living and working in the park interior in past decades or whose careers were otherwise notable. These activities culminated in Ambler’s 2013 book “Yellowstone Has Teeth,” which narrated the recollections of Ambler’s interviewees interwoven with her own experiences in a wide ranging memoir of “living year-round in the world’s first national park.”

Ambler and Wehrman left Lake Village in 1993, after which Ambler served as editor of the “Tribal College Journal” from 1995 to 2006. Ambler is also the author of “Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development” published by University Press of Kansas in 1990. Ambler and Wehrman split time between homes in Atlantic City, Wyoming, and Lake Havasu, Arizona.

***SCOPE AND CONTENT***MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL HISTORIES  
1987-1995

*CATALOG NUMBER* MSC 206 (YELL 188046)

*VOLUME* 0.5 LF (9 interviews)

*DESCRIPTION* This collection consists of nine oral histories of Yellowstone Park employees and spouses interviewed by Marjane Ambler. Materials include copied cassette tapes, interview summaries, transcripts, release forms, and occasional correspondence/background material. Content from all interviews in this collection appear in “Yellowstone Has Teeth” with the exception of the William Armstrong interview.

Ambler’s purpose in writing “Yellowstone Has Teeth” was to document the experiences of interior Park employees with an emphasis on life during the winter season. Ambler also wanted to expand the diversity of Yellowstone employees whose careers are documented in writing. In addition to male rangers, Ambler sought out the experiences of other park employees including maintenance workers and the “hidden community of women, who are either rangers or support troops for the rangers.” Both goals are reflected in the interviews assembled in this collection. The six men and three women represented are former park rangers, concessions and maintenance workers, volunteers, and homemakers. Interviewers begin by stating basic biographical details and usually develop into an open-ended discussion of their park careers. Life in the park interior is the dominant topic, especially dealing with winter weather and daily life in isolated outposts. Other common topics include wildlife management (elk, bison, and bears), work hazards, transportation, and family life. Some interviews are more focused, such as Henry Rahn’s work as a bear feeder and Kathleen O’Leary’s experience during the fires of 1988.

*ORGANIZATION* Arranged by format and then chronologically.

*PROVENANCE* Gift of Marjane Ambler, 1987-1989

*RESTRICTIONS* YES, use restrictions are noted for individual interviews.

*ASSOCIATED MATERIALS* Audio recordings and transcripts available online at Montana Memory Project <https://mtmemory.org/>

Ambler, Marjane. *Yellowstone Has Teeth*. Helena: Riverbend, 2013.  
Yellowstone Research Library

## ***CONTAINER LIST***

### **Box 1**

<b>File</b>	<b>Title</b>
01.01	Correspondence, 1990-1995
01.02	Information and Project Sheets, circa 1990
01.03	Transcripts (original), circa 1990

### **Box 2**

<b>File</b>	<b>Title</b>
02	Recordings, 1987-1989

<b>Item</b>	<b>Title</b>
YELL188046-OH1	Gerald "Jerry" Bateson Sr. interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Terry Wehrman in Gardiner, Montana, March 21, 1987

Jerry Bateson was the winterkeeper at Lake Hotel from 1950 to 1975. This Interview covers Bateson's twenty-five winter seasons at Lake, with an emphasis on his general living conditions. Topics include work duties removing snow from roofs; transportation by skis and snow plane; lack of communication and amenities; entertainment and hobbies; the electrification of Lake; housing conditions and provisioning of winterkeepers by the Yellowstone Park Company; bear encounters; significant events including the rescue of a stranded pilot and the 1965 collapse of Lake Lodge's boiler room; and weather conditions, both extreme and typical. The experiences of his wife and son are also discussed, as are other winterkeepers at Lake. Listen online: <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll92/id/28/rec/8>

YELL188046-OH2	Helen Wolfe interviewed by Marjane Ambler in Lake Village, Wyoming, April 5, 1987
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Helen Wolfe worked as a cook and maintenance worker for the National Park Service from 1965 to 1987. This interview covers Wolfe's career with the NPS from the 1960s until the date of the interview. A major focus is Wolfe's experience as the second woman ever hired by Yellowstone's Maintenance Division. Wolfe discusses the difficulties she and her colleague Verna Nelson faced, including harassment by coworkers and park visitors. Wolfe also discusses her affection for working in the Norris Geyser Basin, including her experience as the first person to witness Steamboat Geyser's 1978 eruption after nine years of dormancy. Other topics include relations with visitors, cooking for Presidents Ford and Carter, and bear encounters. Listen online: <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll92/id/25/rec/7>

**Box 2**

<b>File</b>	<b>Title</b>
02	Recordings, 1987-1989 (continued)

<b>Item</b>	<b>Title</b>
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YELL188046- OH3	Kathleen O’Leary interviewed by Marjane Ambler in Lake Village, Wyoming, August 28, 1988
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Kathleen O’Leary was the wife of ranger David Phillips and a direct observer of the 1988 fires. This interview was recorded a few days after O’Leary and Phillips’ harrowing escape through the burning landscape of the Thorofare district to Lake Village. Unlike the other interviews in this collection, it is tightly focused on O’Leary’s recent experiences of the previous few months. She discusses the beginning and progression of the 1988 fire season, firefighting strategies employed by both the National Park Service and National Forest Service, her and her husband’s activities in defending the Thorofare district, the psychological effects of living near active wildfires, and a detailed and dramatic account of the couple’s escape with four horses and one mule. Listen online:

<https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll92/id/26/rec/2>

YELL188046-OH4	Francis "Red" Payne interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Terry Wehrman in Livingston, Montana, December 3, 1988
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Red Payne was a maintenance foreman in Yellowstone from 1966 to 1974. Payne shares experiences from his decade in Yellowstone’s Maintenance Division, primarily relating to clearing snow from roads and breaking the ice pack on Yellowstone Lake. Payne discusses equipment, working with women and black employees, worker recreation, and bear stories. Other topics include firefighting, wildlife management, poaching, harvesting hay for the Lamar Buffalo Ranch as a teenager, and stories from Payne’s contemporaries including ranger Jerry Mernin and maintenance worker “Blue” Evans. Finally, Payne shares some of his father’s stories of driving park stagecoaches in the early 20th century and reflects on changes to the park in recent decades. Listen online:

<https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll92/id/41/rec/6>

**Box 2**

<b>File</b>	<b>Title</b>
02	Recordings, 1987-1989 (continued)

<b>Item</b>	<b>Title</b>
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YELL188046-OH5	William “Scott” Chapman interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Louise Chapman and Terry Wehrman in Gardiner, Montana, December 15, 1988, and January 21, 1989
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Scott Chapman was a ranger at Yellowstone from 1930 to 1962, a record breaking thirty-two years without transfer. This interview is wide ranging, covering stories and experiences from Chapman’s extensive career at Yellowstone. Major topics include the nature of ranger work in the 1930s; winter living conditions; Chapman’s work on the Lamar Buffalo Ranch; transportation (skiing and horses); challenges raising his son Bill in backcountry isolation; family and social life in Mammoth, West Yellowstone, and in backcountry posts; the Park’s history of wildlife management (especially the elk culling program, which Chapman helped administer); run-ins with poachers; firefighting; and Chapman’s recollections of other influential rangers including George Baggle, Joe Douglas, and Harry Trischman. Listen online: <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll92/id/27/rec/3>

YELL188046-OH6	William “Bill” Armstrong interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Mary Armstrong and Terry Wehrman in Livingston, Montana, January 7, 1989 <b>[RESTRICTED]</b>
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Bill Armstrong worked in Yellowstone’s Maintenance Division from 1948 to 1980. He also worked on a PWA-funded road construction crew during the 1930s. This interview contains stories and reflections from Armstrong’s road crew experience (1933-1934) and his early career with the National Park Service (1948-1960s). Topics include 1930s road construction equipment and techniques; interactions with CCC workers; challenges of the post-WWII boom in visitation with limited facilities; improvements and problems brought by Mission 66; bear stories, including efforts to discourage bears from campgrounds by improving sanitation; and elk and bear interactions and management policies. Contact the Archives for research access.

**Box 2**

<b>File</b>	<b>Title</b>
02	Recordings, 1987-1989 (continued)

<b>Item</b>	<b>Title</b>
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YELL188046-OH7	Robert “Bob” Murphy interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Alice Murphy in Livingston, Montana, February 7, 1989
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Bob Murphy was a career National Park Service ranger and administrator, serving as superintendent and chief ranger of multiple National Parks from the 1930s to 1974. This interview consists of stories and impressions from Murphy’s career at Yellowstone, 1938-1956. Major topics include cross country ski patrols, with detailed descriptions of ski equipment, routes taken, and memorable trips; backcountry cabins; smoke jumping and fire suppression; poaching and law enforcement; elk and bison reductions; and Brucellosis studies at the Lamar Buffalo Ranch. Murphy also discusses the cultural attitudes of early park rangers, noting the influence of military culture and the wide latitude rangers were afforded in their work duties. Murphy recalls stories from the careers of other rangers, including Harold “Bob” Jones, Hugh Ebert, Bert McLaran, and Harry Trischman. Listen online: <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll92/id/30/rec/1>

YELL188046-OH8	Alice Bigelow Murphy interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Bob Murphy in Livingston, Montana, May 17, 1989
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Alice Murphy was a National Park Service employee and wife of ranger and administrator Bob Murphy. This interview mainly focuses on Murphy’s experience at the Snake River Ranger Station in the winter of 1952-1953. Murphy discusses the details of her home life: appliances, radio communication, food storage, transportation, hobbies, and social life. Murphy’s living conditions were primitive but growing up on a ranch prepared her for the hardship. Murphy also discusses her time in Mammoth, with a general discussion of job opportunities for women in Yellowstone; and relations between rangers, maintenance workers, and concessions employees. Listen online: <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll92/id/31/rec/5>

**Box 2**

<b>File</b>	<b>Title</b>
02	Recordings, 1987-1989 (continued)

<b>Item</b>	<b>Title</b>
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YELL188046-OH9	Henry "Hank" Rahn interviewed by Marjane Ambler with comments by Terry Wehrman, Joe Figg, and Cora Figg in Lake Village, Wyoming, August 17, 1989
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Hank Rahn worked as a garbage truck driver and bear feeder at Yellowstone from 1936 to 1942. This short interview covers Rahn's experiences as a bear feeder at the Otter Creek dump site between 1938 and 1942. Rahn discusses details of the bear feeding program, bear behavior, defending himself and his truck, close calls while feeding bears, and encounters with bears outside of his regular job. Listen online: <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p16013coll92/id/29/rec/4>



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**MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL  
HISTORIES**

**GERALD LEROY “JERRY” BATESON SR.  
WINTERKEEPER AT LAKE HOTEL**

INTERVIEWED BY  
MARJANE AMBLER,  
AUTHOR

MARCH 21, 1987  
IN GARDINER, MONTANA

Yellowstone National Park Archives  
P O Box 168  
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190-0168

Catalog Number: YELL 188046-OH1

**NARRATOR:**

Gerald Leroy “Jerry” Bateson Sr. was born December 24, 1913, in the rural community of Six Points, Ohio to Perry Bateson and Zella Pollard. Bateson spent most of his early life in Ohio, where he struggled to find work during the Great Depression. His first exposure to Yellowstone National Park occurred in 1936, when he travelled to the Park in an unsuccessful attempt to gain employment with the Civilian Conservation Corp.

Bateson returned to Ohio where he married Thelma Caswell in 1940. Jerry’s only child, Gerald Leroy Bateson Jr, was born October 3, 1942. Jerry enlisted in the US Army the following year and served until 1945 as a sharpshooter in the European, African, and the Middle Eastern theaters of war. Bateson’s marriage to Thelma Caswell ended upon his return from World War II, and in 1948 he was remarried to country western singer and musician Thelma Gardner. Gardner performed in Chicago’s WLS-AM “National Barn Dance” radio show and had spent three years touring with the USO.

In the spring of 1950 Jerry returned to Yellowstone as a warehouse worker with the Yellowstone Park Company. That fall, the position of winterkeeper for Lake Hotel opened up. Despite knowing little about the position, the Batesons decided to “give it a try.” The couple lived in Lake Village year-round until Thelma’s death in 1968, and Jerry continued the job by himself until 1975. Gerald Jr. lived with the couple from 1950 to 1959.

Bateson continued seasonal work for the Yellowstone Park Company as a plumber until his final retirement in 1980. He died September 4, 1994 in Livingston, Montana.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Born May 19, 1948, in Colorado, Marjane Ambler began a career in journalism in 1968. Ambler worked in various positions including as editor of the “High Country News,” an environmental publication, from 1974 to 1980.

In 1984, Ambler’s husband Terry Wehrman accepted a position as a snow groomer in Lake Village, Yellowstone National Park. The couple spent the next nine years living year-round in the interior of Yellowstone. Ambler worked as a volunteer during the early years and as an interpretive ranger during the summers of 1990-1993.

During her time at Lake Village, Ambler began to collect the recollections of the other park employees and family members within her small social circle, as well former park employees who experienced living and working in the park interior in past decades or whose careers were otherwise notable. These activities culminated in Ambler’s 2013 book “Yellowstone Has Teeth,” which narrated the recollections of Ambler’s interviewees interwoven with her own experiences.

Ambler and Wehrman left Lake Village in 1993, after which Ambler served as editor of the “Tribal College Journal” from 1995 to 2006. Ambler is also the author of “Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development” published by University Press of Kansas in 1990. Ambler and Wehrman split time between homes in Atlantic City, Wyoming, and Lake Havasu, Arizona.

**SUMMARY:**

This Interview covers Bateson’s twenty-five winter seasons at Lake, with an emphasis on his general living conditions. Topics include work duties removing snow from roofs; transportation by skis and snow plane; lack of communication and amenities; entertainment and hobbies; the electrification of Lake; housing conditions and provisioning of winterkeepers by the Yellowstone Park Company; bear encounters; significant events including the rescue of a stranded pilot and the 1965 collapse of Lake Lodge’s boiler room; and weather conditions, both extreme and typical. The experiences of his wife and son are also discussed, as are other winterkeepers at Lake.

**Restrictions:** None

**Related Materials:**

- Bateson, Gerald L. Jr. *Growing Up In Yellowstone*. Gardiner: Pumice Point, 2011. This autobiography contains many details of his father’s life and career, including photographs.

**Format:** Two audio cassettes, 74 minutes total recording time. Digitized using TEAC player/recorder on June 25, 2019.

**Transcript:** Transcribed by Marjane Ambler, March 1987? Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Barrett Codieck, Yellowstone National Park Archives Intern. Transcript 28 pages.

**Technical Note:** There is a gap in audio at the beginning of the second side, possibly due to an error in copying the cassette tape. The original transcript provides the missing text, which is indicated in this document by brackets.

**Gerald “Jerry” Bateson Sr. interviewed by Marjane Ambler  
in Gardiner, Montana, March 21, 1987  
with comments by Terry Wehrman**

**Narrator:** Jerry Bateson (JB)

**Interviewer:** Marjane Ambler (MA)

**Also present:** Terry Wehrman (TW)

**MA:** You were born in Ohio?

**JB:** Yes.

**MA:** When were you born?

**JB:** Oh, 1913. I'm an old cuss.

**MA:** I guess you are. I would have never guessed that.

**JB:** Yes, I'm 73.

**MA:** That way of life must have been good for you.

**JB:** Yes, I think so. I think it's a really healthy life. Gosh, if I wouldn't be so old, I would still be out there. I really miss the place, in the winter time especially.

**MA:** Do you?

**JB:** Yes, I guess I'm an old hermit, because after my wife passed away, I still stayed there for 8 years. She passed away in '68 and I stayed until '75 alone. [Thelma Bateson died of complications from diabetes.]

**MA:** You raised your son out there?

**JB:** We did for about five or six years. He was from a former marriage, and he stayed with his mother back in Ohio for a few years until we got settled. He came out one summer and he liked it so well that he decided he wanted to live out here. So we taught him school there at Lake during the winters.

**MA:** So what grades would that have been?

**JB:** Oh, about from the fourth to the ninth, I guess. Something like that. He took this Calvert system. Have you heard of it?

**MA:** I've heard of it, since I've been in Yellowstone.

**JB:** We did it through the mail. We sent all his papers in to, I believe it was Baltimore, Maryland. They grade them, and let you know how you are doing. It worked real good. He was up with the rest of the kids or better. They claim they do better like that than they do in a regular public school.

**MA:** So where did he go then? Did he go back East?

**JB:** No, he stayed here. When he got old enough to chase girls, why he moved down to Gardiner. [Laughter]

**MA:** It was a little too isolated?

**JB:** Right, it was then. He left when he was about seventeen.

**MA:** How well did he do in the Gardiner schools?

**JB:** Well, he didn't go to school anymore. He just went to work. That was the only schooling he took. He met a gal here and got married. He lives over in the next house here, but they moved to Colorado, and he worked down there in construction work for several years, and then they moved back up here. Her mother lives here in Gardiner.

**MA:** So when you first moved there to Lake in 1950, was that in the spring?

**JB:** In the fall. We came out here in the spring, and I worked in the warehouse for Elvin Tyson until fall, and then this job turned up at Lake, and we thought we'd give it a try. We didn't know a thing about it, but it sounded good to me.

**MA:** I would imagine the job opened fairly frequently. There probably weren't too many before you that...

**JB:** Right, there weren't too many then that would tackle the job because it was so isolated, but now, why everyone wants to try it. But not back then.

**TW:** Some wouldn't try it more than once, though. [Laughter]

**JB:** No, right, that's for sure.

**MA:** So when you took the job that fall, how many people were living at Lake?

**JB:** Three.

**MA:** There was you and your wife and...

**JB:** Right, and one single guy over at the lodge.

**MA:** Who was that?

**JB:** Hank Jurceyk was his name. He was from back East.

**MA:** He was the winterkeeper for the Lake Lodge?

**JB:** He was the winterkeeper at the lodge. They had a separate one for that.

**MA:** How do you spell his name?

**JB:** Oh, boy. J-u-r-c-e-y-k, I think it is. It was a tongue twister.

**MA:** So you both were working for...

**JB:** For the old Yellowstone Park Company. That was when they were in here. And he stayed about six winters I think, and since then, the ones I had would work one or two winters. One was from Helena, and Joe was from Livingston and then two or three married couples spent a winter or two in there with us. Most of them are single guys. Ole John Whixell from Gardiner here, he was up there for several... He was a winterkeeper at the old Canyon Lodge, and then when they closed it down, then he moved to Lake. I don't know just what winter it was, but he stayed there several winters.

**MA:** Uh, huh. So that first winter, you were living at the place where the Durfeys used to live, by the hotel? [Gary Durfey was winterkeeper at Lake in the late 1970s and was joined by his wife, Lori, from 1981-1985. Their first daughter, Megan, was born in 1984 and also wintered at Lake.]

**JB:** Yeah, there by the hotel. I spent all my winters in that old house.

**MA:** Did you go out at all? Did you ski out to Mammoth?

**JB:** No, I never did. We had a snow plane, and if conditions were right, we could get out with it. But it was a pretty rough trip. Once in a while we'd make it out. You could go up as far as the top of the hill at Swan Lake. You couldn't come down off of that big drift, you know. No way you could do that in a snow plane in the winter, the way it used to drift in there.

**MA:** You mean because you would go into the water?

**JB:** Yeah, you'd go into the creek there.

**MA:** At Golden Gate?

**JB:** At Golden Gate. So you had to walk from there down to get your mail. That was the only reason we'd come out was to get the mail, but maybe once during the winter we'd do it. But some winters we never even did it. Rangers would bring our mail out when they were on ski patrol. They'd bring our first class mail.

**MA:** So how often was that?

**JB:** Once a winter. Usually about March they would take off at Mammoth and ski to... Well, they had two stops before they even got to Canyon. It was tough going at times. You'd get eighteen, twenty inches of snow overnight, and that made 'er tough. They'd break trail and, where is the first... I can't remember where the first cabin is.

**TW:** Lounsbury said around Obsidian...

**JB:** Yeah, just this side of Obsidian Cliff. I can't remember the name...

**TW:** Crystal...

**JB:** Yeah, I believe it is. Crystal Creek Lake cabin or something like that. Then the next night, they would stay at the old Norris Ranger Station; they were still using it then. Then the next day they would ski on across the cutoff to Canyon and stay overnight there. And sometimes they wouldn't get in there until midnight or so, it was so tough going over that ole Canyon Hill.

**MA:** Across the cutoff?

**JB:** Yeah, the Norris cutoff they call it. Norris to Canyon.

**MA:** Do you know where that is?

**JB:** It's the road now, but it used to be a different road that went along the Cascades, that's the old road. So they would stay at Canyon. Maybe rest up a day there because they were so tired, and then they'd ski on to Lake. That was a tough trip, too, I'm telling you.

**MA:** Did you have telephone communication?

**JB:** Part-time. Back then when we started, the Yellowstone Park Company had the telephone system in the park, and anytime the line would go out in the winter time, well if we didn't go out and fix it ourselves, than we were out of phone. And that happened quite often.

**TW:** Was that the old crank system?

**JB:** Right, that was the old box on the wall, the old crank system. We had that for a good number of years before Mountain Bell came in, I don't know just how many anymore. The same way with electricity. We didn't have that for, oh, seven or eight years, I'd say.

**MA:** So you say something did go wrong with the telephone quite often. How long a period would you be without communication?

**JB:** Oh, maybe for months.

**MA:** Months, plural?

**JB:** Yeah, well if it happened between Canyon and Norris, well they would just forget it. They didn't have any way then, except to ski out. So they wouldn't come out and fix it. And if we couldn't find the trouble on our end, well then that was just it until spring. Sometimes I could... They had a two-way radio system over in the old ranger station, and I could use that to call in the weather and so forth, and I would do that once a month. Call the monthly weather in, for the snow course and so forth.

**TW:** When you took your snow plane up through Hayden Valley, did you just kind of have to zigzag through?

**JB:** Right. And that drift, I guess they call it Grizzly Drift up on the hill. You'd have to go up over the top of it because it was too sideways all the time before they started grooming. You'd slide right down into the river. You'd think you would anyhow. You'd go up over the top of the hill and then back down to the road. And same with some of the other drifts on Hayden Valley, you'd go up around them if they were too sharp.

[Break]

**MA:** So you had no communication...But if there were an emergency, you could use that two way radio?

**JB:** Right, we could use the radio. It usually worked. Sometimes it didn't. It was just in that ole cold ranger station. I don't know, they must have had to run it on batteries then, because there wasn't any power out there.

**TW:** Did you have a wind generator?

**JB:** No, not at Lake. We had what they called a Pelton wheel. It ran from water pressure from the water reservoir, you know the old one, well, you wasn't there when it was there. It was up on the hill. But it would run a generator. The water pressure would run a generator. And we had an old big set of DC batteries in the old boiler room, and it kept them charged. And that was all we could have was some DC current, that's all we had. You couldn't use it except for lights. It wasn't any good for a stove or a hot plate or anything like that.

**MA:** So that means you didn't have a washing machine or an iron?

**JB:** No, not then. That was for about five years that way. Then they finally did put in an Onan generator that we could use in the winter time for three or four years, and then Montana Power came in.

**MA:** So that would have been about 1958 when Montana Power came in?

**JB:** Right. Something like that. I have it somewhere in a diary, but I don't know just what the date is.

**MA:** You have a diary, huh?

**JB:** I kept tabs on the weather and so forth and what I did every day.

**MA:** Have you ever told the people at Mammoth, the historian about that?

**JB:** No.

**MA:** That would be quite a valuable thing. If you don't know what to do with that...I'm sure they would treasure it.

**JB:** I suppose they would.

**MA:** Maybe it's a personal thing that you would just as soon not have available to public.

**JB:** Well, I suppose. There's nothing in there except what I did every day. And the weather. That's the main reason I kept it was to mark down how much it snowed every day, and I took the weather records.

**TW:** That could get a guy in trouble, keeping a diary.

**JB:** Yeah, you bet. Especially if you were a poacher! [Laughter] Jerry would really give me a bad time. Jerry Mernin. He was always accusing me of poaching anyhow.

**MA:** I had heard that some of those people who lived out there by themselves...that was really the most practical thing to do.

**JB:** They probably did, way back before I started winterkeeping, but they never did while I was there. I've heard that they did, back then, and you couldn't hardly blame them then because it was tough to get meat and everything like that. The company furnished our food for several years, and they'd wait until about November and send our meat in, and we would put in the old meat lockers at the hotel, and it was cold enough it would stay froze the rest of the winter.

**MA:** The meat lockers were just insulated?

**JB:** Yeah, right, they were big walk-in boxes they called them. All you'd have to do was make sure the martens didn't get in because they would ruin it.

**MA:** Did that happen?

**JB:** I caught one in there once, and boy, he wanted to fight me. I had to get a broom and run him out of there.

**MA:** You had a whole carcass hanging there?

**JB:** Yeah, they'd send out a half a beef or whatever you ordered. They furnished our food for several years, so they would send out beef and pork and turkeys and chicken or anything you ordered. They'd send them out frozen.

**MA:** So you would have to cut meat when it was still frozen?

**JB:** Yeah, that was quite a job in the winter time. You had to have a good meat saw.

**MA:** I wanted to go back a little on this power. When they put in the generator, was that on all the time?

**JB:** No, you just run it in the evenings for a while until you went to bed and then you'd go and shut it off. Otherwise, you wouldn't have enough gasoline to run it.

**MA:** So at that time did your wife have a washing machine?

**JB:** We got a washing machine then. Even got a TV. It wasn't very good, but...In '56, I think it was, when we got the Onan plant. We bought a TV, but it was lousy, really.

**MA:** What was the plant?

**JB:** Onan, they called it. It was a big generating plant.

**MA:** How do you spell that?

**JB:** O-n-a-n.

**MA:** Is that the company?

**JB:** Yeah, that's the company that made them. [Inaudible] They still have some around the park at different places. They made different sizes, this was a good sized one. The reason they got it was they had what you call a mess hall in the spring and fall to feed your help in. It would make enough power for that, too. When they would move out, we would just use it for the winter.

**MA:** So they would use that for cooking?

**JB:** Not for cooking but for their lights and their refrigeration.

**TW:** So did you cook on propane?

**JB:** No, we cooked on wood for several years. I don't know what year propane came in. About the same time we got the Onan, I think, they put propane in. About '56, I think that was. So that was good. Then we had our heat, and we quit using wood altogether. We had propane for cooking, and our refrigeration then was from propane then, too. They bought a propane refrigerator. We were glad to get that. [Inaudible] We had the root cellar to keep our vegetables in and fruit.

**MA:** They're still using that.

**JB:** That's good. That's a good ole root cellar. Do the government employees use it?

**MA:** Just Todd King and Jim. I think that they put up some potatoes and things for some of the government guys.

**JB:** It's big enough, it would take care of everybody out there.

**TW:** Isn't there another one out behind the Ham Store?

**JB:** Yeah, there's one over there. I don't know what Ham uses that for. They used to use it for storage of some kind, but I've never been in it.

**MA:** I heard somewhere that that's where all their liquor is.

**JB:** I think they store some of their stuff in there for the winter.

**TW:** I notice they have nails driven through it to keep the bears out.

**JB:** Yeah, to keep the bears out. That's the way ours was. The door had nails pulled through it. Boy, they'd try to get in it, back when we had a lot of bears around there. They even had that on some of the houses.

**MA:** Oh, really. Did you have that on your house?

**JB:** No, I don't believe so. But the winterkeeper over at the lodge did.

**MA:** The nails were nailed from the inside out so the points would be sticking out?

**JB:** Yeah, so they wouldn't get in there and try to tear the door out. No, ours didn't have it. But I remember the old lodge winterkeeper's house had it. That was before they built the one that Jim McBride is living in now. It was just a big cabin.

**MA:** Where was that?

**JB:** That was right down the hill from where Jim is living now. There used to be old cabins on that hillside where the parking lot is now. The winterkeeper was in there. They put two cabins together, I think. It was bigger than the regular ones.

**MA:** So you didn't get very good TV reception?

**JB:** No, it was lousy.

**MA:** What did you use for an aerial?

**JB:** I bought a regular Channel Three antennae. I gave it to one of the government guys when I left there.

**MA:** So did you get at least one station?

**JB:** Idaho Falls, that was all.

**TW:** Still not very good reception.

**JB:** No, it's still not very good. Gary [Durfy] finally got pretty good reception. There was an antenna on the other end of the house, and he hooked on to it, and it worked pretty good. Just that little difference made quite a difference in the picture.

**MA:** So that must have been quite a change for your wife?

**JB:** Oh, boy, right.

**MA:** She used to be with the USO?

**JB:** Yeah, right. She worked out of Chicago for a while with the old WSM "Barn Dance," out of Chicago. I met her in Toledo. [Thelma played the guitar and sang. In addition to WLS-AM radio's National Barn Dance program, she spent three years with the USO.]

**MA:** So, she went from leading a real social life to...

**JB:** Yeah, right to a real quiet life. But she was ready for it. She enjoyed it out there in the winter.

**MA:** Did she get out on snowshoes or skis?

**JB:** She snowshoed quite a bit the first few years. But then she got to where she didn't like the cold. She just had all sort of hobbies that she'd make stuff, in the house.

**MA:** What kind of things?

**JB:** Oh, just knickknacks. And she even made things to sell to the stores and so forth.

**MA:** Out of wood? Or ceramics?

**JB:** No, out of...sewing, mostly. And beads. She really enjoyed that. She even sold stuff to the drug store in Gardiner for several years when Callison[?] run the drug store. She was well contented to stay in where it was warm.

**MA:** So did she ever have to help you out on your job?

**JB:** No, she did a few times, first few years she was there, she'd go out. We had a lot more buildings at Lake than there is now, to shovel. It used to be what they called the Bullpen, which was a great big ole building where they stored stuff. And they had rooms in it for the engineering department and so forth. She'd go out and work on flat roofs like that, just to get outdoors. And she enjoyed that.

**TW:** So you did you wire the roofs?

**JB:** Yeah, I did the hotel roofs, the steep ones in there.

**MA:** Maybe you could describe what that means.

**JB:** Just like this was a big roof, you'd tack a wire on this end, right up on the peak, and take it across here and tack it on this end and then pull it and leave it hanging, clear down to the ground. You just tack this end light and have this one solid. And when the snow got oh, three or four feet, or whatever you wanted, you thought should be cut off, why then you'd jerk your wire here, and it would pull the staple out, and you would just slide it along the roof, just walk right under with it, and it would cut the whole slab off.

**MA:** So it was all one wire?

**JB:** Yeah, right, and you'd have it long enough so you could stay out of the way where the snow wouldn't catch you. [Laughter] I've got a couple of real good pictures I'll show you sometime. On slides, of snow coming down.

**MA:** So that meant that on steeper roofs you didn't have to get up there...

**JB:** Yeah, you didn't have to. But one winter I had to, we had rain in February, and it got clear through and froze to the roof and froze the snow right solid, so I had to get up there and dig it all off. But it didn't happen very often.

**MA:** That must have been pretty dangerous?

**JB:** Yes, it was hard work, anyhow. You had your hooks that you'd hook over the top of the roof and the safety belt, and ropes so you could let yourself down to the edge.

**MA:** Like the guys who work on the power lines?

**JB:** Yeah, kind of like that. You would use creepers and the safety belt and rope.

**MA:** Creepers were on your feet?

**JB:** Yeah, on your shoes. They use them out there now on the shingle roofs.

**MA:** I was just trying to think of how to describe them.

**JB:** Something like what you walk on ice with, something that you won't slip. It kind of raised heck with the roof down there. It will cut through shingles even in time, if you use them long enough. But they work good.

**MA:** So you used that technique on the hotel?

**JB:** Yeah, that's about the only place I used it. And the flat roofs, on the lake side, it would blow off pretty good, but on the back side of the hotel, it would drift in. You'd have drifts back there to take off. Yeah, if you take a flat roof anywhere along the lake shore, it will blow it off, but if it comes up over on another roof down on the flat, it will just pile it in on it, make it deeper.

**MA:** Did you have roofs that had different levels, where you had to shovel it off one level and then...?

**JB:** Yeah, not too bad there at Lake. Boy, that old Canyon Hotel used to be the bad one for that.

**MA:** Did you have any close calls when you were working on roofs?

**JB:** Oh, I've had my feet go out from under me a few times. The bad part was, you get up there and get moving around, and sometimes that whole thing would slide off, and it would knock your feet right out from under you. If you didn't have a belt on, you'd go with it. But if you were fastened, it would hold you up there. Scare you, but it wouldn't hurt you. Just like an avalanche is what it was. I had that happen a couple of times, but nothing serious.

**MA:** I guess that's lucky. What would have happened if you would have broken a bone?

**JB:** Oh, you'd be in bad shape. Back then, it would have taken them days to get you out of there. That was even before they had any helicopters in this part of the country. Now, they could run out there and pick you up in a few hours and haul you to the hospital.

**MA:** You don't remember any stories of their having to evacuate anybody?

**JB:** No, not there. I guess some guy broke a leg at West Thumb once. They had to pull him in, through Lake, through Canyon, and all the way in on a sled, on a toboggan. I guess they worked days to do that, and the poor guy would have suffered.

**MA:** That was pulling him on skis?

**JB:** No just on a sled. He was sitting on a sled.

**MA:** But the people who were pulling?

**JB:** They were on skis.

**MA:** That would be tough.

**JB:** Yeah, that would be tough. Ole Dolph Eggar was the winterkeeper at the Canyon Hotel, he's the one who told me. He's one of them who had to help pull him from Canyon to Tower Falls.

**MA:** That was before your time?

**JB:** Yeah, that was years before I was here.

**MA:** So, did you give your wife an idea where you were in case you didn't get back?

**JB:** I always did. When I was out on the lake on the snowplane, and the snowplane broke down, it would take a day to walk in, if you were on the other end of the lake.

**MA:** What about the guy who worked by himself? Did he try to let you know where he was working?

**JB:** Well, they were supposed to, but most of them didn't. I'd try to call them once in a while just to make sure they were okay or buzz over by there.

**MA:** Once in a while, meaning?

**JB:** Once a week or something like that. [Laughter] We were supposed to call each other, but a lot of times we didn't. Either too busy or too lazy, I don't know which.

**TW:** Did you ever hear the story of skiing out of the park to go to the dog races?

**JB:** Oh, is that right? No, I never heard that. There used to be some...

**TW:** Who was the Buffalo keeper?

**JB:** At the Buffalo Ranch?

**MA:** Trischman?

**JB:** He was a great skier. He skied all over the place. I've heard a lot of tales about him skiing out to check on his buildings and so forth. Harry Trischman.

**TW:** We've heard that story a couple of times, didn't know if it was sled dog racing, or...

**JB:** I don't either. I know there used to be a guy who used to work in the park that lived in Ashton or one of those towns out in that part of the county. He had a snowplane that he'd come in the park with once in a great while.

**MA:** What was your worst winter, in terms of the amount of work that you had to do?

**JB:** '56. 1956 was the heaviest winter. We had two or three real bad winters in the twenty-five winters I was there, but it was one of the worst.

**MA:** How much snow did you get?

**JB:** Right around two hundred inches of snowfall, and it was sixty-six inches on the level there at Lake. That was the deepest that I measured. That's getting pretty high anyway, just about the top of my head.

**MA:** So how was it around your house? Did you have to dig...

[Side break, gap in recording]

**JB:** Yeah, dig the windows out and the doorways all the time, so we could] have some light in there.

**MA:** So, on a winter like that, could you keep up with the roofs?

**JB:** Well, you could, but it kept you busy. That was one winter when you sure didn't sit around much.

**MA:** Was you son out there at that time?

**JB:** He was, and he was a lot of help. I had to take care of the buildings at the ole West Thumb. They had a lot of cabins there and so forth, and I'd have to go up and clean Ham Store. I took care of that, too. That's what I used the snowplane for, was to go across the lake. And the buildings at Fishing Bridge, we took care of those, too.

**MA:** So how long did it take you to get over to West Thumb?

**JB:** Not very long, if that lake was fairly smooth. We could go sixty miles an hour. But it was usually rough out there with waves and the snow, and you couldn't go that fast. But you could make it in an hour easy.

**MA:** How often did you go out there?

**JB:** Not too often to clean them. About twice during the winter. Go about in January. You'd wait until the lake got good. Once in a while you'd have to go on the road because the lake wouldn't freeze over and be safe until February.

**MA:** You mean because the lake never got solid?

**JB:** Never got solid, yes. Kind of a warmer winter. Sometimes it will freeze over last of December or so and then come a big wind, and it's not solid, and it will break it up, and it will go for a month before it will freeze again. That only happened a few times, but it did happen.

**MA:** Did you run into pressure ridges out on the lake? [ Pressure ridges are compression ruptures in ice caused by expansion.]

**JB:** Yeah, they'd be five or six feet high. You had to just hit them just a certain place to get over them.

**MA:** With the snow plane? That must have been interesting!

**JB:** They weren't too bad. After it had snowed for a while and blowed, well it would kind of drift over and smooth it out a little bit...Sure crazy how that thing will freeze. Did you folks, you probably heard it moan and groan when it starts to freeze.

[Inaudible]

**MA:** Did you hear it every year?

**JB:** No, it's just the way the snow comes. If you don't get much snow for quite a while then it will freeze and crack and freeze and crack. That's when it does all the moaning. You can just hear them go clear across the lake.

**MA:** You think that it's when there isn't much snow that you can hear it more?

**JB:** Yes, not much snow and real cold. One winter the lake hadn't froze solid yet and some guy coming from Denver on an airplane had to set it down on the lake, and boy, that was kind of scary. It clouded in is the reason he did that. He was headed for Dillon, Montana, and it got so cloudy, he couldn't see the mountains, and he got scared, and he set it down on the lake. He set it down by Steamboat Point, and it had just froze the night before, and thank God that was the coldest night we ever had out there. He taxied clear across to Lake Lodge on the way, and he had to stay there three nights with us before he got out. The rangers got pretty worried. They were going to make him leave it in there, but he finally got her flying and got it out of there.

[Inaudible] They were going to make him pull it up on shore and leave it all winter, and that was his livelihood. He was really scared. Dale Nuss and them were out a couple of times. They could still drive out there on a four wheeled drive. They got him really shook up. But it finally cleared one morning were he could see a little blue sky. I think he stayed three nights with us in our cabin. I took him out in that ole snowplane and packed out a little trail for him to make sure he didn't get in some slush. He revved her up and got her off the snow. It was a pretty good sized plane.

**MA:** So did you have other people who would knock on your door in trouble?

Jerry Bateson Sr., March 21, 1987 (YELL 188046-OH1)

**JB:** No, not very often.

**MA:** When did they first start bringing snowmobiles in there?

**JB:** Well, it was about '65, I think. Mid '60s. And after that, why then, once in a while you'd have someone break down. But that was about the time Jerry started there in '70. That's when the snowmobiling really got started.

**MA:** That's Jerry Mernin?

**JB:** Jerry Mernin [ranger], yeah. And he would take care if they had problems. Give them a little gas or something like that. But they were usually in big parties back then, and they would be enough of them that they could pull the broken machines back in. Him and I--we would help each other out, but that's about it.

**MA:** So, on a normal winter, would you have a certain routine that you'd follow every week in terms of how much time you had to spend shoveling?

**JB:** No, we'd more or less leave that up to the weather. If it was too cold and windy, you wouldn't go out. But when it was nice, you would work longer hours.

**MA:** It seems that would take a lot of self-discipline to keep enough ahead of it that you wouldn't be caught up short when a big storm came.

**JB:** Yeah, that's what you had to do. That was the problem out there. One winter, when Frank Mitchell and his wife was there, we got an awful lot of snow early on and real heavy. It just came down in bucketsful, and that ole boiler room at the lodge caved in. That was the only building we lost at the Lake. He was supposed to have took care of it, but it just snowed too much too quick, and he was working on the lodge. It shouldn't have caved in. In the fall of the year, the maintenance crew, before they left, would always go through and put poles up to strengthen them up. And I think they missed that year. We figured they did.

**MA:** So it wasn't all his fault?

**JB:** No, not all his fault. They didn't fire him for it. But it sure made a mess. It just broke all the pipes. The roof came right down on the boilers and just broke all the pipes.

**MA:** What year would that have been?

**JB:** Oh, boy, let's see. My wife was still there, so it had to be about '65, I guess. In the early '60s anyhow. It sure made a mess. They plowed in early that spring because they had to get the lodge open. The bull crew had to come out and get all the snow out and the roof off and tear all the pipes out so the plumbers could get in and re-plumb it all. It was a big job.

**MA:** So you say the big year you had two hundred inches of snowfall. What was the average year?

**JB:** About one hundred fifty, I'd say, was an average year for the snowfall.

**MA:** So how much would you have on the ground at one time?

**JB:** In an average year?

**MA:** Uh, huh.

**JB:** About four foot. A little over. Between four and five foot was the average depth out there in the wintertime.

**TW:** They have more down south.

**JB:** Right, you bet. Down in the Lewis River country, it really gets deep. They'll get three times as much as we would at Lake. And Canyon even gets more than Lake does. It seems funny, but it's just the way those storms travel through there. West Thumb and Grant Village get a little more than Lake does, too.

**MA:** Did you get to the point where you could pretty much tell when a big storm was coming in?

**JB:** No, not too much. We had a couple of winters about what you've had, not quite this light, even while we was in there. You just didn't know. You could go by the weather reports, but they miss it just as much as a person living out there.

**MA:** When you first went out there, the first few years, 1950 on, how long was your season that you'd be in there without coming out at all?

**JB:** Well, the latest we ever got plowed out in the spring was May 2nd.

**MA:** That's pretty late.

**JB:** That's late, compared with what they do nowadays. They're in there in March now.

**MA:** When was that?

**JB:** That was about '53, I believe. I looked it up the other day. I forget. But it was in the early 50s.

**MA:** You say they would bring the meat in, the end of November. So that was usually when the season started?

**JB:** Yeah, they'd tell you to have everything in by the first of November. You couldn't drive or wasn't supposed to drive out, unless the weather was nice, and there wasn't much snow. Some

falls there wasn't and you could drive out in November. Other ones, why the first of November you were snowed in.

**MA:** Did they ever run short themselves where they didn't have the meat in?

**JB:** Yeah, they had a hard time. A few times, they'd have to use a big four-wheeled drive to get it out there to us.

**MA:** But they always got it in?

**JB:** They always got it to us, you bet. We couldn't have stayed out hardly all winter without it back then.

**MA:** That must have been a big chore to figure out what food to have for the winter?

**JB:** Yeah, it was, right.

**MA:** Was it all canned goods that you had?

**JB:** Just about, uh huh. That's when I worked at the commissary here at Gardiner, and you'd order everything through it, your canned goods and your meat. We'd take the canned goods out in September before the roads got bad, and just have to wait on the meat until it got cold enough that they thought it would keep all winter.

**MA:** Did you get a little tired of canned food?

**JB:** Yeah, you bet.

**MA:** When you first got out in the spring, what would you have a hankering for?

**JB:** Fresh eggs, usually, and fresh milk and things like that and fresh vegetables. We'd put a lot of fresh vegetables, everything we could, in the root cellar, like carrots and stuff, that would keep good.

**MA:** All winter long?

**JB:** All winter long. We'd cover them with dirt.

**MA:** Could you keep, like apples?

**JB:** Apples would keep perfect in there, all winter long. It'd get almost to freezing in there. The potatoes would get real sweet before spring because they was so close to frost. Everything kept good. And we'd even keep our canned goods in there, a lot of it, because we didn't have room in the house; we just had a small pantry to keep canned goods.

**TW:** Did you ever have trouble with martens?

**JB:** No, they never got into that. It was built up pretty good.

**MA:** Did you burn your garbage?

**JB:** Yes, all the paper stuff we would. In later years, they told us just to sack it up and put it over in the garbage room at the hotel, so we did, and they'd haul it out. The first years, we'd burn it, and we always fed the birds there, and the martens and stuff would come around and get scraps, too.

**MA:** So these telephones, would they work for anyplace beyond the park? Or were they just for the park?

**JB:** Just for the park.

**MA:** So basically you went all winter without any communication with any relatives or friends outside of the park?

**JB:** Right, we did those first few winters. I could call Gardiner, that was as far as you could call, but you could call anywhere in the park. That was all maintained by the Yellowstone Park Company, the phone system. And it was an old party system, if you rang to talk to somebody, why all the rest of them could listen in.

**MA:** You mean everybody else in the park? Or just everybody at Lake?

**JB:** Everybody in the park. [Laughter] It was quite a set up.

**MA:** Did you do anything special for Christmas and Thanksgiving?

**JB:** No, just have the other winterkeeper over was all.

**MA:** That was kind of the tradition?

**JB:** Yeah, right, we'd always have the lodge winterkeeper. And the people from Canyon, we had them down several times in the winter. They had a snowplane a few years there, too. They could get down, or we could get down to them. We could once in a while visit that way. Sometimes you could, but back then before they groomed the road, you never knew about those things. If it snowed a whole lot even while you were going, you might not get back home, so you didn't take too many chances. The snowplane worked good when the snow was right, but you'd have to let it set up for several days after a storm before you could move, so that's why we didn't use it too much.

**MA:** So then both you and your wife could ride in it?

**JB:** Yeah, we both could ride in it. We even went three of us in it to Canyon.

**MA:** When your son was there?

**JB:** Yeah, when he was in there, and we'd take the other winterkeeper, and all three of us. One of us had to sit [in the doorway.]

[Side break]

**MA:** So you were say for the the snow to be just right it had to be set up...

**JB:** Yeah, it had to set up for a while, get a few warm days where it would settle.

[Off microphone conversation]

**MA:** So were they hard to steer?

**JB:** No, it steered real good. It had one ski in front and two behind.

**TW:** Did they use any kind of keel behind the propeller blast?

**JB:** No. Like you do on airboats? No, that front ski would steer you around real good. Just a single ski in front, and then the two that carried the motor and the cab.

**MA:** I heard those were kind of dangerous.

**JB:** Yeah, they were. I got hit by mine once. You had to hand crank the one we had. The newer one they got me later had a starter on it. The first one though, these hot spots was always a problem with it. If you went on the road up to West Thumb, you had those on the other end. One time me and the lodge winterkeeper, we were going up and we stopped to put the wheels down; you couldn't go across those (the hot spots) on the skis. When I cranked it up after we put the wheels down, the accelerator or something stuck on it, and it just wanted to take off, and I had to run for it and hold on to it. They had a prop guard on it, but when I swung it around, the tip of the blade hit me right in the back, and it split my finger. We went on out, and I worked all day, but boy I was bleeding a lot. When we got back, I had to go on in to...I think the roads must have been open on the other end. I know I went into the doctor, and he put some stitches in my finger.

**MA:** What about your back?

**JB:** It healed up. I got a good scar back there, but I didn't need stitches.

**MA:** I imagine it helped to have a lot of clothes on?

**JB:** That's all that saved me. It would have really took a chunk out of me, but I was dressed warm. That really made you afraid of that thing. It would do that once in a while, that darned gas would stick on that thing. If you were alone, it would just take off.

**MA:** There you'd be.

**JB:** There you'd be if you were away from home. It did that to me out in front of the hotel one time, but I managed to catch it that time. I got hold of that guard, and then you'd have to run up along on the ski and get inside to get to the key to shut it off. [Laughter] That was a problem. Scare the hell out of you. Never liked that part about it.

**TW:** They should have designed it with a long cord on the key...

**JB:** Yeah, so you could jerk it out.

**MA:** Yeah, like they have on...

**JB:** Like snowmobiles. They should have had something like that. Because this was the type you had to get out and turn the prop to start, and you were right behind the thing. If it took off, you were standing there looking at it.

**TW:** Sounds as if it were a fairly light outfit?

**JB:** Yeah, it was. That was the first one. The winterkeeper just before me bought it himself-- Sherm Jones. He was winterkeeper there, him and his wife, two or three winters. The reason I got it was that was when the war in North Korea broke out, and he had to go to that. He was in the Reserves. So that was how we got the job at Lake. He had bought that because one winter, she [his wife] was skiing down the hill back of the hotel and just about broke her leg. They had to get a snowplane in from West Yellowstone or Jackson or somewhere to get her out, and it was a hell of a job. So after that he decided he wanted a snowplane, so he just bought that. When he left, he sold it to the company, and that's how I got it.

**MA:** So she was skiing...this was his wife?

**JB:** Yeah, his wife skiing that...you know that one hill behind the lodge and the hotel, the small hill? [Inaudible] That's where we done our skiing, what little bit we did.

**MA:** Yeah, that's a good hill. [Inaudible] That one right behind the lodge is a steep one. You know what one I'm talking about?

**JB:** Yeah, that one with the trees. I was always afraid to do that. I've seen guys ski through there, but I was never good enough to steer that good. But that other one was good. You could come clear to the hotel if things was right.

**MA:** Oh really? we haven't had it that good.

**JB:** That was probably in the spring when it was crusty and so forth.

**MA:** That would be quite a ride.

**JB:** And that was before that road was back where it is now. It used to come right in by the house.

**MA:** Did you ski before you took that job out there?

**JB:** Never had. I had snowshoed some, I used to live up in Canada for a while, but it was the first I was ever on skis. I still like to cross country ski, but I never had any training for downhill skiing--except that little hill at Lake.

**MA:** That is a pretty good downhill run.

**JB:** The only problem is you have to walk back up every time.

**MA:** You say you were there for eight years after your wife died?

**JB:** Yeah, she died in '68, and I stayed until '75.

**MA:** That must have been hard, to stay there without her.

**JB:** Yeah, it sure was the first year. I kind of got used to it.

**MA:** But you didn't have any desire to go get a real job in the city?

**JB:** No, I didn't. I kind of wanted to stay on at Lake. I would still be there if I wouldn't have gotten so darn old. I really liked it. It's just something that gets in your blood. And I'm kind of an old hermit anyhow that likes to be around where it's quiet. [Inaudible] You bet, that's a great place in the winter, I think. Do you folks live in one of the apartments, or in a trailer?

**TW:** In one of the apartments in the government area.

**JB:** I thought maybe you were in Bob Roller's trailer that he used to live in. [Inaudible] I would prefer the apartments; you get a little more room.

**TW:** We're living where Larry Powers used to live.

**MA:** He showed us the bear tooth marks on the backdoor. Did you ever have a bear try to get into your place?

**JB:** I sure did. I had them break the window there a couple times. Boy, that would scare you. A grizzly would stand up, and I don't know whether he tried to break it or just the weight of his paws. Boy you would hear that glass break in the middle of the night, and you sure would come out of bed.

**MA:** So then what did you do?

**JB:** I'd grab a gun and run out, but he never tried to get in so I just would yell and he would leave. Twice I had them break the glass there in that house, you know, where Durfeys live.

**MA:** Was your wife alive then?

**JB:** She was one time, and I remember one time was after she was gone. She was scared to death of them, too.

**MA:** Sounds like a smart woman.

**JB:** You bet, anyone's smart if they're scared of those things, because they will...

**TW:** This fall we had one hanging around, got into the grease trap behind the hotel.

**JB:** Oh, yeah, I heard about Todd having quite a chase out there. Did you see that?

**TW:** I think twice she nearly overtook him.

**JB:** Running around the track. [Laughter] I would have liked to see Todd. [Inaudible, laughter] God, he's lucky he didn't get hurt.

**TW:** She was kind of a cranky old bear, and then she came back later, and that's when we were having trouble. We couldn't get out to ski, and then the contractors had trouble.

**JB:** Are the contractors still there?

**TW:** There are a few of them.

**MA:** So did you have any close calls with bears other than that?

**JB:** No, not really. Sometimes when we first started to stay there, why there'd be five or six of them around there at a time.

**MA:** Five or six grizzlies?

**JB:** No, mostly black bears. Once in a while one of them would start for you and act like he was going to chase you, but he'd be usually just bluffing. I'd get in the house quick enough not to take any chances.

**MA:** You mean five or six right in the area of your house?

**JB:** Yeah, right by the house. People would feed them all the time then, around the cabins and so forth.

**MA:** So this was at the end of the season when the tourists had just left.

**JB:** Yeah, either then or in the fall before they left. Same way at Fishing Bridge. They'd throw fish around and bears would get in garbage cans for fish, and you just saw bears all the time. It wasn't too good of deal. It's a wonder more people didn't get hurt by them, but they didn't. Once in a while someone would get bit though.

**MA:** What about the buffalo?

**JB:** They didn't even stay around at all. Not at all. Last winter or two they started staying there, two or three of them. But they never used to stay there. From then on, they just got more there at Lake all the time. They were never there in the summertime and very seldom in the winter.

**MA:** Did you run into them when you started snowmobiling out?

**JB:** Yeah, you would in Hayden Valley sometimes on the road. And that was a problem with the snowplane because you couldn't turn one of them around like you can a little snowmachine. You just had to stop and let the buffalo go where he wanted to go and then go on.

**MA:** I imagine they were a little more skittish, since they weren't used to...

**JB:** Yeah, they were. They would get out of the road a lot quicker. And the plane looked bigger and noisier than a little snowmachine, and that would kind of spook them.

**TW:** What size engine did you have on that?

**JB:** Oh, that one you saw there only had a sixty-five horse. The other one they bought me was bigger, it had an eighty-five horse. [Pause] They were a lot of fun. You could zip over across the lake in just a short while when it was fairly smooth. I've been over to the South Arm, Southeast Arm. You had to watch out for the hot spots because they're liable to be anywhere out on the lake. Not too much. Just around West Thumb and out on the east shore, but you could see them quite a ways away.

**MA:** So the way of life must have changed quite a bit when the park roads started being groomed.

**JB:** Yeah, it did. You didn't have people going through like you do now. Before then, you just didn't hear anything or see anything for maybe all winter. Oh, I don't know what year, '55 or '56, the government started getting quite a few of what they call Weasels, you know those old Army Surplus Weasels that run on tracks. And they would come out once in a great while on them. That was the first people we started seeing, once or twice a winter.

**MA:** That would be government employees?

**JB:** Yeah, government employees, mostly rangers, like Dale Nuss. He liked to fool with something like that. And Joe Way.

**TW:** Roller was telling us that Joe Soucek [winterkeeper] was out there and had only sandwiches, something like a couple hundred for the winter?

**JB:** Yeah, that poor guy, I guess that's all he lived on one winter. He just made up sandwiches and put them in the freezer.

**MA:** He really did that?

**JB:** Yeah, I think so. That'd be a rough way to go through the winter, wouldn't it? Cold sandwiches. [Laughter]

**MA:** People seem to have a lot of stories about him. I heard something about that he would get his hair shaved off?

**JB:** Yeah, it'd cut her right down close. The other winterkeeper that first started winterkeeping there would do that, too. Cut his own. He'd take the clippers and cut it right down to his head.

**MA:** Who was that?

**JB:** Hank Jurceyk, that first winterkeeper when we started.

**MA:** So he'd just do that in the fall?

**JB:** Yeah, he'd just do that in the fall so he wouldn't have to fool with cutting his hair in the winter time.

**MA:** I guess if he wasn't going to see anybody but you guys...

**JB:** Yeah, right, it wouldn't hurt a thing, and he was comfortable with it. [Pause] Thelma used to trim up mine a little bit, and I had to do it myself after she was gone, and that was kind of a problem.

**MA:** Did she cut her own hair, too?

**JB:** Yeah, she'd trim it.

**MA:** I can imagine that would be kind of tough cutting your own hair.

**JB:** Yeah, it is. You can't do a good job, but you get by. Like you said, not many people saw you. You kept your cap on, like Joe does.

**MA:** So he's always been kind of quiet, huh?

**JB:** Yeah, ever since I've known him, and that was the first I met him when he started winterkeeping.

**MA:** What was the other story we heard about him? Something about him putting his trash in the cans outside of his house there?

**TW:** Yeah, in the government area, when he was working for the government.  
[Inaudible]

**JB:** Yeah, he'd do that in the wintertime there, too. He'd just use the cans setting around, he'd put stuff in them.

**MA:** So then when the Mernins came, did you socialize more often then?

**JB:** Yeah, right. Jerry and Cindy. Couple winters he was there before he married Cindy. Him and I would trade back and forth, "batch-ing" cooking a little bit, and when some of the skiers would come out and stay with him, why I would go over there for dinner at night. We did quite a bit of that. And then when Cindy got there, she was a real good cook, so I got a lot of good meals with them.

**TW:** That was quite an adjustment for her.

**JB:** Yeah, she was just about like my wife, she was a city gal, and she just plunged right out there in that wilderness.

**TW:** What was that story, she had her Mixmaster?

**MA:** She had her Mixmaster on the sled. So what did your wife's friends think; they must have been amazed at her lifestyle.

**JB:** Yeah, right, they were surprised that she could do it. They all came out and saw us every summer from Toledo.

**MA:** Oh, did they?

**JB:** Yeah, a lot of them. That's where her sister lived and two or three of her kids from her first marriage. So they have all been out several times to Yellowstone.

**MA:** It said in there that she would help with the entertainment in the summer?

**JB:** Right.

**MA:** What kind of entertainment?

**JB:** She was a country and western singer.

**MA:** So then this was for the guests?

**JB:** Not so much the guests. It was for these parties the kids would put on, like the beauty queens and so forth that they used to have. I don't know if they do that anymore. They would pick a queen for each section of the park, and then they'd have a runoff somewhere. They would have entertainment for that, and she would sing for that. That was what it was mostly for.

**MA:** So then did they have like sing-alongs on a regular basis during the summer for entertainment for the employees or the guests?

**JB:** They did at the lodge. She used to go over there about once a week. They used to have tryouts on the stage there in the rec room in the lodge. They used to have entertainment for the help and for the guests both. I'd forgot about that.

**MA:** We'd heard about that kind of thing at Canyon, and I just didn't know whether they did it at Lake.

**JB:** They did back then. I don't know whether they do now or not.

**MA:** So was it a different kind of employees at the Lake Hotel than at the Lake Lodge?

**JB:** No, they were about the same.

**MA:** Were they?

**JB:** Just a bunch of college kids and so forth, just out for a good time.

**MA:** What did you feel when spring came, after you'd had that whole park to yourself for so long?

**JB:** You was glad in a way to see the plows come in a way because you wanted to get fresh groceries and stuff. But you were always glad to see them go in the fall, too. [Laughter] You bet, all those people. That was the happiest time, I think, was in the fall of the year when they closed everything out, that was for us. Get quiet again.

**TW:** I've noticed that. In the spring you cheer up, you're glad to see them come, but...

**JB:** Right, but you're sure glad to see that fall. I know we were. I used to hunt quite a bit in the fall and fish quite a bit, so that would give me time to do that before winter set in.

[Pause]

**TW:** Did you hunt up in Montana?

**JB:** Well, I did for a while, but then I claimed Wyoming for a residence, and I'd hunt out the South and out the East Gate. I had better luck down in that country than I did around here [Gardiner]. Back then there wasn't as many hunters, and I got several elk out the South Gate and a couple out the East Gate. That was quite a help. That was after we had to start buying all our own meat. The first years, the company would buy everything. The wages wasn't much, but they

furnished everything else, so that worked out pretty good. There was five or six years that way. But after that they thought it'd be better if we just bought our own food, and they'd just give us an allowance for their food. That was good, too, that way you could pick out just what you wanted. Before, you had to more or less take what they had in the way of canned goods and so forth, but they'd give you anything they had so it wasn't bad. And the meat, well, you could just order anything.

**MA:** What do you mean you had to take what they had?

**JB:** You got it out of a commissary over here at Gardiner where they supplied the hotels and lodges out of.

**MA:** So they might have a lot of green beans one year and not much corn?

**JB:** Right, stuff like that. And maybe all number ten tin cans, all large cans. So you'd eat one thing for an awful long time. For several years, that was the way most of it came out, in those big cans.

**MA:** I'm sure you wouldn't want to waste a bit of that.

**JB:** No, you wouldn't.

**MA:** I was curious about...we kind of feel that people have certain expectations of us since we live in the park...purity standards, like a little bit shocked that we have a VCR for our television or that we even have a television. I just wondered if you ever felt that kind of expectations.

**JB:** No, we never did, but I know a lot of people think that way. Boy, they think you've got to really rough it if you're going to be out in the woods like that, but we'd like to have things a little better if we could. That's why we got a TV just as quick as we could because we lived there with just a battery radio for several years, so that was enough of that.

**MA:** So with the radio could you get stations from all over?

**JB:** Yeah, you could back then. We had that old Zenith that sits over there in the case, and it worked real good. We had a big battery that would run it.

**MA:** A six volt or...

**JB:** No, a lot larger than that. They made a special pack for those back then. You can't buy them now, but you could then. One of those would last for months. We had real good reception, and that's all we had for news and everything else.

**MA:** So did you have certain programs that were kind of a ritual?

**JB:** Yeah, back then they had some good radio programs. George Burns and Jack Benny and all those old timers that put on a pretty good show.

Jerry Bateson Sr., March 21, 1987 (YELL 188046-OH1)

**MA:** That's amazing to me that your son could be content until he was in the ninth grade.

**JB:** He was real satisfied. He enjoyed the snow and the work and the school that way.

**MA:** Did he ski a lot?

**JB:** He get out and skied a lot. He liked to snowplane quite a bit. He was real satisfied.

[Pause]

**MA:** Well, I'm running out of things to ask you. [Did you have anything else you wanted to add?]

[End of interview]



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**MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL  
HISTORIES**

**HELEN MARIE (FLEMING) WOLFE  
NPS COOK & MAINTENANCE WORKER**

INTERVIEWED BY  
MARJANE AMBLER  
AUTHOR

APRIL 5, 1987  
IN LAKE VILLAGE, WYOMING

Yellowstone National Park Archives  
P O Box 168  
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190-0168

Catalog Number: YELL 188046-OH2

**NARRATOR:**

Helen Wolfe was born Helen Marie Fleming on January 12, 1926 in Spokane, Washington. Her parents were Clarence Fleming and Dorothy Dow. Helen moved to rural Montana at a young age, and little else is known about her early life. In 1942 she married her first husband, John Pierce, with whom she had three children: D.J. Pierce, born April 2, 1943, Dorothy Pierce Juhnke, born January 16, 1946, and Robert Pierce, born December 30, 1949.

In 1961, Helen followed her second husband, Charles Taylor, to Yellowstone National Park. After working for Park concessioners for a few years, Helen joined the Park Service in 1965 as a cook. By 1968 Helen was working with a maintenance crew in the summer season, the second woman to be hired by the Park's Maintenance Division. When Charles died of a heart attack in 1975, Helen remained at Yellowstone where she married her third husband, Ed Wolfe, the following year.

Although Helen was not retired at the time of this interview, 1987 appears to have been the last year that she worked for Yellowstone. She lived in Livingston, Montana as of 2012.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Born May 19, 1948, in Colorado, Marjane Ambler began a career in journalism in 1968. Ambler worked in various positions including as editor of the "High Country News," an environmental publication, from 1974 to 1980.

In 1984, Ambler's husband Terry Wehrman accepted a position as a snow groomer in Lake Village, Yellowstone National Park. The couple spent the next nine years living year-round in the interior of Yellowstone. Ambler worked as a volunteer during the early years and as an interpretive ranger during the summers of 1990-1993.

During her time at Lake Village, Ambler began to collect the recollections of the other park employees and family members within her small social circle, as well former park employees who experienced living and working in the park interior in past decades or whose careers were otherwise notable. These activities culminated in Ambler's 2013 book "Yellowstone Has Teeth," which narrated the recollections of Ambler's interviewees interwoven with her own experiences.

Ambler and Wehrman left Lake Village in 1993, after which Ambler served as editor of the "Tribal College Journal" from 1995 to 2006. Ambler is also the author of "Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development" published by University Press of Kansas in 1990. Ambler and Wehrman split time between homes in Atlantic City, Wyoming, and Lake Havasu, Arizona.

**SUMMARY:**

This interview covers Wolfe's career with the National Park Service from the 1960s until the date of the interview. A major focus is Wolfe's experience as the second woman ever hired by Yellowstone's Maintenance Division. Wolfe discusses the difficulties she and her colleague Verna Nelson faced, including harassment by coworkers and park visitors. Wolfe also discusses her affection for working in the Norris Geyser Basin, including her experience as the first person to witness Steamboat Geyser's 1978 eruption after nine years of dormancy. Other topics include relations with visitors, cooking for Presidents Ford and Carter, and bear encounters.

**Restrictions:** None

**Format:** One cassette tape, 42 minutes total recording time. Digitized using TEAC player/recorder on June 24, 2019.

**Transcript:** Transcribed by Marjane Ambler, May 1989? Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Barrett Codieck, Yellowstone National Park Archives Intern, July 2019. Transcript 16 pages.

**Technical Note:** There is a gap in audio at the beginning of the second side, possibly due to an error in copying the cassette tape. The original transcript provides the missing text, which is indicated in this document by brackets.

**Helen Marie (Fleming) Wolfe interviewed by Marjane Ambler  
in Lake Village, Wyoming, April 5, 1987**

**Narrator:** Helen Wolfe (HW)

**Interviewer:** Marjane Ambler (MA)

**Also present:** Terry Wehrman (TW)

**MA:** OK, we're at Lake on April 5, 1987, and we're talking with Helen Wolfe. Helen, could you tell us when you started working for the park? At first we'll just go through the years, and then we'll go back and talk more about what it was like.

**HW:** Came out here in 1961. I didn't work the first two or three years, and then I went to work for VP, which is TW now. I worked in housekeeping; I worked as a cashier; I worked in the laundromat; I worked at the travel desk. All that time I had an application in with the government. Then in 1965 I cooked for the government in the mess halls. '66 I cooked in the mess halls at Lake, Canyon, and Beartooth. Then they closed the mess halls so I've gone in with the snow crew in the spring.

**MA:** What year did you start with the snow crew?

**HW:** Probably '68 or '69. Cooked for them every spring. If there was any special occasion, they'd usually call me in to cook. Like Presidents or parties or classes. I cooked for rangers' classes and naturalists classes.

**MA:** And then you...

**HW:** Oh, I was on maintenance during the summer. The snow crew only lasted eight to ten weeks at the very most. Then I'd go on maintenance. I worked thirteen years at Canyon at various jobs, and I was at Grant Village three seasons, and at Norris three seasons.

[Pause, microphone noise]

**MA:** So you were at Norris for three seasons?

**HW:** Grant Village for three seasons, Canyon thirteen.

**MA:** That's a lot of years in maintenance.

**HW:** I cooked two summers for the interagency fire crew at Canyon, and this will be my fifth season at YCC [Youth Conservation Corps]. Seasons used to last a lot longer for seasonals because they didn't have all these people out in the park in the wintertime. We came in about the first of April, and we would stay until the snow got too deep in October. Live in an apartment

Helen Wolfe, April 5, 1987 (YELL 188046-OH2)

until the trailer court was open and then in the trailer court and then in fall, back to the apartment.

**MA:** So you'd be moving three times a year?

**HW:** About that. You get used to it.

**MA:** How did you decide that you first wanted to go to work for maintenance?

**HW:** I like the park, I suppose. And I could see more of it. Not many jobs you could get paid for doing what you want to do and where you want to be.

**MA:** That's the truth. You didn't like office work?

**HW:** No way. We won't even go into that. I was on maintenance, and a lady in the office asked me why I didn't take a correspondence course and get typing and shorthand during the winter. So I did! Next thing I got on as secretary, but I didn't like sitting in a room all day.

**MA:** When you working for maintenance, what types of jobs did you do?

**HW:** Cleaned trails, cleaned rest rooms, cleaned museums. The years I was at Canyon, I did the visitor center three days a week, two days a week, whichever, we traded off. Things were more relaxed then. They weren't tried and true like they are now. I worked at campground a day or two a week, and then I did the rim station, on the canyon rim. At Grant I had the visitor center and the campground.

**MA:** When you say cleaned trails, is that...

**HW:** Oh, just around the area, around the geysers.

**MA:** So, you cleaned up litter? [Microphone noise]

**HW:** Yeah, timing geysers, and I'd take the temperatures and keep track of the heights and the changes of season and the changes of color. I worked with the naturalists a lot.

**MA:** So you enjoy the geysers?

**HW:** Oh, yes. When I'm through working, I think I'll be a VIP [Volunteer in Parks] and just go out there and watch them all the time.

**MA:** What is it that makes you...Do they change from day to day?

**HW:** Sure they change. They change every day.

**MA:** I have had trouble getting into the geysers myself...

**HW:** You're kidding!

**MA:** And I figured that what I need is some real fan to be my guide and show me some of the things...

**HW:** Every year there's new ones. You can work the same area every day and every month, there's something different. A geyser gets more active, or less active. A new one shows up. The color changes. I was the first one to see Steamboat after it hadn't erupted for nine years.

**MA:** Is that right?

**HW:** I didn't get a thing done all day but stand there and look at that geyser and get all wet. I told my boss the next day, and he said, "It doesn't matter." I left the signs up on the rest rooms, "Closed for cleaning," but when that geyser went, that was it for the day. [Both laugh]

**MA:** That must have been a thrill.

**HW:** It was a thrill. I'd been cleaning the sink, and it sounded like an airplane coming in, and all of a sudden, it went thud. So I went out, and then I could see. It was just tremendous. It just ruined the paint job on my car in the parking lot. Just took all the paint right off the top and off the hood, and one door.

**MA:** Bet you parked it there because you didn't expect that to happen?

**HW:** I didn't care [laughs]. You get so attached to the geysers, you don't mind.

**MA:** So how high did that go, that first one?

**HW:** Four hundred feet.

**MA:** Four hundred feet?

**HW:** And it spewed rock and debris for a quarter of a mile. Sludged up all the trails and the stairs and the other geysers down below. It was just beautiful! They sent a helicopter with some news service people down from Billings. I've never seen so many people in my life with [inaudible]. They just ruined it with their garbage.

**MA:** Oh, did they?

**HW:** Oh, people! They don't realize how fragile this place is. They walked everywhere. I felt like taking the broom and saying, "Get out of here!", but you can't do that. This is supposed to be for the enjoyment of the people, but they kind of take advantage of it. There were paper cups and cigarette butts and candy wrappers and stuff all over. I just could have cried. Because it's no fun for us that are on maintenance to walk around those geysers either and track them all up. You know about the silica--it takes many years to build up, and it takes 15 minutes to tear it all down with those people walking across it.

**MA:** But you have to walk across it to get all their garbage.

**HW:** To get their garbage, yes.

**MA:** So you feel like you're destroying something when you go out there yourself?

**HW:** Right.

**MA:** What does it do to your shoes?

**HW:** Cooks them. The soles of a good pair of shoes are gone in three months, at most. It's the hottest place in the park. The ground is always hot. If they'd build an elevator I could go up and down, I'd go back there, but I can't. I'd be breathing that sulfur, and I can't get back out of there like I used to. I walked the trails twice a day when I worked there.

**MA:** You say you have asthma?

**HW:** Terrible.

**MA:** So when you say you walked the trails twice a day...

**HW:** You do all the trails and pick up all the garbage twice a day.

**MA:** That must be several miles. Have you ever figured out how far it is?

**HW:** No.

**MA:** You weren't interested?

**HW:** No, not in how far. I was just interested in what was happening.

**MA:** So how old were you your last year of working there?

**HW:** [Oh, boy. Fifty.]

**MA:** Your asthma just got worse?

**HW:** Yes, it just got steadily worse. That fall it got so bad, they told me I couldn't do it anymore. But I still think the time will come when I can do it. I may have to tie a rope on the back trail to pull me out, you know, from tree to tree. I'll think of something. [Laughter]

**MA:** So did they think the sulfur aggravated your asthma?

**HW:** They don't know... [Inaudible] I have spent hour after hour after hour down there, and the geysers change. In August there was an upheaval in the geyser basin, and everything changes. The geysers change color. Some of them drain. Some of them get more active. Then it's

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somebody's job to sit there and time each one, see what's happening and get their temperatures. They always had me do that.

**MA:** So is there a lot of competition for that job?

**HW:** No, nobody wants it.

**MA:** Nobody wanted it but you?

**HW:** They still don't want it.

**MA:** They must have felt pretty lucky to have you around.

**HW:** Well, they tried to get me back. I couldn't hack it this year. Rick Hutchinson wanted me back; he's a park geologist.

**MA:** But you say you still spend some time getting out to the geysers on your days off?

**HW:** Oh, you bet. I'll go out, probably next week, for three days; it takes three days to see what I want to see. Then in the fall, I'll go out again.

**MA:** What's your favorite area?

**HW:** Norris. There are more hot pots and more things to see there in less area than in any other place in the park if you know what you're looking for. I can go off the trails, because they've showed me where there is stuff in the back country. I can go back there. There are a lot of beautiful things that ordinary people don't see.

**MA:** But other people could see them?

**HW:** It's off limits. They've taken me back there and showed me what's there and told me that when I got back to let them know I'm back there. They don't care. They know I won't touch anything.

**TW:** Is there a combination of algae?

**HW:** Yes, and there's some beautiful geysers back there. They couldn't make trails to all of them because there's quicksand, and you know people aren't too careful. They showed me where to cross when I go down there. Down the hill on the right on the back basin, way down there, you cross over instead of going around. [Inaudible] You go down there and cross. There are lot of beautiful things.

**MA:** So you enjoy looking at the height of the geysers and the different colors. What makes the different colors?

**HW:** Having the algae in the water. The algae makes the color.

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**MA:** You see changes over the season, and you also see changes over the years?

**HW:** Oh, yes. Many of them will get like Steamboat. After not going for nine years, it blew its vent out. It could huff and puff to no end because there was no restriction in there. It wasn't as hot anymore.

**MA:** So that meant that it couldn't go to four hundred feet again?

**HW:** No, not yet. It has to build up to go that high.

**MA:** I was interested in one thing that you mentioned that I wanted to go back to. You said you cooked when Presidents came in?

**HW:** I cooked for a couple.

**MA:** Who?

**HW:** Ford and Carter.

**MA:** Ford came in what year?

**HW:** Oh, years.

**MA:** It really doesn't matter.

**HW:** I keep a diary at home, naturally. It would have had to have been 1976, and Carter was here in '78 or '79.

**MA:** So when Ford was here, what kind of dinner...

**HW:** We had a cook out at Artist Point. Hamburgers, hot dogs and all the trimmings, drinks. It was very informal.

**MA:** So how many people did you have to serve?

**HW:** I was supposed to serve ninety, but two hundred showed up.

**MA:** You're kidding! What did you do?

**HW:** We managed. They didn't get as much to eat, but they had enough. We always plan on too much. So many Secret Service showed up, is what happened, which we hadn't planned on.

**MA:** You mean like a hundred?

**HW:** Yeah. Those trees were full of Secret Service, of course, to protect him and his entourage.

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**MA:** Did they say anything about the choice of location, about Artist Point?

**HW:** Ford had been a ranger here when he was young. He just wanted to see the park again.

**MA:** He lived at Canyon, wasn't he?

**HW:** Yes. That's the reason he asked to have it there, so he could look. He had his tie and his jacket off, really informal. We visited.

**MA:** Oh, you got to talk with him?

**HW:** Sure! Carter was really my favorite. He is really informal. And he and his wife are so sweet. We had a barbecue at Old Faithful.

**MA:** And was that an informal occasion too?

**HW:** Oh, yes. Everything is informal out here. That is the charm of Yellowstone and the West, is informality. That's what they expect. Roughriders and whatnot.

**MA:** Any other celebrities that you cooked for?

**HW:** Oh, all the big shots of the Park Service, I suppose. Secretary of the Interior and different ones like that, but they didn't impress me. They were just people.

**MA:** Not like Carter did?

**HW:** They're just people. They were all really nice. They all treated me real well. They were nice to me.

**MA:** Well, they ought to. You feed them good food.

**HW:** You know, they could be a little high toned, but they're not. Everyone's real nice.

**MA:** So you were saying that you were the second woman to go to work for maintenance?

**HW:** That's what they tell me. Outside, you know hard hat and the dirt. I worked in the campground at Canyon.

**MA:** That was what year?

**HW:** '67 or '68.

**MA:** You say you were wearing a hard hat and working in the campground.

**HW:** Yeah, the first woman. There was a lot of static the first year.

Helen Wolfe, April 5, 1987 (YELL 188046-OH2)

**MA:** Was there? I was kind of curious about that.

**HW:** A lot of men would say, "What did you take a man's job away from him for?" But what man is going to work four months out of the year? My husband was out here working, and why not work, too?

**MA:** What was your husband's name?

**HW:** Chuck Taylor.

**MA:** So your name was Taylor at that time?

**HW:** Yes. He passed away in 1975.

**MA:** So did anybody get nasty about it? Did they play any practical jokes?

**HW:** No, just a few people from back East were resentful.

**MA:** Visitors or employees?

**HW:** Visitors. Oh, the employees were all nice.

**MA:** I'm glad we got that straight.

**HW:** Oh, yes. Because they figured out women do a better job in the museums than the men do.

**MA:** In terms of the visitor contact?

**HW:** Cleaning. Men don't have time to spend on the rest rooms, and they don't want to do the corners. They don't want to keep the yards pretty. They don't want to wash windows. So they found out. Verna was the first one in here.

**MA:** Verna?

**HW:** Verna Nelson. Then they hired me. They said from then on, it would be just women in the visitors' centers. When my husband passed away, I asked for a transfer. I couldn't stay at Canyon any longer so I went to Grant. I had the museum there. The museum was quite new, so I really didn't have enough to do. I asked for enough to keep me busy so I had work in the campground. I had all that time and lot on my mind, and I wanted to be busy. I wanted to be busy at that time.

**MA:** So did your husband die on the job or...?

**HW:** No, he shoveled a roof off on the visitor center, and he shouldn't have done it. He died in our home. Had a heart attack. He knew he wasn't supposed to do it, but the snow was real deep that year, and he was helping this man.

Helen Wolfe, April 5, 1987 (YELL 188046-OH2)

**MA:** That was during the winter?

**HW:** Spring. The tenth of May.

**MA:** You were both seasonal workers.

**HW:** Uh-huh.

**MA:** That was in '75. So was the park open during the winter at that time?

**HW:** No. There weren't all these people out here in the winter either. There would be one winterkeeper to see that someone didn't come in, I suppose, and wreck something. Usually a man and his wife stayed out. That was all. It's all changed.

**MA:** I could imagine that that would be hard to work at Canyon.

**HW:** I couldn't stay there anymore.

**MA:** At least you could work at some other part of the park.

**HW:** All I had to do was ask my boss. I guess if you do good work, you can be transferred. I was transferred several times. I met this man that I'm married to now when I was working at Grant. He worked in Mammoth.

**MA:** Oh, what's his name?

**HW:** Ed Wolfe. I asked for a transfer to the North District, so I got Norris. They've been real good to me.

**MA:** You asked for that because of Ed?

**HW:** Getting married, yes. I couldn't drive clear to Grant. He didn't want me to stay down there. So they transferred me to Mammoth. I worked out of Mammoth. When it got to where I couldn't work at Norris, I got a job in Mammoth, close to home, inside.

**MA:** So when you first started in maintenance, did you get paid the same amount the men did?

**HW:** Oh, yes. I was a Maintenance 5 worker. I made three dollars and fifty cents an hour in 1969 and '70.

**MA:** That was good money, wasn't it?

**HW:** Real good money. We didn't wear uniforms then.

**MA:** What would you have gotten paid if you had kept doing office work?

Helen Wolfe, April 5, 1987 (YELL 188046-OH2)

**HW:** Way less, way less.

**MA:** Why did that woman think you would be better off with stenography?

**HW:** She wanted a helper she liked. [Both laugh]

**MA:** I see. I thought maybe she wanted to help you up the ladder.

**HW:** No, she wanted me in the office with her.

**MA:** So did you ever get any comments from people outside the park, like in Gardiner on your having the men's jobs?

**HW:** No, Gardiner people are all very understanding, most of them work out here, too. That's what holds Gardiner together is the park.

**MA:** Yeah. So when you first started working for the park, had you lived in Montana before that?

**HW:** I was raised in Montana.

**MA:** Where were you raised?

**HW:** Oh, a little town of about eight hundred people, [inaudible].

**MA:** I know where that is.

**HW:** That's where I was raised.

**MA:** Do you mind telling me when you were born?

**HW:** 1926.

**MA:** Is that right? You could have fooled me.

**HW:** I have a son 43. Oh, he's 44. I take that all back. He turned 44 the other day.

**MA:** So at that time, when you first started working in maintenance, that was prior to the federal affirmative action and quotas?

**HW:** They didn't even want any women working really, but they couldn't stop us. If they needed the help and we were available, they had to take us. My first day on the job, the man who was the boss down here, he laid me out. He said he did not want me working; he didn't want any women in his area. He didn't want to hear one word about me all summer. When fall came, he said he

didn't know anyone who could get so much work done. He said, "You've always got a job." It's true that women have to work three times as hard as men at some things to get anywhere.

**MA:** That doesn't surprise me. What do you mean that they had to hire you?

**HW:** If you were available and passed the test, they had to take you, and it was a struggle because they didn't want us. I've been very fortunate. My husband has never allowed any foul talk around me. I'd go to work in the morning with the rest of the crew, and this particular boss would tell a gross story. So they got grosser every morning, and I'd go hide behind the garbage cans until they took me to work, my face as red as a beet. Not in front of a bunch of young men, you don't want to hear that. So after a while, my husband said, "My wife will take her own car and go to work from our house, and she'll come back to our house at night." He told the boss down here, and they agreed: I didn't have to listen to that.

**MA:** He did that during the...

**HW:** During the morning, when we were getting ready to go to work. He thought it was smart to see if he could make Verna and I blush. That got stopped. That's sexism.

**MA:** Yep.

**HW:** There are women in the park that like that sort of thing. They laugh and joke and put up with it. But I've never been around it, and I'm not going to start.

**MA:** And it seemed obvious that he was doing it to make you feel uncomfortable?

**HW:** That's right. That's why he did it.

**MA:** Is that the foreman who told you he didn't want women around?

**HW:** No, that was the foreman at Canyon. The foreman in the area, the one at Lake here, he didn't want me working. But after the first year, he said I always had a job.

**MA:** So the foreman at Canyon, he was the one telling the jokes, do you think he was deliberately trying to make you feel uncomfortable?

**HW:** I know he was. Because he knew my husband wouldn't put up with it.

**MA:** So it sounds like, from what you said, that if you passed the test, they had to hire you. So that gave a woman a lot more opportunity in government than you could have gotten at that time, or now, in private jobs?

**HW:** Yes. I know it was quite a hassle when my papers came back. See, I sent them to region. I first got a job with the Wyoming Forest Service [USFS in Wyoming] to go out twelve days and be in two. So we framed that and put it under glass on the coffee table. We thought that was great, grandma out with a bunch of kids on a trail crew. Then I put in again, and I got this job in

the park. Boy, all the guys got together at the big shops, and they were whispering and muttering among themselves: "What are we going to do with her?" So, I wasn't about to back down.

**MA:** You were a grandmother at that time?

**HW:** Um-hum. I have a granddaughter [age] twenty-three.

**MA:** So the two jobs were offered at the same time so you took the Park Service job instead of the Forest Service job.

**HW:** Yes. My husband wouldn't let me take the Forest Service job. [Laughter] No way.

**MA:** Be out in the woods with all those guys...

**HW:** He figured it would be too hard for me. I think that's why he stopped it, but I've never been sure. [Laughs]

**MA:** Fortunately, it didn't become an issue because you had the other job.

**HW:** We didn't have any issues in that marriage. It was real relaxed.

**MA:** Sounds like you were lucky. So Verna started the same year that you did?

**HW:** No, she started the year before, in the middle of the summer.

**MA:** Did she mainly do clean up?

**HW:** She did the visitor center. And they were very mean to her! They bought the biggest mops they could find, the biggest mop pails they could find, and made her do all kinds of things that first year. She did every one of them and never said a word. She was marvelous. She paved the way for the rest of us.

**MA:** It sounds like the two of you paved the way for a lot of other people.

**HW:** I don't think I could have taken as much static as Verna took. I think about the time they threw the biggest mops and the biggest mop pails and all the extra stuff at me, I think they would have broken me down and I would have quit. But they had a lot of respect for her after the first year. She came up...Oh, I can't remember when they were going to close the street from us in the trailer court...In the middle of the summer, maybe the first of July...

[Side break, gap in recording]

[**HW:** ...what ever happened. Maybe she knew a Congressman or something. But she did her work and then some.] I can still see her and I hiding behind those garbage cans.

**MA:** Was there ever a job in maintenance that you were interested in that you didn't get?

**HW:** No. I usually did pretty much what I wanted to do.

**MA:** That's good. You said that initially, when you worked out at Canyon, they had a much smaller crew.

**HW:** There were eight men. That was when my husband was working out there. There had a real small road crew, like four men. Then they had a foreman, like Don Sessing is now. Then there would be three other fellows. Everyone worked real hard, real fast. But the area was new, so they could keep up with it. The roads were all new; the buildings were all new. That was the showplace of the park in '61. Everything was new. The village, the trailer court departments, the maintenance, everything was new then. So I guess they could get away with a short crew, with everything in good shape. Then they built Grant up, and it was quite new when I went down there. I went there in '75. The museum was only nine years old. It had had real good care. The man before me had been an older fellow, and he just babied it, just like I did. Lovely place to work and nice people to work with.

**MA:** Who would you say was the most interesting character that you worked with through the years? Anyone come to mind?

**HW:** Oh, I can't think of any. I met so many nice people and made so many good friends up here. This is my first love.

**MA:** The park?

**HW:** Yeah. My husband knows it. We went away one year after we got married. He retired in '60, and we went to Billings that fall and managed an apartment house for a year. Every day I moaned about Yellowstone. He said, "I'll never take you away again." I just couldn't stand being away from it. It has a magnetism for me. My last husband and I almost went to Grand Canyon [National Park]. We went down for two weeks and stayed with some people. He was going to transfer down there, and I couldn't stand being away from Yellowstone. So we came back.

**MA:** So your present husband is retired?

**HW:** Yes. He ran the storehouse for twenty years. Now he hauls the mail to Cooke City three days a week. He got his energy back, and he's ready to do something now. He retired in '80.

**MA:** I can imagine it would get pretty boring sitting at home when your wife is working.

**HW:** We have four trailers, and we have three tenants. We're busy.

**MA:** The fascination for you is more the geysers than the wildlife?

**HW:** Oh, no. I love the wildlife. I could stand and look at a buffalo by the hour. When they have their calves out here in the valley, I hardly ever get home. I'm out there taking pictures. We have

albums and albums of just buffalo. Some of just the sheep. Some are just of the antelope. Swans. We're both wildlife lovers. Very much.

**MA:** Uh-huh. So do you have a bear story for us?

**HW:** Lots of bear stories. Another lady and I went for a walk one day. The snow was waist deep. We weren't supposed to leave the trailer court. We walked around the road and up toward Dunraven. We were looking at the ground, kicking the snow, and we looked up, and there was a griz standing on his hind legs looking at us. She drug me awhile, and I drug her awhile, and he followed us all the way back to the rest room. We locked ourselves in the rest room and stayed until the men got off work. He paced back and forth, and back and forth.

**MA:** You're kidding!

**HW:** No, I'm not kidding.

**MA:** How far was it back to the rest room?

**HW:** A long ways. [Laughter] By the time we got there, neither of us could talk. You know running, and the snow was deep. We cut across to get back. And as we ran and staggered, the bear followed us. Then in the night...

**MA:** The bear didn't try to catch up with you?

**HW:** No, huh-uh. Oh, did we catch hell that night. We weren't supposed to do that. We had small trailers in those years. Several times in the night, we would feel the trailer just rock, and you'd get up, and there would be a grizzly rubbing against the wall. Kind of chills you. Then one day I was all alone--I have pictures of that day. I was the only one in the trailer court, and I felt the trailer wiggle. There's a difference between a bear wiggling and earthquakes. I tiptoed over to the window, and there was little, tiny, brown bear. He had taken my clothes line down, and he was playing with clothes! But I didn't do a thing! [Laughter] I just stayed in the trailer and let on like I wasn't there! He finally went away.

**MA:** So the grizzlies were just scratching against the trailer?

**HW:** Just rubbing.

**MA:** It wasn't that they smelled anything cooking inside?

**HW:** Oh, no.

**MA:** Because they could have come right in.

**HW:** That's right, they could have torn the trailer up. I always kept all my food in the refrigerator. I never kept any food in the cupboards--sugar, coffee, anything that has any odor.

There were a lot more bears then than there are now, visible bears. For years, you would never see less than twenty between Canyon and Norris.

**MA:** You're talking about like in the '60s?

**HW:** Um-hum. Before the Craigheads.

**MA:** You think it has to do with the garbage dumps being closed?

**HW:** Of course it does. There weren't any attacks. Nobody ever got hurt. You'd see them along the side the road, but they were satisfied. They didn't beg, like dogs.

**MA:** So you don't think that was such a good idea, to close the dumps?

**HW:** No, I don't. But then it's none of my business. [Laughs] I thought it was dumb because they had been on garbage all their lives. To take their source of food away was dumb.

**MA:** So when you were at Canyon, did you get to watch the otters very much?

**HW:** No, I didn't see the otters at Canyon. But I did see them at Grant. There's an old crater in the lake, and the water is warmer in that crater, it's right by the edge. And they play in that in the wintertime. They get up on the snow and slide down into that warm water. I never did see them at Canyon. There used to be some beavers at Canyon, and we watched them all the time, but they died.

[Coughing]

**MA:** When you first started working did you feel like there were some of the wives who might resent you working with the men?

**HW:** Of course not. Everybody knew me. I didn't work with men when I was at Canyon. I took myself to work, and I came home at night by myself. I had all the upper loops, and I was by myself all day.

**MA:** Would you say some people think you're a little crazy for spending all spring with the snow crew?

**HW:** No. Well, every day I'm off, I'm out in the park. I don't get enough just working here.  
[Laughter]

[Off microphone conversation]

**MA:** I'd like to go over the plow schedule a little if you don't mind.

**HW:** They leave Mammoth, like on a Monday morning, and by Friday they've plowed, usually to Canyon. The next Monday I come out and set up the mess hall there until they plow to Lake.

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The other cook goes to Madison, and she stays there until the roads open to Old Faithful and West. And then they take her to Grant Village because the Lake crew has plowed that far. She stays there while they do Craig and South--Lewis River Canyon.

**MA:** What was your longest season?

**HW:** Last year. Ten weeks. And then the Lake crew plows over Sylvan, and then they're through. They usually plow Dunraven from Mammoth. I used to go to Beartooth, but my summer job interferes with that. I don't think we'll do Beartooth this year. I think the area people can get it.

**MA:** OK.

[End of interview]



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**MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL  
HISTORIES**

**KATHLEEN BETH O'LEARY  
RANGER**

INTERVIEWED BY  
MARJANE AMBLER  
AUTHOR

AUGUST 28, 1988  
IN LAKE VILLAGE, WYOMING

Yellowstone National Park Archives  
P O Box 168  
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190-0168

Catalog Number: YELL 188046-OH3

**NARRATOR:**

Kathleen O’Leary was born October 14, 1954 to Dr. John H. O’Leary and Enid L. Keene of Havre, Montana. No further details of her early life are known. In 1977, O’Leary began working in Yellowstone, where she met and married her husband David G. Phillips in 1983. Phillips had worked as a ranger since 1967, mainly in the isolated Thorofare Ranger Station in the Park’s southeastern corner. O’Leary joined her husband in Thorofare for the summers of 1984-1986 and, momentarily, 1988. In the summer of 1988, Phillips and O’Leary defended Thorofare from fire until relief arrived, after which they evacuated by horseback.

From 1992 to 2006, O’Leary was employed as a ranger at the entrance station and backcountry office of the Snake River District, together with her husband. In 2006, the couple retired to a ranch near Riverton, Wyoming, where Phillips died three years later. O’Leary remains on the Riverton ranch as of 2017.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Born May 19, 1948, in Colorado, Marjane Ambler began a career in journalism in 1968. Ambler worked in various positions including as editor of the “High Country News,” an environmental publication, from 1974 to 1980.

In 1984, Ambler’s husband Terry Wehrman accepted a position as a snow groomer in Lake Village, Yellowstone National Park. The couple spent the next nine years living year-round in the interior of Yellowstone. Ambler worked as a volunteer during the early years and as an interpretive ranger during the summers of 1990-1993.

During her time at Lake Village, Ambler began to collect the recollections of the other park employees and family members within her small social circle, as well former park employees who experienced living and working in the park interior in past decades or whose careers were otherwise notable. These activities culminated in Ambler’s 2013 book “Yellowstone Has Teeth,” which narrated the recollections of Ambler’s interviewees interwoven with her own experiences.

Ambler and Wehrman left Lake Village in 1993, after which Ambler served as editor of the “Tribal College Journal” from 1995 to 2006. Ambler is also the author of “Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development” published by University Press of Kansas in 1990. Ambler and Wehrman split time between homes in Atlantic City, Wyoming, and Lake Havasu, Arizona.

**SUMMARY:**

This interview was recorded a few days after O'Leary and Phillips' harrowing escape through the burning landscape of the Thorofare district to Lake Village. Unlike the other interviews in this collection, it is tightly focused on O'Leary's recent experiences of the previous few months. She discusses the beginning and progression of the 1988 fire season, firefighting strategies employed by both the National Park Service and National Forest Service, her and her husband's activities in defending the Thorofare district, the psychological effects of living near active wildfires, and a detailed account of the couple's escape with four horses and one mule.

**Restrictions:** None

**Format:** Two cassette tapes, 93 minutes total recording time. Digitized using TEAC player/recorder on June 26, 2019.

**Transcript:** Transcribed by Marjane Ambler, August 1989? Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Barrett Codieck, Yellowstone National Park Archives Intern, July 2019. Transcript 23 pages.

**Technical Note:** There are gaps in the audio at the beginning of tape one, side two, and tape two, side one, possibly due to an error in copying the cassette tapes. The original transcript provides the missing text, which is indicated in this document by brackets.

**Kathleen O’Leary interviewed by Marjane Ambler  
in Lake Village, Wyoming, August 28, 1988**

**Narrator:** Kathleen O’Leary (KO)

**Interviewer:** Marjane Ambler (MA)

**MA:** ...the 28<sup>th</sup>, and we are at Lake in Yellowstone Park, and I’m Marjane Ambler. I’m talking to Kathleen Phillips. Kathleen, could you tell me where you lived and how long you’ve been working in Yellowstone Park?

**KO:** I started working in Yellowstone in 1977, and my husband starting working in 1967, I think it was.

**MA:** And that’s Dave Phillips?

**KO:** Dave Phillips and we met five years ago. And then following – let’s see, the summer of 84, I went in to Thorofare to spend the summer with Dave and his two children. And then we spent a total of four summers in Thorofare. Last year we didn’t get in.

**MA:** So that would have been 84, 85, 86 and 88?

**KO:** 86 and 88, yeah.

**MA:** All right. And how long do you usually stay in Thorofare?

**KO:** We have gone in usually right around Fourth of July. Ordinarily the limiting factor is waiting until the river goes down enough so that we can ford it. And of course, this year, since it was so dry, that wasn’t really a problem. Dave and Tyson – Dave’s son, Tyson – went in ahead of Linnea and I and cleared trail for about a week and that was right at the end of June. And then we went in just a couple days after the Fourth of July this year.

**MA:** Okay, and Tyson is how old?

**KO:** He’s thirteen.

**MA:** And his name is spelled?

**KO:** T-Y-S-O-N.

**MA:** And Linnea is?

**KO:** She’s ten. And it’s L-I-N-N-E-A. So we all got in together then there, I believe it was about the 6<sup>th</sup> or so of July this year.

Kathleen O’Leary, August 28, 1988 (YELL 188046-OH3)

**MA:** So when did there start being any fire activity in that end of the park?

**KO:** We went in, and we'd been there a few days, and then we were going to ride down to Cabin Creek and do some stuff there, and it was...let's see, the first week of July. We could see smoke from Two Ocean Plateau and called it in when we were on our way to Cabin Creek. They said that yeah, that is a controlled burn. It's in the Forest. [Bridger-Teton National Forest] So we said, "Well, it's a pretty good-sized smoke, should we let you know when it crosses the border?" And they said, "Oh well, yeah, I guess so. That's a good idea." And of course it did within a few days. And it's really beyond anyone's expectations as far as how many acres it would take out. But that's true of a lot of the fires this year, of course.

**MA:** Which fire, did that fire have a name?

**KO:** Yeah, it was called the Mink Fire and it started somewhere around Enos Lake. It's in the Bridger-Teton forest. And the district ranger saw it when it was half an acre, in Silas. And there's a few stories that go with that as to his reaction. But it was more or less a prescribed, or a "let burn" area, so they didn't deal with it early on. And then it was just, you know, gained momentum and kept going north and a little bit east. And it came down into Atlantic Creek. And they had a major episode there when it was right down at the bottom of the drainage. They decided that they had better do something about it, and they kept speculating whether it would cross Yellowstone Meadows or not, and the ranger who lived there, at Hawks Rest.

**MA:** Kathleen, we were talking about the incident at Atlantic Creek?

**KO:** Right?

**MA:** And you say the ranger...what was his name again?

**KO:** Ray Wilson.

**MA:** And he was in the forest?

**KO:** Yeah. Hawks Rest is just across the Thorofare River from us, and also across the border. And right below the butte it's called Hawks Rest. He was observing this fire for several days and letting his people know about it, and being real – you know, just sort of gathering information and not really acting on it. And then there was some – it was sort of a political maneuver, is what happened, and some of the outfitters decided that, oh my gosh, if that fire comes across Yellowstone Meadows, we won't have any grazing land in that area. And I don't know, I'm sure there's a whole story behind that, of how they got the funding to do anything about it. But they were too late, basically, because they brought in a sprinkler system for the meadows. And in the process of setting it up, as they were putting it together and they were laying out hose, the fires swept across and three men almost lost their lives in that episode. It was just barely getting them out in time, is what happened, with a helicopter.

But it was so obvious that -- there were those of us that were down there who had really looked over the area, especially Ray – that it was so dry that is was going to happen and it was going to

Kathleen O'Leary, August 28, 1988 (YELL 188046-OH3)

happen soon. And they just didn't get there in time. So then it was right down in the bottom, and then in came around. It's interesting because we were in a – the Upper Yellowstone Valley has got several perimeters going around on the east side from where we are. And so the fire was at the bottom, and then it started heading north on the west side of the river and started going up the various drainages as time went on. So Falcon Creek was the next drainage after Atlantic. And then it was crossing into the Park around that point.

**MA:** And so how far was that from you?

**KO:** Well, let's see, probably between two and three miles, something like that, it'd be across the valley.

**MA:** And that was still mid-July?

**KO:** Right. That would be mid-July, or something like that.

**MA:** So did you, from that point on, did you have fire fairly close to where you were?

**KO:** What was happening then, the Mink Fire then was just heading north and going up into various drainages. There's Atlantic, Flacon, Lynx, Badger, and then beyond that is the lake. And then it started coming, it sort of made the big loop and then started heading south and was in Mountain Creek and then Trident Creek and then Cliff Creek. And now, I'm not sure whether it's come into Escarpment Creek or not, which is the drainage that is right next to us. But there were a few tense moments with the wind, even when it was on the west side of the river.

**MA:** You were on which side of the river?

**KO:** We're on the east side. See, the confluence of the Thorofare and Yellowstone are at sort of the south end of that big valley there, and it did burn right out to the confluence right before it got into Lynx Creek. But there were some moments, I remember one afternoon when the wind was coming right out of the west, and we were getting all kinds of ash coming down, and it was very brown, nasty-looking smoke. You know, the stuff that looks like it's really going through a lot of fuel, and it looked close. And we saddled up our horses and were ready to get out. Because you just couldn't tell, you know, where it was. And after seeing the fire cross Yellowstone Meadows, which is just – that is the area that would be before the confluence of the Yellowstone and Thorofare. It's a little confusing because they do flow north, but it would be up country or upstream from there. Anyway, after observing how quickly it can go across a meadow, we – I mean, depending on how it would spot, or whatever, we didn't know whether that fire on the west side of the river was going to, you know, hope over and it would be heading right exactly for our cabin.

**MA:** Did you have someplace to go? If the fire...I mean, you had your horses saddled.

**KO:** Yeah, right. We kind of went at that a couple of ways. There are three cabins in the area right there. There's Ray Hawks Rest cabin, and then of course the Thorofare Ranger Station, and then there's the Game and Fish cabin, which is there for their employee who is there just part of

the time. And the plan was that I would probably have took the horses over to one of the other two places. Figuring that, you know, between the three of them, all three wouldn't be threatened equally or whatever by the fire, and then just sort of go from there.

**MA:** And at this point you still had the kids with you?

**KO:** Yeah. So that was kind of intense, then. No, wait, I take that back. I'm sorry. That was later on. That was after they had gone. When the fire was still – I'm getting my chronology fouled up. Before that, when the fire was down at the bottom near Hawks Rest, at the bottom of Flacon Creek, we decided that I would take the kids and the horses, as well as the Forest Service horses, which are a total of nine horses, two children, and myself, and go down to the lake, to Trail Creek. And we stayed there for, I think, three days or so and waited to see what happened with the fire. And then it looked like it was going to stay on that west side, and we did come back then.

**MA:** So you were in radio contact with Dave during that time?

**KO:** Right, yeah. And it worked out quite well. We had to clear some trail to get to Trail Creek, and it was kind of an adventure for the three of us.

**MA:** When you say clear trail, what does that involve in this case?

**KO:** Well, Tyson basically came through like a champ. There had been a blow-down in there, so it was a matter of getting out the axe and just getting through it in order to get to the cabin. So it was a long day.

**MA:** When you say a long day, how many hours?

**KO:** Well, let's see, we started out early. It was probably 7:30 or 8:00 in the morning, and we got there probably about 6:00 in the evening or something like that. You know, just to push it through to get there.

**MA:** So, did you have any feeling that the fire was pushing you up this trail, or were you...

**KO:** No, at that point we were just kind of getting out of the area, so we wouldn't...the trouble is that the horses – they were great to have there, I mean they're perfect for that area, because you've got to cover so much ground. And to look around and see what was happening, you know, that it worked out great. But when it comes right down to having fire threatening the immediate area, they're really a burden or a liability.

**MA:** Meaning that you have that many more bodies to move?

**KO:** Yeah, exactly. And they don't get onto helicopters too easily, either, to evacuate.

**MA:** Well, couldn't you have just gotten on a helicopter and left the horses?

**KO:** Yeah, right, if it came right down to it, that's what we could have done. But it was just if there was any way we could've saved their lives or just, you know, avoid having them panic and run for it. You know, we were trying to be cautious about that.

**MA:** In the grand tradition. [Laughter]

**KO:** So anyway, that was probably the last week of July of so, that the kids and I were at Trail Creek. And then it looked as though the fire had calmed down a bit and was staying on that west side of the valley. So we came back, and that was their last few days in Thorofare for this year, because they had plans to go to a family reunion on the east coast, and that was already in the works. A lot of people think we brought the kids out and put them on the airplane because it was too crazy with the fires, but in fact, that was already the plan, anyway. And I think it worked out well that way. It was just a little bit easier in terms of thinking through logistics if we had to make a mad scramble anywhere, not to have the kids. So, it worked out pretty well, although we missed them quite a bit, too, and those days of just sort of hanging out and watching the fire and whatnot. So then we rode out, we all road out to Trail Creek and went to Bozeman, and we got on a plane, and that was...

**MA:** You did that part by boat, then?

**KO:** Yeah. We got the boat. And Cindy, one of the rangers here, was good enough to stay there with our horses for a couple days while we were taking the kids to the airport. So they got off, and when Dave and I came back in there was a crew at Trail Creek setting up sprinklers and everything like that, you know, to get lined out.

**MA:** And this was around the first of August?

**KO:** First of August. And then when we rode back in, we were riding – the trail had definitely been hit on that east side of the river. The fire had gone from the west side up those drainages and had gone over and spotted onto the east side. So the trail had been hit with fire. And so we rode on the trail a ways and decided we better get down into the meadow and try to stay away from this, because it was right there, and that was pretty intense.

**MA:** Meaning that the fire was close to the trail, where you were riding?

**KO:** Yeah, it had crossed the trail, so it was going through fire that wasn't crowning or anything, but it was still quite active. A lot of, you know, hot coals and hot spots, and trees falling down. It's interesting how the fire would burn right around the base of a tree because of all the stuff and everything, and then just eat away at that, you know, the real body of the tree, and then finally it's going to fall over.

**MA:** And you don't know when it's going to fall over.

**KO:** And you don't know, yeah. The tree will fall when the time comes, and that's really nerve wracking you know, to be going through and hearing these trees coming down.

**MA:** So is that the scariest part is having the trees falling, or was it...

**KO:** At that point it was, yeah. It was, because you can see, you can observe, you know, as you're heading along, these tree trunks that have got these little skinny bottoms. It's like, now wait a minute. There's too much weight up there to be help up by that little, you know...

**MA:** So you went down in the meadow where there weren't any trees."

**KO:** Right, we got off the trail, got down in the meadow, and were closer to the river and just got through, and that was right around the Mountain Creek area, which is probably about six miles or so from the cabin. And then went ahead and got through that and then rode into the cabin.

**MA:** In Thorofare?

**KO:** Yeah. That was about the 3<sup>rd</sup> or so of August. And then we stayed there until we just came out recently in the last couple of days.

**MA:** So when you had this opportunity to get out of that, go to Bozeman, and then you were coming back, did you ever have nay moments where you thought, "I really don't want to do this!"

**KO:** Yeah... You know, in a way, it's interesting, because we've developed such a bond with that area right around, especially the immediate, you know, the cabin and that area right there. And I think Dave especially was thinking, you know, if we can do anything to help protect that cabin, then we've got to be there. Because it's, you know, that's our home.

**MA:** Yeah.

**KO:** And I was also looking forward to spending some time there with just Dave and I, too. I mean, like I say, of course we missed the kids, but that was kind of nice, you know, to have that time.

**MA:** Oh, I certainly understand that.

**KO:** And just to kind of, do what we could. And it had already been set up with the hose and pumps and all that, so it was all – you know, as far as the mechanics, the equipment being read, it had already been in place when we'd gone out to Bozeman. So we got back to, you know, it had been ready to go.

**MA:** Could you tell us a little bit about that, describe the set-up, the hose and where the water comes from?

**KO:** Okay, yeah. We had our creek that supplies for our drinking water—well, all the water we use. Its close – relatively near the cabin, it's probably about – it's hard to describe, about a city block away, in the meadow. And they had set up four of the Mark III pumps right in the stream.

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And I don't know how many feet of hose we had, but we had pumps that would work the hoses that went up to the barn and then to the cabin. And then they had what's called the pack hoses, just a hose that you could just use, you know, with a nozzle on it. And the sprinkler systems were neat. I mean, they were great. We watered down the cabin a number of times this summer just to, you know, just for a drill anyway, and just to kind of get things damp in the area. But it was impressive how much water, you know. We could really soak down the area

**MA:** So that gave you some confidence?

**KO:** Yeah, it did, in a way. When you see across the way how, across the valley how incredible the fire can be. And I think everyone here this summer has observed at some point in time just the power and intensity of that fire when it gets going through an area. And then we kind of wondered, "Oh I don't know about these little pumps!" I don't know. It was some comfort. But granted, it is an odd feeling to know that you can't just hop in your car and drive away from it, of course. You have to have another plan. So what we did, there were several days of just waiting you know, anticipating what would happen, and we did a lot of little projects. We painted the kitchen and marked boundary quite a bit.

**MA:** Marked boundary, what does that mean?

**KO:** Well the boundary of Yellowstone Park is real close by, and so we have the boundary markers that run along and you just nail them to the trees. And it has to be re-done every so often. Different people either take them for souvenirs or the trees fall down, or you know. And this is mostly in anticipation of hunting season, so that it's quite clear, you know, for the hunters, or for the poaches or whatever, to get the boundaries defined. So we went out and hiked along putting boundary markers in, and spent time doing that. But it was frustrating because it's like, you know, we wanted to help in the firefighting. It was just to be sitting there, watching, you know, drainage after drainage being burned up and getting closer to us – it's really unnerving. It's frustrating.

**MA:** Did you have trouble sleeping?

**KO:** Yeah, I had some weird dreams at times. And there were moments where it was hard to sleep later on in August when...well, what virtually happened was we kept anticipating the fire from the north coming down and getting closer to our cabin, but what in fact happened was a fire from the south, the Atlantic Creek, which was the original spot, kicked into gear again. And so whatever was left to burn there started burning furiously up there. And the wind was from the southwest and blew it right towards Hawks Rest and it spotted onto that butte and then came down the Thorofare drainage, which is really close. And that's what the fire that was threatening if the other day. And we haven't really gotten the official report of the sequence of events there. I know they back-burned around the cabin, but I'm not just sure what happened with, you know the fire burning there

**MA:** So, for the people that haven't been there right to see that kind of an intense fire, is there a noise that goes with it?

**KO:** Oh yeah, there's this incredible roar. It sounds like a jet engine, like a jet taking off. Only it stays there, it doesn't dissipate, it's just this roar.

**MA:** It doesn't take off.

**KO:** Yeah, it doesn't take off. And, well the one, when it had spotted over near the Thorofare River, it was a really odd evening because we knew it was – that smoke had been coming over, you know, toward us and we figured, gosh, it could spot. And all day long it never really happened. And then we were just about to turn in for the night and we were out brushing our teeth, you know, out on the porch, and we could see the pink glow through the trees. And it was like, my gosh, what's that? So we walked out in the meadow and sure enough, there was a fire up on Hawks Rest which is just about the Thorofare River. And yeah, it was crazy. And so then just a few days later – it was actually the day before we left the area – Dave was over with a couple other guys that had come in, over by the Game and Fish cabin, which was the most threatened cabin at the point. And I wish Dave was here to describe that. But it was this incredible roar, and then, you know, as night's coming on of course the contrast of the fire and the darkness, it really, you know, makes it even more dramatic. And it was just a wall of flames about a quarter of a mile long or something, it was just coming toward you. And it's just unbelievable. That was the most impressive, dramatic or whatever, fire. It was right in that area, and you could definitely see it through the trees from the front window in our cabin – well, until probably about 11:00 at night. Right below. And then it is hard to sleep. Because you just think, "Well, they always talk about the fires laying down at night", but you think, "If it's a warm night, and if there's a wind, that's not going to lay down a fire." It's a little bit...there's some anxiety there, no doubt. I think the main thing that I found, that when I started feeling anxious about it, or nervous or whatever, if I started doing something, tried to be productive somehow, then that feeling kind of goes away. You just feel you gotta do what you gotta do and try not to spend so much effort just anticipating.

**MA:** So that's when you painted the kitchen.

**KO:** Right, like, okay, let's get some work done.

**MA:** Now, when this fire is approaching you, did you have the feeling that you really could get a helicopter to respond within a short notice?

**KO:** Well, yeah, you'd kind of want to think that. And I thought that early on, when they first came and set us up with the pumps. There was a firefighter from Idaho, and he was with us for a couple days explaining things and how to do this, and what it's like to work it. [Inaudible] Well then – and I don't mean to place blame on the fire crashers, because I'm sure they were doing what they could, but they were spread so thin. There were so many things happening there all the time, it was going crazy all at once. There was an unfortunate episode up at Howell Creek, which is – well, it's up the Mountain Creek drainage toward Eagle Pass. And there were two guys there, I don't know how many days they had been there when the fire finally came close to...the immediate, I mean, right there at the cabin. And they pretty much had to hunker down in the creek bed there. And they had asked for a helicopter and were told there are other priorities. I don't know what they were, but you can imagine how you'd feel.

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**MA:** Did they have fire shelters?

**KO:** They weren't in their fire shelters. They probably had them with them, but I don't think it came quite to that degree.

**MA:** They got out okay?

**KO:** Yeah, and they were fine. I mean, definitely traumatized to some degree, but...we felt at some point that we better figure this out ourselves. You know, if the fire gets real close, we decided it wouldn't be wise to depend on a [helicopter.]

[Side break, gap in recording]

[**MA:** So you felt that] it wouldn't be wise to depend on somebody else's helicopter?

**KO:** Yes, especially with the horses. We didn't want to have them in a position of just sitting ducks with the fire around. And that factor entered in with the helicopters being spread so thin that the time – you know, you just can't have them come out of the sky at a moment's notice because they're just far too busy with other areas.

**MA:** So tell us how far you were from the closest road – car road.

**KO:** The Thorofare Ranger Station is 32 miles from the closet road, and that would be at the nine mile post of the east entrance road. And it's supposed to be – I've heard this more than once – Thorofare is supposed to be the farthest point from a road in the lower 48 states. So it's what you call remote.

**MA:** So was that trail, that particular trail, usually something that you thought would be free of fire?

**KO:** Well, no, that was what was so odd about it. As the days went by, we were trying to figure out how we would get out of there. Because every single drainage had been burned or was burning. And that would be our ordinary – I mean that would be the usual way of getting out. But the trail, one day we went down to clear trail – you know, the trail had already been burned. We figured we may as well put some effort into this and clear it, you know, now it had cooled off enough. And we'd gotten as far as Mountain Creek and then it was just, there were flames everywhere. And it's real thick spruce forest there, so it was just real hard to pick your way through. And then we spent three days clearing through the burn going up Lynx Creek, and we figured that would be our escape. You know, when it came time to leave, we would go up Lynx Creek, and that goes up through Two Ocean, and then drops down into the Snake River and on up that way. And then about two days before we left, two or three days, Lynx Creek completely blew up, it was just fire. Whatever hadn't burned was burning. So that was out.

**MA:** Meaning that Lynx Creek drainage had burned somewhat before?

**KO:** Right, so it was just: what do we do? And then the Thorofare was burning with that fire, we couldn't go out Deer Creek Pass, over that way. We couldn't go up Eagle Pass, because that whole Mountain Creek had, you know, was still... So, what it came down to was Falcon Creek. There had been just a lot of money expended on that part of the forest to put that fire out early. And so that was, in fact, how we got out, was up Falcon Creek. And then we were told that there was fire on top, so we bush-whacked across Two Ocean down into Passage Creek, and that was a long day, our first day.

**MA:** This is when you were getting out?

**KO:** Yeah.

**MA:** How many horses did you have with you at that time?

**KO:** Four horses and a mule. So there were five, and the two of us.

**MA:** Before we get into your trip out, I wanted to ask you a couple of – backtrack a little bit. When you had the kids in there, I suspect that quite added to your anxiety level, just feeling the responsibility for other bodies?

**KO:** Yeah, yeah, right. It was. It was hard, and especially like our early trip to Trail Creek and it was just me and the kids and the horses.

**MA:** How many miles was that?

**KO:** Seventeen miles to that cabin. And yeah, you do, you feel the responsibility, and it's hard to really relax, you know, with fire close by and just sort of wondering what's going to happen next. I mean, ever morning it's like, oh, where is it going to go now? And that just kept, it was just sort of an ongoing feeling. So that was...

**MA:** How did the kids react? Did they realize how serious the situation was?

**KO:** Yeah, I think so. You know, as far as getting real close to fire, they could observe it across the valley at the time they were in there, and it was definitely there. You know, it's one of those base-level, the human reaction of, oh gosh, this is – you know, it's a major threat. And I think they could really feel that. A couple of days before we left to go to take them to the airport, we did walk over across the valley and walked into the burn, up a trail that was really familiar. It was up Lynx Creek trail just a ways. And, you know, we saw a chipmunk that had been burned. You know, I think that was the only time that they had been – they had really gotten into the burned area. And I think it was quite an impression, really. And then of course we talked about how long it would be before it would ever look the way it had. And that angle is what all of us are feeling... especially with familiar places, it's just so hard to accept. And they had a few reference points on that. There was a burn from about 14 years ago that is located between Cabin Creek and Trail Creek that we've ridden through several times. And we keep saying, "Oh, this is 14 years later after it first happened, and it's not very pretty yet." But, yeah, they've got a pretty good impression of it, definitely. Something that is interesting as far as, you know, earlier we

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were talking about helicopters and whatnot. And we were in touch with the Forest Service helicopters more than we were with the park helicopters, really when it all added up. There was a spike camp right in the area that's close to Yellowstone Meadows, at the time that they were working that Falcon Creek drainage. And they stopped in and would give Dave, you know, a ride now and then to the area and whatnot. And we loaned them a couple of pumps, and our original sprinkler system was the one that they were going to set up in Yellowstone Meadows, and then that project fell apart, so they brought all their sprinklers to the cabin. So there were real, you know, close relationship there with – we kind of overlapped the two agencies. It was sort of interesting.

**MA:** So you were able to have some kind of contact with other people that could give you a bigger perspective, other than what you could just see from where you were?

**KO:** Yeah, exactly. And for several days there that was real helpful, and then there came a time in late August or so when they were no longer able to do that because they had yet another fire, the Emerald Fire, that was down – well, it was north of the Mink Fire, but it was a major fire. So they had to put all of their effort into that, you know, so it was like well, okay, it was nice while it lasted. But it was good. Their Ops Chief, so-called, was a real nice guy, the first one. And then the next one, I think he had good intentions, but he was floundering a bit and was just having a hard time holding it all together. But that was good to be able to get in on some of their flights and what not, to see what was happening. Then to be in touch with the people up Howell Creek and watch them. That was going up the Mountain Creek drainage, up the mountain, and just to kind of keep track of where it was.

**MA:** So your job, you both are employed by the Park Service, is that right?

**KO:** Well, what happened, there's only really one position back there, and that's Dave's, you know, his being a park ranger. This year I was – oh, what the term – I can't remember the category...

**MA:** It's not a VIP? [Volunteer in Parks]

**KO:** No, I was going to get that, but it's basically intermittent. Maybe that's what it's called. So I've been paid some, and I don't even know how much. But I was definitely with Dave. We pretty much do everything together. We're very family oriented. We go out together and do things.

**MA:** It sounds like the Park Service got quite a deal. So, as I understand it your job [Inaudible] includes some of the same things that you were doing at the time?

**KO:** Yeah, in a sense. Just the angle of knowing what's going on in the area. But of course it was closed to backpackers and outfitters fairly early on. And that's a good bit of effort in a normal summer – keeping track of those folks and knowing that they're within regulations of how to keep a campsite. If anyone was lost, you're search and rescue kind of thing. So having no one in there, that took away a lot of those responsibilities. And it was kind of odd to not have folks around.

**MA:** So your main job was protecting the cabin, then?

**KO:** Yeah, cabin protection was pretty much the main of it from early on. And I know Dave was frustrated a bit. Because a good bit of the time we knew that we weren't threatened immediately, that it wasn't going to just bear down on us at the drop of a hat. I mean it was far enough away that there was time there. And I think he felt like he would like to jump in, like help with the Howell Creek cabin and some of the other places in the general area. But I think they had a plan that they really wanted him to stand by in case anything...you just don't know.

**MA:** So were you responsible for watching out after the Trail Creek and Cabin Creek cabins also?

**KO:** No, not really. We kind of...just in terms of reconning the area when Dave had access to the Forest Service helicopters to do that. We would keep in touch with Mona here at Lake. We kind of let her know what was going on. Then one day (I believe we were riding over Lynx Creek, the days were where clearing trail) you could see that the fire was on Colter Peak, which is close to Cabin Creek, and we called that in. Because there was so much going on in the park that it was so hard for them to know exactly how close. Because some of these fires would just inch along. You know, they didn't really rip through an area quickly, and so they would sneak up on you. You know, you'd think, oh no, it's a ways off, it's a ways off. And then one day it's like, oh no it's not, its close! So there was a group of Helitak people [firefighting helicopter] at one point that came in to – I should back up a little bit. There was sort of an odd occurrence when the fire came into Mountain Creek. The Forest [Service] decided that they would like to stop the fire in the park so that it wouldn't come back into the forest. So it was like okay, this is a let burn area, but we will – they decided to allow the Forest to come in and use a wet line. You know, do the water drops, and hose and whatnot, to stop the fire from going further south. Which seemed odd. But they set that all up and had the spike camps – well, that was where part of the operation was done, in Yellowstone Meadows – and spent several days and, I'm sure, several thousand dollars to stop the fire there. Well, then they figured it was all suppressed and moved on. Then several days later a spot occurred. It had kicked up and spotted south of the wet line. And the chief ranger was flying the area and saw that. And so the next day they put it, I think it was four Helitak people, south of that wet line where the spot was, to put that out, to stop that. And they realized early on that it was going to take definitely more than four people. I mean, it was already, you know, too big. And so there was a whole day when Dave was on the radio trying to get a Forest Service crew to come up, since they were the ones that were so intent on stopping it at that point. And they didn't have the resources, they couldn't do it. And so those four Helitak people were taken then, the next day I believe, to Cabin Creek to protect that cabin. And then that fire just kept coming south. So all that – it's so interesting when they put so much effort and money into stopping it, and then when they can't get back to it, it goes out of control again. You know, it's a loss. It's a terrible waste. And I'm not sure at this point where that fire is, whether it's gotten into the Escarpment drainage or not, which is right by our cabin.

**MA:** So why was it so important to protect this cabin? Isn't it one of the older...

**KO:** In Thorofare?

**MA:** Yeah.

**KO:** Yeah, it's got historic value. And the barn also, which I'm not sure if this is – I've heard a few times that the barn, in fact, was the original ranger station, in that building. And that was redone, I think four years ago or so by the A team, and they did just a beautiful job on the barn. And then they did the nice stone foundation and put in more logs and lifted it up, you know, to make it a higher ceiling to it. And it's just a lovely barn. And then the ranger station itself it – I'm not sure how old it is, I should know that. But, yeah, it dates back quite a ways, it was be a loss, I mean it really...you know, when they keep talking about saving the patrol cabins, well, Thorofare is a ranger station. It's not a patrol cabin. It's definitely – it's a different slant to it there, it's a little more important than some of the patrol cabins around.

**MA:** Meaning that it's bigger, or...?

**KO:** It's just that there's someone stationed there all the time, as opposed to a patrol cabin that's used just here and there when people are coming through the area. So yeah, it's a really nice cabin...it's the old log style – two room, really nice front porch. It's just a really nicely made, and they have put a lot of work on it over the years, just improvement and whatnot, so it's worth saving. So it'd be interesting to know just what it looks like now, with the back-burning and whatnot they've gone around there. The cabin is still standing, as far as we know. But we don't know how many green trees or where the closest green tree is from the cabin. And that's really depressing.

**MA:** Are you planning on being back there next summer?

**KO:** Yeah, we talk about it like we are. I mean I think we are. It's like we got to get back. But I don't know. It would be strange summer again. If it's another dry year, we won't have to worry much because it's pretty much burned out – that area. But I think there'll be a lot of trail clearing, and I'm not sure what, probably trying to find new campsites and that kind of thing. But it's hard to accept that the way we knew it is really gone.

**MA:** I want to get into your trip out. Do you want to take a little break first?

**KO:** Yeah, maybe I should

**MA:** We're starting up again. We need to backtrack and correct Kathleen's name. It's Kathleen O'Leary. That O – apostrophe – L – E – A – R – Y, right?

**KO:** Right.

**MA:** Okay, and I forgot to ask you, Kathleen, how old are you?

**KO:** I'm 33.

**MA:** I wanted to ask you whether you noticed any strange animal behavior.

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**KO:** Oh, well, let's see, I think early on, the most striking thing was the tracks that we saw, the bear tracks. When the fire had gone down Atlantic Creek and was in the bottom there and coming around Falcon Creek, the bears were heading north, away from the fire. And I wish I had gotten a picture of some of the trails around Bridger Lake [in the Bridger-Teton National Forest]. You could see every size – black bear and grizzly bear. The trail was literally covered with bear tracks, and just all heading the same direction – away from the fire. We saw all that in probably mid-July, I guess it was. From then on, we didn't see any sign of bears through that whole time period until I believe it was the day before we left; there were some grizzly tracks at our corral. So there was one right in the area. I believe that bear went up the Thorofare drainage because the forest ranger did follow some tracks going that way.

**MA:** So is that unusual for you not to see bear signs for that long?

**KO:** Right, yeah. On a normal summer we would see a lot of bear sign, a lot of tracks and scat along the different trails. In riding around we didn't see many bears, which always made me feel safe, in that sense, of riding in the back country, that bears don't generally want to deal with horses, so they make themselves scarce. But you know, they would still be around. And yeah, this summer they were pretty much out of there. I'm trying to think. Other animal behavior that we noticed – I think it was because the grass was so short – there were a lot of hawks and osprey that were flying around, especially in the big valley. I think the grass was so short, and the moles and mice and things were a little more visible. And they were having a real heyday getting down there and getting little rodents. But we saw hawks, I mean there were just --- you could see three or four at a time, every day. You know, just there they were, flying around. Way more than we'd ever seen. I'm trying to think of... We did see elk herds, we saw some really large herds of elk grouping together earlier than usual, and hopefully did not get up some of those drainages.

It's real unnerving to think about some of the loss of animal lives from the fires. I know, the superintendent and various people want the public to know, they want them to feel like the animals are safe in all this. And it just can't possibly be true. You know, the way the fire moved down there, you know it was everywhere. I mean like all of us who lived here this summer in Yellowstone learned so much about fire, you know, just being right in it. And it was so interesting how it would just kind of weave around. And the animals – I mean a good many of them did, in fact, get out of there, I'm sure but it was so confusing as to where exactly it was coming from, where it would go next. And some of the drainages, I know, like Trident Creek – Dave commented that whatever animals were up in there could not have gotten out, because there are a lot of cliffs in that area, and no matter how sure-footed a critter is, they couldn't have gotten out. And so we don't know what the loss was in that sense.

**MA:** When you say large herds of elk, about how big?

**KO:** Oh, I don't know. Maybe close to a hundred at a time, around that. And then we did see a lot of moose, and they seemed to be --- you know, the cows would start coming together a bit, and then... that's normal, apparently. I had never seen it, because we had never – but it was early, again, you know, that was happening. And there were a lot of moose right around the area near our cabin. They were showing signs that they were behaving as though it was autumn.

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**MA:** I wonder if that could be because the haze made the days seem shorter?

**KO:** Yeah, you wonder exactly what it was, because it was still getting really hot during the day. But that could well be visibility and stuff. And it would feel like autumn sometimes, it'd feel like a fog moving in, cool in the morning.

**MA:** So did you have this smoke almost every day?

**KO:** It seemed like the wind, there was enough of a breeze to life the smoke out of there through all of July and probably half or so of August, that we could go out into the valley and see these incredible columns of smoke there. It would just build up the big cumulus clouds and whatnot, and be relatively clear, down low where we were. But then it did, the last probably ten days or so in there, when it was burning just...there were so many areas of active burning around us, literally all the way around us, that was burning. And so then, yeah, it would be sopped in a good part of the time. [Inaudible]

**MA:** Well, let's talk about your trip out. How far did you have to go? Would you normally go out toward Snake River?

**KO:** No, we would normally take one long day to ride the trail out to Nine Mile [Post trailhead, near Lake Butte on the East Entrance Road ], which was 32 miles out along the lake shore. But not knowing where exactly the fire was at the north end of the Yellowstone valley, right by the lake there, it was just too much of an unknown. It looked really intense in terms of smoke and the flame that we could see. And it would be just really difficult going for the horses – a lot of downed logs and a lot of deep grass, just tedious stuff. So that in combination with the fires, it was just not worth considering as an option. It was getting to the point that every drainage was either burned or on fire, and we were just thinking, what's going to happen here? So that option was out.

The Forest was being really – the ranger down at Hawk's Rest had talked with his supervisor, and he was concerned. He thought that maybe we should come out through the Forest, but that didn't look to good either from our viewpoint in terms of where the smoke was. So we figured if we went up Falcon Creek (which had burned part way up, and then they had put the effort into putting that fire out) and then go over Two Ocean Plateau, and drop down into Passage Creek, and then follow the Snake River out, that would be our best bet. And so the day before we went, they brought in our replacements, Wes Miles and Dan Ehlen. And that was the evening that it was just crazy. There were walls of fire over by the new Game and Fish cabin right at the Thorofare River. And it was just so hard to leave then because we just wanted to be able to put some effort into saving that cabin. All the days of anticipation, and then we decided at one point: We need to finish the fact on the day, Dave's last day of the season, and go ahead with our lives. We have other things we have to get on with. And you have to make that decision because we were offered some more...to extend our season. And we had already decided that we will go the day that we had planned. And so we felt we really needed to stick with that, for various reasons. So the guys came in the afternoon and literally within an hour, that fire had...

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[End of tape. Gap in recording]

**MA:** This is tape number 2, side A, and we're just talking about the arrival of your replacements. That would have been what day?

**KO:** Oh gosh, Thursday, the 24<sup>th</sup>? Something like that.

**MA:** Thursday would have been the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**KO:** Okay, it would be Wednesday.

**MA:** Wednesday, the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**KO:** I believe so. They came in, the two guys. Then the three of them went over to the Game and Fish cabin to see just where the fire was and to figure how to get the relay to the Forest people] [Recording resumes] and let them know the cabin was really immediately threatened. They were over there, and I was meanwhile saddling horses and getting them ready to go out. Actually before this, I should tell you about another plan that we had in terms of getting out of there in case the fire came really close. Dave and I had set up a few days before that, our own little spike camp across the valley by the confluence of the Thorofare and Yellowstone. We set up a tent and some sleeping bags and some MREs – you know, the food the firefighters eat in the fields, just a few, and then some supplies for our horses. And that was all set up over there in case we just had to get out. And then we'd have to wait for someone to come in to help us. So that was all set up. And then the evening, then that the replacements came in, I was saddling horses and getting ready to go over to that camp because we didn't know whether our cabin, in fact, would be in the path that evening, of the fire. So there had been a sprinkler system set up at the Game and Fish cabin sometime earlier, and they started that up, and then I was just getting some stuff done at the cabin. And it was really strange, because suddenly there were – I was taking a shower, and these helicopters appeared out of nowhere, they two big helicopters. And they landed in our meadow and I was directly them over to the Game and Fish cabin. And so they had more equipment to...

**MA:** You were directly them from the shower stall?

**KO:** Yeah! It's like... [Laughter]. But it's not a stall; it's out in the open air. And yeah, I was grabbing for my towel, and it was kind of a crazy scene. But late that day they had brought in more equipment and people to protect that cabin, that Game and Fish cabin. And so they got that all set up, and so Dave and Dan and Wes came back to Thorofare cabin later in that same evening. And then we ate dinner and went and watched the fire, you know, this big wall of flame, and it was just unbelievable. At that point there was a chilly wind coming from the north, so we felt like we were pretty safe for the night.

**MA:** Because the fire was south of you?

**KO:** Yeah, right. And so we thought well, we'll do all right tonight. And it did calm down up there a bit by probably 11 or 12 at night. But it was burning late, which seems odd. You know,

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you talk about the burning period and whatnot, and that was a late one, geez. It's so odd to see a fire, really, you know it's there day after day...it's like, okay, and then one day, kaboom! You know, it's a big fire, it is really impressive. And then that's what happened at that one. So we just continued our plan, with leaving the next morning.

**MA:** So you had to unsaddle the horses and start all over?

**KO:** Right. Tuck in the horses, yeah. "Okay boys, it's okay, you can go in the pasture tonight." And, you know, put all that stuff away. And so the next morning we loaded up two – well, one pack horse, the mule, and then had our two riding horses and then one extra.

**MA:** Did this happen often, Kathleen, that you actually got as far as saddling the horses?

**KO:** It happened twice this summer, yeah, right.

**MA:** That you were about ready to run.

**KO:** Yeah, and the plan was that I would be the one that would take the horses either to another cabin or across the valley to that spike camp. And then Dave with stay with the pumps and do what he could.

**MA:** Without any horses.

**KO:** Right. So they would be out from underfoot and in a safe place.

**MA:** So did that mean that you might have to be clearing trail yourself?

**KO:** No, I wouldn't have probably, just going over to that spike camp.

**MA:** There wouldn't have been any need to?

**KO:** No, it was just across the valley. It was right on the edge of a burn from earlier that summer – this summer. I mean they were already burned just as off a few weeks earlier. But it was safe because there was not fuel left.

**MA:** Weren't you quite a ways from a big body of water that would be safe?

**KO:** Oh, yeah. But we talked about also hunkering down in the river. We had the Thorofare River, which was, I don't know, just under a mile away. That's not a real desirable option, obviously, especially with the horses. It was interesting because I read an account of the fire of 1910. It was in a book, a neat book. [Montana's Early Day Rangers by Robert C. Gildart] ...I've got to get my hands on that. It's at the Thorofare ranger station. I think Gary Youngblood donated it. It's about the rangers of the earlier days in Montana, mostly forest rangers, some of their adventures and whatnot. They talked about this one firefighting group. Of course then, they didn't have any equipment. They hadn't had helicopters or pumps or whatever. They had hunkered down in a river. The fire had come over to them in the middle of the night, which was

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strange. And there was one man who was determined to save the horses. They had three horses, and he had taken blankets and wet them down and put them over their heads and over their bodies. Had them standing there in the river. And he saved them. The fire went over them. It was just impressive. So I did have a few odd dreams about being down in the river, trying to save these horses, dumping water on them was going to be my job, to deal with the horses, to go to a safe place.

So the morning came that we were going to leave, and we got things loaded up. We'd already heard the forest ranger talking to the firefighters that had been put down at his cabin and at the Game and Fish cabin. They were looking at spotting, and it was already kicking up. And that was less than a mile from our cabin at that point. We went ahead across the valley and then up Falcon Creek drainage and went through the burn that had happened earlier in the summer. They had already cleared that trail out so it was easy going through the burn, pretty much. You know, just to look at those suspicious trees that look like they're going to fall on you, but we got out to Phelps Pass. We'd been told not to continue on that trail because there was a fire. If we kept going on that trail, we'd be coming to fire. We went ahead and bush-whacked over Two Ocean, which took hours. Oh! That's hard because you get on top and then you have to find a way down to the next drainage that's not a cliff. I don't know if you've seen the...anyways, it's that Two Ocean Plateau has got cliffs around it pretty much. And so we had to do a lot of looking around for a way down. And then we rode over to the Fox Creek cabin, which is in the Snake River district, that night.

**MA:** So how many house were you on the trail that day?

**KO:** Oh, we'd probably gone 24 miles or so. We started about 9:00 in the morning and got there probably around 6:00pm. So it was probably about a nine hour day.

**MA:** And that was Thursday, the 25<sup>th</sup>, then?

**KO:** Yeah, Christmas. [Laughter] Right. And so we were at Fox Creek cabin that night, and we could see columns of smoke around us, but it seemed like a pretty good distance away. You know, we slept pretty well that night. It didn't seem like it was right there. And that land is interesting country. This year was the first year I'd been up on Two Ocean, and I've been up there twice this summer. We went up with the kids one day and it was a really nice day. But the visibility was terrible. We couldn't really see that much, and so it was kind of disappointing, because you can normally see down to the Tetons, and it gives you a view all the way around. So that was kind of disappointing. But anyway, so we were at Fox Creek and then the next day went – I should get that map – up, well we followed the Snake River drainage, is what it is. And went to the Snake River Canyon, and that's quite a trip to go in there, and then we were pretty much free of fire. We saw some columns fairly close, like right over the next hill a couple times. But it looked like we were headed in a pretty good direction. And then there's a junction where you can either go through Basin Creek or Beaver Creek to get around Heart Lake to get to the Heart Lake cabin. And as of that day, basically it just blew up. It was on fire, so it's like, well, okay, we'll go north to get to the cabin. And that was when we had the most intense moments there. We were riding along and it was fine, and then we could tell that the fire was pretty close. And so we stuck

on the trail and we were just staying with it so that we wouldn't have to figure that out if we got off somehow.

**MA:** How could you tell that the fire was close?

**KO:** Well, you know, the smoke was right there, and then you started seeing flames just right out in the woods.

**MA:** Oh, pretty good clue!

**KO:** Yeah, there it is. And so it was hard. At one point in time we were going along, there was a fire quite close, just off the trail on either side, and then we'd get to a green area, and then we'd get to another area where there's...

**MA:** So when you say quite close to the trail, how many feet do you think?

**KO:** Oh, a few feet off the trail.

**MA:** Say, ten feet?

**KO:** Yeah. I mean right there, pretty much, you know.

**MA:** And this was on both sides of you?

**KO:** Yeah, at a couple points. But not, you know, torching the whole tree area, like that. It was mostly ground fire. But then you didn't know when it's going to take off, that's why it was so frustrating. And then at one point – there was a lot of grass under there. The terrain was such that there was quite thick grass under the trees. And that was burning and causing a lot of smoke, because it was just, you know, that's how it is. I guess the firefighters, they do a lot of it. They don't mind being out in the trees, but when there's grass they can't stand it because of the amount of smoke. And the smoke was so thick; we couldn't even see what was ahead of us. So Dave got off and tied up his horse and then walked ahead. And there was torching and stuff going on then. It was like well, we gotta know that we can get through there. So he'd just disappear into the smoke, and that was when I – I didn't panic, but I was close to it. I was on my horse and the other four horses were standing there, and they were dead still. They didn't move a muscle. And that was really eerie. And they had their rear ends to the closest fire, just still. And suddenly they'd start breathing: "Whew!" you know, hyperventilating, and I thought, this was...

**MA:** And you really didn't have any idea of where else you could go?

**KO:** No, that's the thing. Well, we could go all the way back to Fox Creek, but that would be insane, going up that drainage again. It was the safest – it seemed like the safest route at the time, you know, at the point where we were at. So then I was waiting for Dave to come back, and it was just like, come on! And at those moments I was thinking, I've got to figure out a way of getting of here. You know, if these torched trees, they are coming right to me – and they were only maybe seven yards away – I've got to get out. But you know, if you could backtrack then

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maybe that stuff has already burned. So it's really a crazy feeling. And so then I could see – he finally popped out of the smoke and comes back and said, “Okay, you’ve got to go through here, because you definitely can’t go back.” And so he led the mule and the others just followed and then I was still on that horse bringing up the rear. And we just went through on the trail, and we could just feel the heat from the fire on both sides. And the smoke was so thick that I could hardly see at all.

**MA:** Could you see the horse in front of you?

**KO:** Yeah, I could just barely make out the horse there. So we just scooted through and it wasn't...

**MA:** You couldn't see Dave, then?

**KO:** No. But, you know, we just sort of held together and just scooted right through there. And it wasn't that big of a stretch, but enough to really be unnerving in not knowing what would happen next. And then to hear trees falling and the roar of the fire at the same time, it was like, okay, putting in a quick prayer and you just have to go for it, and try to keep your cool. And so we got out of that little area. And that was definitely the worst of it. And anything from that on, I mean, you're so thankful to have gotten through it, anything else is small potatoes. It's like, hey, I got through that we can deal with anything else. And all the rest of the way to the cabin there was some fire and some this and that, you know, smoke and whatnot, but it wasn't so intense and encompassing and we just kept riding. And we got to Heart Lake cabin and collapsed. And Ann Marie is a good friend anyway, and so it was real good to be able to...

**MA:** She's the backcountry ranger there at Heart lake?

**KO:** Yeah, she's the Heart Lake ranger. And Tom Eric also is there helping her; he's also a good buddy. So it was just nice to have friends there, and they'd make a pizza and an apple pie and it was like, “Oh, it's heaven!” You know, we made it to heaven. We were with good friends, and so it was just such a relief to get through that. Then the next day, we just had to ride the eight miles to the road from heart Lake. We had to pick our way through; that had not been cleared. It was just real tedious. It took probably twice as long as it should have, just picking our way along. We saw a couple of spots of active fire, but they were small and pretty insignificant, like I say, especially compared to the day before. It was like, “Oh, torching trees...several yards away...nothing terrible. [Wry laughter] Its weird how your perspective changes. So then we got to the trailhead.

**MA:** So how many hours would you say it took you to go those eight miles?

**KO:** Oh, gosh, probably four hours or so, four or five hours.

**MA:** This area had been burned; is that why all the timber was down?

**KO:** Yeah, pretty much the whole stretch from the road to Heart Lake is burned. Well, that sounds a little too extreme. There are patches of green in there, but when a fire goes through an

area, there's so many trees that come down. Though there's a lot left standing; there's so many that will come down because of that burning at the bottom around the base of the tree. So we had to get off the trail and work our way around that quite a lot to get out.

**MA:** So were you all brown? You and the horses?

**KO:** Yeah, boy, yeah. The white on the horses was simply covered up with soot. The days that we were in the burn, like clearing trail at Lynx Creek and stuff, when we'd get back it was just soot everywhere. It's hard to even wash out too. You'd have to hand wash it. Then we were at the road and glad to have gotten through it all, everyone intact and no loss at all. Marschall had the horse trailer, and it was good to see him.

**MA:** I imagine that there were times when you weren't real sure that the humans and the horses would make it.

**KO:** Yeah, at that moment when Dave was checking out that smoke area. I thought, whatever I'm going to do, I'm going to make sure that I untie the horses before I take off on my horse to find a safe spot. It's just, there they are. We brought them into the area. You just feel responsible, it's like being with kids in that area. You feel like, okay, I did this, so I better make sure that I'm looking after their safety. But surprisingly they were standing there dead still, they did not panic (inaudible). So it made it easier to direct them around in that field. But they did really well. They didn't like it. I mean, every time we entered an area that had been burned, they'd go, "Oh what is this? This is all right." But they came through really quite well.

**MA:** I imagine you're going to have stories to tell for many years.

**KO:** Yeah, boy, the year that Yellowstone burned. Then we went to that cheesecake party the other night when we got out, and it sounded like a therapy session or something. Everyone was sort of pouring out their emotions about it – "my favorite trail is black!" and this and that. How it looks around their cabins and just the feelings you have about the place. It is never in our lifetime, I mean, it just hits you over and over again, that it just is always going to be so different than the way you think of Yellowstone. But, yeah, I'm curious to see what our cabin looks like, and the back-burning, and what the actual fire did.

**MA:** Hope that somebody else is taking as good of care of it as you did.

**KO:** Yeah, right. It was really difficult, just that whole ride going over Two Ocean Plateau and on to Heart Lake. We just kept thinking about our own little spot in Thorofare. But God, we left it! You know, abandoning it at the last minute there. So that was difficult. I think especially for Dave. Because he's put in a lot more years there than I have.

**MA:** How many years had he been down there?

**KO:** Well, let's see. '69 I think was his first year at Thorofare. Then there was a block of time that he was out of the park. But several summers from the summer before he left and then since '82, I guess. Something like that. So, he's seen a lot of changes in the backcountry and just how

it functions. Just that whole area – the different policies dealing with bears and campsites in the backcountry. Because when he first started there were no designated campsites. But gosh: “Hasn’t it always been this way?” “No, I was the one who chose those campsites!” It’s just so hard to put all the emotions aside and say, “Oh yeah, this fire is good for the park. It’s really doing a lot of good.” You think, well, to a degree, but how much acreage? And this is my own opinion, I’ve got to admit. Dave goes with that policy much more than I do. I admit that it’s an emotional factor that enters in. It just does; it’s like there’s too much that burned out. There’s just too much!

**MA:** Is there anything else you’d like to add?

**KO:** Well, let’s see. It would have been nice to have the kids there longer. I mean, they just sort of got a taste of what was happening, and that one walk we had into the burned area. In a way.

**MA:** Would you like to have them along when you were going out?

**KO:** No [Laughter]. I’m glad they didn’t have to go through that. I think Tyson probably would have thought it was a big adventure and been excited, but I think it would be really frightening to Linnea. Well, probably frightening for both of them. It was like two more bodies to keep after and to feel responsible for.

**MA:** Did people that were in the front country think that you should’ve gotten out of their earlier?

**KO:** Yeah, it was kind of frustrating because while the kids were there, in July, they kept saying, “Dave, what do you think about the kids coming out?” No, we just felt that we were safe enough at the time; that it was important for us to stay through the time that we had together. Because we all value that time so much. We thought about it, but it’s like well, for the time that they had planned to be there, we should be all right. That worked out quote well. There were days in August when we were marking the boundary or just doing little project that it was like, gosh, it’d be nice if the kids were here. Because there wasn’t the immediate danger. But you do what you can. It was an interesting summer and I want not want to go through another one like it. With all that helicopter activity, and all that smoke, and anxiety of anticipation – what was going to happen next. I think I’ve put in my time with this and I don’t want to do this again. Because you think of just the normal, routine days out of a regular summer, like going to check on some backpackers and clearing a little trail. Something that was interesting that I’ve heard other people say – that they had not given fire much thought ever before. I mean, you’d see old burn areas or you’d find stumps that had been burned probably a hundred years ago or something and say, “Oh yeah, there was a burn here once.” And I was just surprised at myself that I’d never really anticipated anything like that in the amount of time I’ve spent in Yellowstone. Not in my lifetime.

**MA:** It happened to me.

**KO:** Yeah, where you think, gosh, this was the year. It was going to happen. People were predicting it because there was such a mild winter and this and that and the conditions. It was

going to be a fire year. You know, isn't that funny when you think about early this summer. It's like yeah, we're going to have some fires this year. You think, well, yeah, there'll be little fires here and there. But this never occurred to us, the degree that it happened. The amount of acreage that was just gone. But I got a few pictures up in the burn up Lynx Creek of new blades of grass that are coming up. You know, all the burned trees and everything, and then here's these brand new – and there was even a lupine blooming – things in the ground. It's like, wow, gosh, already. It's renewing itself. So it'll happen. I'll get green, eventually.

[End of interview]



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**MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL  
HISTORIES**

**FRANCIS “RED” PAYNE  
MAINTENANCE FOREMAN**

INTERVIEWED BY  
MARJANE AMBLER  
AUTHOR

DECEMBER 3, 1988  
IN LIVINGSTON, MONTANA

Yellowstone National Park Archives  
P O Box 168  
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190-0168

Catalog Number: YELL 188046-OH4

**NARRATOR:**

Francis Burnie “Red” Payne was born March 22, 1914, on a primitive homestead near Springdale, Montana. He was one of twelve children born to parents Harry and Anna Opal (Walter) Payne. In 1925 the Paynes moved closer to Springdale, where Francis attended school. Francis married Henrietta Schnablegger in September of 1937 and the couple began ranching on property south of Livingston, which they later purchased.

In 1964 the Paynes decided to sell the ranch and move to Livingston. The following year Francis found seasonal work as a truck driver in Yellowstone National Park. Francis’ connection to Yellowstone predated this, as his father had driven stagecoaches in the park at the turn of the century and Francis himself spent a summer cutting hay for the Lamar Buffalo Ranch in the 1930s. Payne would work in the park every summer until 1974, rising to the rank of maintenance foreman. After retirement Francis and Henrietta continued living in Livingston until his death on September 4, 1999.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Born May 19, 1948, in Colorado, Marjane Ambler began a career in journalism in 1968. Ambler worked in various positions including as editor of the “High Country News,” an environmental publication, from 1974 to 1980.

In 1984, Ambler’s husband Terry Wehrman accepted a position as a snow groomer in Lake Village, Yellowstone National Park. The couple spent the next nine years living year-round in the interior of Yellowstone. Ambler worked as a volunteer during the early years and as an interpretive ranger during the summers of 1990-1993.

During her time at Lake Village, Ambler began to collect the recollections of the other park employees and family members within her small social circle, as well former park employees who experienced living and working in the park interior in past decades or whose careers were otherwise notable. These activities culminated in Ambler’s 2013 book “Yellowstone Has Teeth,” which narrated the recollections of Ambler’s interviewees interwoven with her own experiences.

Ambler and Wehrman left Lake Village in 1993, after which Ambler served as editor of the “Tribal College Journal” from 1995 to 2006. Ambler is also the author of “Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development” published by University Press of Kansas in 1990. Ambler and Wehrman split time between homes in Atlantic City, Wyoming, and Lake Havasu, Arizona.

**SUMMARY:**

Payne shares experiences from his decade in Yellowstone's Maintenance Division, primarily relating to clearing snow from roads and breaking the ice pack on Yellowstone Lake. Payne discusses equipment, working with female and minority employees, worker recreation, and bear stories. Other topics include firefighting, wildlife management, poaching, harvesting hay for the Lamar Buffalo Ranch as a teenager, and stories from Payne's contemporaries including ranger Jerry Mernin and maintenance worker "Blue" Evans. Finally, Payne shares some of his father's stories of driving stagecoaches in the park in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and reflects on changes to the park in recent decades.

**Restrictions:** None

**Format:** Two cassette tapes, 71 minutes total recording time. Digitized using TEAC player/recorder on June 26, 2019.

**Transcript:** Transcribed by Teresa Begen, November 2019. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Barrett Codieck, Project Archivist, November 2019. Transcript 24 pages.

**Technical Note:** There are gaps in the audio at the beginning of each tape side, possibly due to an error in copying the cassette tapes. This interview also has intermittent static.

**Francis “Red” Payne interviewed by Marjane Ambler  
in Livingston, Montana, December 3, 1988  
with comments by Terry Wehrman**

**Narrator:** Francis “Red” Payne (RP)

**Interviewer:** Marjane Ambler (MA)

**Also present:** Terry Wehrman (TW)

**MA:** And it’s December 3, 1988. And I’m Marjane Ambler and we’re interviewing, could you tell me--

**RP:** Red Payne.

**MA:** Red Payne? That’s what you want to go by?

**RP:** That’s everybody knew me up there by that.

**MA:** Okay. And your real name is?

**RP:** Francis Payne.

**MA:** Francis Payne. Okay, just for introduction, Red, would you tell us where you were born and when you were born?

**RP:** I was born in the Crazy Mountains, Springdale, Montana, in a sod shack. The building is still there. And there was no doctor, no nothing. And there was 14 in my family. And twelve of us was born without a doctor. And we had a midwife, you know, come in. And I went back to that place many years later and I asked if I could take a look at it. It’s a blacksmith shop now, you see, this building, but that’s where I was born. Then my folks, right after that, then they homesteaded in the Crazy Mountains there. We was raised there and we didn’t leave there until I was 15 years old when we left the Crazyes.

**MA:** And when were you born?

**RP:** Nineteen-fourteen.

**MA:** Okay. And so then when did you start working in the park?

**RP:** Oh, I didn’t start till 1965.

**MA:** Nineteen sixty-five until?

**RP:** We had a ranch up the valley, see, and then we sold part of the ranch. And then I wasn't, I was too young yet to quit, so I went to work in the Yellowstone and the first year I worked as a truck driver. Then I got a foreman's job there.

**MA:** A foreman's job.

**RP:** In the South District, we called it then, see. I worked there till 1974. Then I just, I just flat quit. [Laughter]

**MA:** Okay. So were you, did you work there just during the summer?

**RP:** No. I was seasonal. I'd go in the spring when we opened up the roads, you know, in the early spring, in late March, and work till they closed the park down in the fall. Generally about seven months was all. I didn't want to take that full career condition or anything because, well, I had other, you know, it would go against my Social Security, you see. I didn't want to start that retirement on the Park Service.

**MA:** Yeah.

**RP:** But I worked there for, well, nine years there. Worked through two or three superintendents there. I enjoyed it myself. It was real nice. We had a lot of problems, but we worked it out. And when we went through the period when all of that, shouldn't say this, maybe, but when the militants had come in and they said, "Well, we want a job," you know, like the girls would come in. Maybe you've had this. I said, "If you can do the job, you're sure [unclear]." And I remember one girl I had there, she said, "I'm a girl," and she says. I said, "When I looked at that application and said Sue Johnson, laborer, I said you can do just whatever these boys can do." And then I sent her out and she was painting something, I can't remember. And the boys is cleaning the paintbrushes for her. I said, "I'll get that [unclear] already." I says, "Go ahead and clean them brushes." [Laughs] I said, [unclear] and by golly, she quit, just like that.

But then I had other girls that come there, and I'll tell you, they could outwork two boys. And I would just tell them that, see? I remember I went over and this girl over there and two boys, they were digging a trench all the way back at the fishing bridge. And I come up and hear this big blonde girl, she was bigger than the boys. And I drove up alongside and I said, "If you want to go to work for us, you can just come over there. [Laughter] We're going to need some help." And by golly, she come over and she got a job with us. We put her on. And she was still there, as far as I know, she was still there when I left. She was still there. But she could work. And them other two boys, I wouldn't have, well, you know what I mean. You've run into them. But she was a worker.

**MA:** So this was kind of a transition time.

**RP:** Transition time. You bet.

**MA:** And there were first women working.

**RP:** Then we had, we brought some black people in there. I remember they come in there and they come out of Cheyenne. Well, they should have been in jail, but of course they let them out. And they would chase around, you know. One of them was married, I remember. And when he got his first check then she called, his wife called, and said, “Where’s he at?” Well, he’d been gone for two weeks. But he got his check and he was gone, see? So that’s just how they was, some of them.

And then we had others, I had some Indian boys work there. And after I left there, them boys would come back to our place out the shop out there and visit me, see, because they were good kids, see, real good kids. And I had a couple of black boys that was real good. And I remember I told this one boy, [Laughs] I told him, I said, “You’ve been chasing around with them girls.” I said, “What you going to have? They’ll be Chocataws.” [Laughter] I knew they were, see, but I said, what are you going to—but they were real good kids, see, and they worked hard. He was a real black boy. But he come in as one of the displaced minorities. And they paid his way here. And they give him a supplement, more than the others got. So and he come in, he drive in, one of the big Dodge car, you remember that one, about ’65 or ’66? Charger, Dodge Charger. Here he had that, see? And I had a couple of boys from Louisiana worked for me. Now this wasn’t a [unclear] boy, they didn’t like that. See what I mean?

**MA:** Oh, yeah, a lot of resentment.

**RP:** Because here he was, he had a hundred dollars a month more than they did, and they paid his way back home, give him a supplement, whatever, a couple of hundred dollars, whatever it was, I can’t remember. They allowed that much for transportation. But the other boys, they had to pay their own way, you see, when they come. And then I had I remember another time, we had a group camp over there at, it was a lake right out of Fishing Bridge. Mary’s Bay, this side, what’s that lake, they call it? Oh, you know.

**MA:** Squaw Lake?

**TW:** Indian Pond?

**RP:** Well, we had a campground there. It was kind of a group—

**TW:** Squaw Lake.

**RP:** A group campground there. And I remember one time there was two, a black boy out at the gate out there. And I just went in to check the thing out. And this boy, he says, “Does them bears eat people?” I said, “You bet. And they like dark meat, too, I told them.” [Laughter] He turned pretty white. But I had lots of experiences there.

There was one black ranger there, got a white girl pregnant once there. It was sad. And she was some, oh, high someplace, I can’t remember. And here he’d got her pregnant. And he was a ranger. And they [unclear] run him off. But we went through that, you know. Which was bad, you know. I don’t know what it is now, but during that period there is when everybody said well, I can do everything, you know. It was [unclear] kind of. But it straightened itself out. You bet.

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**MA:** Uh huh. As I understand it, though, there was quite a bit of variety in terms of the type of work that you did in maintenance at that time.

**RP:** Oh, yes, yeah, I done everything. On the weekends, I was run the whole at South District on the maintenance department. And Bill Armstrong was my supervisor the weekends. I worked on the weekends. I was [unclear] [canyon?] and the whole works.

**MA:** So you were actually doing snow removal?

**RP:** Well we started [unclear] snow removal, yes.

**MA:** And what roads did you do?

**RP:** We were doing them all in the South District. Clear to Norris Junction, and that was the end of our line, see. First we didn't get Dunraven till the last thing, we did that. And we'd take the south entrance first. But that wasn't in our district. I mean, going towards Jackson, we'd go down that, see, and then we'd work over Craig Pass, up to end of our line, that district there. And then we'd work Sylvan Pass, and then we took Dunraven. Then they'd take the last snow blast away and take it over to Cooke City there. So then we'd lose that. Sometimes we got drifted in pretty bad.

**MA:** So was it pretty deep some years?

**RP:** Oh, my, yes. You bet. I seen it when the snow stakes didn't show down in the [unclear] Canyon down there.

**MA:** So how deep would that be?

**RP:** Oh, gee, twelve, 14 foot deep. I seen right on Armstrong one time, we stood up on the top of our pickup, I stood up on top, on the level, and I couldn't see over the top. So you know how high it is. On the level. Right at Lewis Lake. Right at Lewis Lake. That's how deep it was. But there's more right now. I understand there's about three foot right now down in that Lewis Lake area right now. And I would say that would be right.

**MA:** So did you have the equipment that could handle that amount of snow?

**RP:** Oh, yeah, we had the snow blast. We had that Unimog, that German machine. You don't have it there now.

**MA:** Unimog?

**RP:** Unimog, yes. It was a German machine. It would only go through about five and a half, six feet. But that thing could go through, from Mammoth to Norris Junction in a day. It would just travel right along, just like, it would just blow the snow right out. And a rock couldn't hurt it at all. Nothing could get into it, see? And it just blew right down the road. And it would just pass

up the old snow blast easy. But I don't think they got it there now. They couldn't get parts for it, I don't think. It was made in Germany. But it was a good machine for five, six feet of snow. But the blast would only take ten, eleven feet, and that's all it could take.

**MA:** So what would you do to get down to the pavement if the blast would only—

**RP:** Well we had the moose, we call it. Now you got that big old Walters, you got that. We'd use that to kind of bust her up a little.

**MA:** And the Walters is a big plow?

**RP:** Yes, a big, deep plow on this big Walters. That was, we called it the moose. But we'd use that to bust out [unclear] ice.

**TW:** They still call it the moose.

**RP:** Yeah, I think so, yeah. And then up on the pass [unclear] we got over ten, eleven feet, and we had to use the Cat with the pads on it and push the snow down [to it?]. You know, because you couldn't go through it, see, and just push it down to it. We used to put a couple of guys on. I found especially on Sylvan up there, you had to pick the rocks out. You know, where these slides would come down. If it gets in there, you know what would happen, it would just tear the heck out of—

**MA:** If it got into the blower.

**RP:** The blower, it would just rip the propellers all to heck. But now, I don't know what they do now.

**MA:** So you'd get out and you'd be pushing the rocks off by hand, then?

**RP:** Oh, yeah. We'd just take them, heave them off to the side. And then you'd go on by them, see? They'd just cut a [chunk of hole?] for them. It wouldn't be a lot, you know, just a little. And then I remember that one year we tore [unclear] pushing the snow off. I don't think you've got a guard rail down there, have you now? On the south, going toward the east entrance? You still got guardrails along the road there? You still got them?

**TW:** It's intermittent.

**MA:** So did you have any close calls when you were doing snow removal?

**RP:** Well a few times, yes. I remember the first time, the snow was so deep on Sylvan going down. And this one road foreman so I told him, I said, "I think I know how to get that snow out of there." So we graded it all into the middle of the road and I come out with that big old plow down there. If you try to hog it on the side, you don't do it. And I went down the middle, I just shot her over into the canyon. And he said, "I'll be damned." He didn't see this. And I said, well, you know, you think about how you would do it. You got it too close, it just would run up the

side and fall back down in there. So they plowed, I told Old Blue Evans, said, "Plow her out in the middle, Blue, and I'm going to try something." He did. And by golly, boy, I come off of that pass and I hit that and just went right over the top.

**TW:** I've done that, too.

**RP:** You have, too. Yeah.

**MA:** So you did it with the Walters, then?

**RP:** No, no, no. Just with the big old snow plow. Just a regular snow plow. I think you still got one of them that we had there. I don't know whether you have or not.

**TW:** Yeah, the FWD.

**RP:** Yeah, that's what we had. Yeah. Yeah. I used to take that out a lot myself. On weekends when I had no operator, I had to take it out.

**TW:** You got any good Blue Evans stories?

**RP:** [unclear] Blue Evans, he was a character. Yeah, he was a funny guy. Blue, he was a real good friend of mine. My sakes, I really cried when he, we went over to see his wife here about two years ago. And I stopped in at Ennis there and I asked the ladies in there, I said if they knew where Blue Evans. She said, "You're sitting on his seat right there." She said, "We sure miss him." He was quite a guy.

He was a poker player. And we have a friend that comes back from Iowa. And he and Blue and another guy over at Townsend, I don't know his name, and the one [with the bus stop?], he said when they come back from the war, he said Blue, he said he had one of them black bags, he said he had \$14,000 he'd stole off the service men he said, coming back, he said. [Laughs] But he said he could work them cards, he said. And he said he had \$14,000 he stole off of them.

**MA:** [Laughs] Just by working the cards.

**RP:** Oh, yeah. Dealing off the bottom of the deck or whatever. Yeah, he was a, and we used to go up there. We played poker. Maybe you do now, I don't know. On snow crew, we'd always have guys that get in, play poker. Blue would never play with them. And I couldn't figure that out. And I asked Steve [Boxta?], I said, how come? He said, "Well, he just won't play anymore." He said that he and another guy went to Vegas. And I guess they caught them down there and I guess it was, they got run out of town or whatever for cheating. And he never would play with us. And he never bragged about it. Blue never told me this. This [Busttop?] was the one that told me all of that. Blue would never say why. He would never play cards with us at all. We used to have poker games every night, you know, for oh, 20, 30 dollars is all you could lose. But Blue, he'd sit back, but he'd never say one word. He was a great guy. He used to be, what's his name, the boss of the whole park, Blue was his foreman before he got to be the chief of maintenance. But Blue, he was a good guy. He was always out to help the worker. Really, you know, of course

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there's nothing wrong with that. He would never put them down. Yeah, he died with stomach cancer. Wasn't that old, either. Then after he left the park, he come down. Well, him and I, we left the park at the same time. He went out that same time in '75, '74, Blue left there. And he come down and that next summer he'd come over to our place and stay with us for days at a time. He was quite a rock hound, and we'd go [hunting rocks together?]. And his wife was a nurse in Ennis there. She worked in the hospital. That's the end of that.

**MA:** I was interested in what you did for entertainment. I guess you played a lot of poker.

**RP:** Oh, yeah. We played poker every night. You bet.

**MA:** That was mainly in the spring season?

**RP:** Oh, in the spring. Or in the snow crew, see, there was no way to get out. So you stay there. So that's what we did. We'd stay in. Sometimes it would be a couple of weeks before we'd even get out. We'd just stay right there all the time. But I enjoyed that, though. It was a nice place. If she'd have been with me, I'd have went on. They wanted me to go on. But I wouldn't do it. She was running our shop out here, you know. So it got so busy for her, she couldn't. So I just quit. And then they called me back a couple of times, wanted me to come up and help them out. I was operating on the lake there, too, you know. And they didn't know what was going on. And I said I didn't, either, when [unclear]. Because he just quit in the middle of the night, so I had to take it over.

**MA:** What was that? The guy that was in charge of doing the—

**RP:** Oh, the lake operation, see. Well, I was in charge of that.

**MA:** And the lake operation involves, could you tell us a little bit about what that involves?

**RP:** Well it was all the boat operation. Now you was there this summer. I think what's his name, Warwood was run out on the lake there. But they didn't do much. We did a lot more than they do now, I'm sure of that. And I remember one time, there was five boys, Boy Scouts drowned. And I went out and helped pick them up. They was in the southeast arm there, and it had come up, one of them storms. And they had life jackets on, too, and they washed ashore. And we went and picked them up and put them in the fire hall there and they come and pick them up, black bags. Yeah, they lost them and one of the Boy Scout masters.

**MA:** Were they in canoes? Or?

**RP:** Yes, they were in canoes.

**MA:** So you went after the storm.

**RP:** All in one town, too. They were all in one town, out in Idaho. Yeah. It was too bad.

**MA:** So you had to go out after the storm was over. And did you know whether they were alive or dead when you went out?

**RP:** Well, no. We didn't know. No, the one ranger, he called me, Don [Yesness?], he called and said if I'd take our boat out and go help them. And so we searched the shores. Well, of course the old landing craft at that time, you know, you could push right up anyplace and see. But their boats, they couldn't get in. And the waves was pretty rough yet. So we could just push up anywhere. I picked three of them up right close together there.

**MA:** That must have been a really difficult job.

**RP:** Oh, yeah. [unclear] yeah. It was five boys and then one of the masters there. In one little town down right out of Idaho Falls.

**MA:** So I imagine you didn't expect that to be part of your job description.

**RP:** Well, you do that. You know, you have to do that, whenever they call for.

**MA:** So what else was part of the lake operation?

**RP:** Well, I was the head of all the garbage maintenance, that was all that. And the building operation, I was head of that. We had the darn incinerators then, you know, we operated them. The biggest headache in the world.

**MA:** Why is that?

**RP:** Well, they just didn't work. [Laughter] They just wasn't—

**MA:** What did you use for fuel?

**RP:** We used oil. Yeah, we had oil.

**MA:** So you'd have trouble getting—

**RP:** Oh, the darn things. It was made to be, I don't think they made over in Canada, and they should have kept them up there. They just didn't work. And they, I think, what have you got over there now where the incinerator, the stack is still there? Any of that there?

**TW:** Just the stack.

**RP:** Stack's there, yeah.

**TW:** And a little bit of the [unclear]

**MA:** So that was where what they call the transfer station now then?

**RP:** Yes, I would say so, yes.

**MA:** Did you use the incinerator over by Fishing Bridge at all during that time?

**RP:** That's the one, well it was right out of, between there, going towards Fishing Bridge. No, no, that's an old one. That was there many, many years back. I don't know. We stored, oh, shutters and stuff. And we had our dynamite cache in that building there. Big cement block there where we stored all our powder and stuff. But we used to have to blast this ice off the bridge down there, you know, Fishing Bridge. We'd get up against it, we'd throw charges out there to break it up.

**MA:** Ice jams underneath the bridge?

**RP:** Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah. I remember one year there, I and old Blue, we rigged up a deal. We put this big old seven-ton, you maybe got that old thing up there yet? The old seven-ton International?

**TW:** No.

**RP:** Okay. Well, we rigged that up. We put a big old boom on the side of that. And we put about a 500-pound weight and we threw it in there and pulled her through, see. By golly, that tore that up. [MA laughs] You know what I mean, see? It was sticking over the bridge. Sometimes it would lift the front end of that big truck around. [Laughs] If we got hung up, we just kept it going. And it tore the darn, tore it up. Just old farmer thinking. You know how you think—

**MA:** So the cable went off of the bridge from the truck down into the water. And it was on the downstream side of the—

**RP:** Upstream, above the grids. Yeah. Great big. And then we had her braced in, tied in on both ends so it couldn't break her off on the end. Yeah, it was quite a deal. That [unclear] work, but it didn't work completely, but it did break up a lot of the ice, see? Gosh, we've been down there at night and thrown out those charges, and boom. Killed a lot of fish.

**TW:** Bill Hape was in on some of that, wasn't he?

**RP:** Yeah. Bill Hape, that was the one that worked for Blue Evans. He, Blue was his foreman [when he started?]. Yeah.

**MA:** So if that hadn't worked right, could you have taken out Fishing Bridge?

**RP:** Well, we had to get it out, see. It never went out. It was a precaution. I don't think it would have took the bridge out. I think it would have went up against it. But it would sometimes, boy, she'd get up within a couple feet of the top of that rascal.

**MA:** Is that right?

**RP:** You bet.

**MA:** Just filling up with pieces of ice.

**RP:** You bet. That ice jamming in there. So that's why we'd use the dynamite, you see, to throw it out there. And just throw charges out there. Oh, yeah, we dynamited some of them, up on Sylvan, too, we dynamited up there sometimes.

**MA:** And you would use that to break up the snow?

**RP:** Blow the snow out, yeah. Mm hmm. I had a permit to work powder, see, and so I worked it. Well, I worked on it when I was just a kid on construction, see, so I and Dave Gwaltney. You heard of him?

**TW:** No.

**RP:** Well him and I, we went to this school course. I knew more than the teacher did about it, but I didn't say nothing. [Laughs] But I knew how to do it. And then we kept all our powder and stuff in that place down there at the old incinerator. It was right, going down to where you got your sewer plants and stuff down there. I don't know whether the building's there or not.

**TW:** They're planning to take it out this summer.

**RP:** I see. Yeah, they had a couple of burners down underneath of there. I never even paid much attention to them.

**MA:** So did anybody ever play pranks on each other?

**RP:** Oh, gosh, yes. [Laughs] One guy up there, he was in the, he'd nail the bacon rind underneath of the cabin there. And then the bear gone under to get the bacon rind out. [Laughs] [unclear] Of course that was just another prank.

**MA:** It wasn't his cabin, apparently.

**RP:** No, no. No, no.

**MA:** It was some other guy's cabin.

**RP:** But he'd nail that bacon rind under there. And I told them two boys, two of them Southern boys, to go over and grease, put bacon grease on the tent stakes or tent ropes for them colored group. That was a bunch of them, what do you call them guys? Job Corps is it or something?

**MA:** Mm hmm.

**RP:** I said, “You go over there and put some of that bacon grease on them.” I said, “That will take care of them.” I guess they tore up a few tents. The bears got them. [Laughs] But that was just what we did, you know, for fun.

**MA:** Did you have any close calls yourself with bears?

**RP:** No, not really. No. But one time I stayed right up, I was in the cabin, in apartments where Joe is at now. And Dale [unclear] he was in the one on the end, clear down—

**MA:** So that would be up above the maintenance shop in the government housing.

**RP:** Uh huh. And Dale was in the house just below. And Dale, he would go jogging every evening. And this is pretty early in the spring. They had the road open. At that time, they’d built this new barn but they didn’t use it back there, the horse barn. They had storage in there. Well he would jog over there. And one time he come over there and he met this bear. And of course you don’t run from a grizzly. You’d just better stand there. If you run, he’ll pull you down, see. And he said that bear come right up to him and made a swipe at him about ten feet from him. But he said then he run back. And he said he run back again and he turned back and Dale said, he said, “I didn’t run yet.” Because, he said, “I didn’t have room to get away.” And he said that then the bear took off. But you don’t want to run from one of them. If he does—

**TW:** Can you have the story of Jerry Mernin, what the bears do?

**RP:** Oh, yes. Yeah. Well this Jerry Mernin, yeah, right by the barn there, we had a couple of traps there. And we had, that’s the year they shut the Trout Creek Dump down, you see. He was, he just walked down to look at them, and here come two big old bear right over the hill, come right up over the bank. They had it kind of graded out there. And he waited, and they come right on him, and he waited till they got right on to them, and he killed them both right there. He went 15 feet from him. And I asked Jerry, I said, “How come you waited that long?”

He said, “The closer they are, the harder that bullet hits them.” He said, “You don’t have to aim.” He said, “You just poke it at them.” And he used the .44 Magnum, I guess, what they use. And by golly, he dropped them both right there. And that one, he said, “Just so they don’t [bust?] the buttons off of my shirt.” That’s what Jerry said. [Laughter] And he got them both right there. Right in front of everybody. That was early in the morning before we went to work, right there. Of course, he was a champion ranger shot in the Park Service, Jerry was. He was real good. But yeah, Jerry was a good man. I worked with him a lot. He was real good. I think he’s at south entrance now, is he? Yeah. I stopped and seen him here a few years ago. He—[cuts out, probably end of original cassette tape] --put him on the top.

**MA:** No, it’s a coyote?

**RP:** Yeah, but not really anything, you know. Buffalo, we never bothered them. You run into them, too, you just let them go by. You just don’t push them. But you’re going to have a lot of trouble this winter up there. The grass, a lot of grass has burnt off. I took four trips to the park this fall. I just wanted to see. Now they’re not telling this whole story. And from Mount

Washburn clear to the river, I'm looking at fifty plus thousand acres all burnt off. And that's all winter rains. And all on the Black Tail Deer Creek there, another fifty thousand plus acres. All burnt. All gone. There's nothing there. And that's winter rains. And Hoppy told me up at the head of the Lamar, he said there's about five thousand grazing there. He said that all burnt off.

And they say that we don't need to feed them. But I want to tell you something. You take a couple hundred thousand acres of grass, and that's a lot of winter feed. And they got thirty thousand head of elk up there. I know I was in the cow business up until we left the ranch there. And I know if I had a hundred head of cows, I had to have feed for a hundred head of cows. And that's what we run, a hundred head of cows. And if we didn't have, we'd get rid of some of them or get some feed. That's just what it is. I don't know why they say that.

Now they used to feed the buffalo in the park. Now when I was a kid, I worked one, I forgot about this, one summer. And we went up and it was way back in the thirties, and we mowed hay up in the buffalo ranch, all that meadows there. Then we irrigated it. And we used to take them mowing machine right from up in the valley up there. [Trail them in there, clearing?] any buffalo ranch.

**MA:** So that was right around Lamar that you hayed.

**RP:** Yeah.

**MA:** Were there other places where they cut hay?

**RP:** They hayed up in the back of the, let's see, going out towards Mary's Bay. And there's an old road that goes up and it comes in up about Cub Creek.

**TW:** [unclear] Road?

**RP:** Yes. And they hayed in there, years and years ago. Blue Evans would tell me that. I didn't know. I never was around. He said they put a lot of hay up there.

**MA:** That was for horses, or—

**RP:** They put it up for horses, and then they'd feed the animals. But I remember one time I went to the park and oh, right about the time we got married. And they was bringing a herd of buffalo come up where they, I don't know where they'd come. We met them, just we'd crossed the Lenore River. And there was five hundred buffalo following this hay wagon.

**MA:** And what year did you say that was?

**RP:** Oh, about 1932 or three, along in there. And they would come from up Slough Creek or someplace, I don't know where. And they'd take them to buffalo ranch and they'd feed them there. And they used to put up a lot of hay there. I mean, a lot of hay. They would stack it and then bale it and then pile it, see? That's how, with the stationary balers. They didn't use balers like now. And that's what they used to do with it. And they irrigated all of that. You might see

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some ditches up in there if you just notice. Of course, I'm familiar with ditches. Right across from the buffalo ranch grounds, there's ditches all along there. They've irrigated all of the meadows there. And they would take old horse mowers up there.

**MA:** So when you were helping with the mowing, you were using horse-drawn mowers.

**RP:** Oh, my, yes. We didn't do it with the tractors, they just pull [unclear]. Oh, yeah. I went up this one summer there. People had a ranch up the valley. They had a contract. They don't it about every year there. Yeah. Done it for a buck and a half a day. That was the price. Of course, they fed us.

**MA:** And put you up.

**RP:** Yeah. Put us up. We said a buck and a half and they eat us. That's the way we said it.

**MA:** A buck and a half and they eat us?

**RP:** They eat us. [Laughs] I said they fed us. That's an expression we had, you know. But that was good money then. Good money then. You could buy a pair of Levis for about a buck. I paid 26 dollars for these.

**MA:** A little more recently.

**RP:** Yeah.

**MA:** I was wondering if you thought that there were any changes in the kind of qualities that people respected. Like when you first started up there, the kind of people, who were the men that you most respected? And whether those same men would be respected today.

**RP:** I think so. I found out that, like the law, the ranger division, I got along good with all those people. But if you treat them right, they'll treat you right, you know. And I found that they always treated me good, you know. And I think that most of the employees there, oh, you had some, you know, But I think that, I know we thought a lot of our [part?]. I remember the last, just before I left there, we had a fire down on the east, oh, below Grant Village. And I can't remember just where it was at. And Jerry Mernin come and he ask me, he said, "Red, I need about thirty people. Men." And so I remember I called up Canyon over there. And I said, "I need ten of your men." And he said, "I just don't have anybody." I said, "Our park's on fire. And we need them." And Grant Village, they sent some. And Canyon sent some. And Grant Village. We sent thirty men down there and they took a helicopter, we took them in. And I flew in and we looked it over. The next day, that fire was out, see? We sent these thirty men, of our men, got them out in a day. Now if we'd let it go on, it could have been into one of these things just like you had this summer. But that was--

**MA:** So what did you have to fight the fire at that—you had a helicopter.

**RP:** That was these first years they put these buckets, you know, these buckets. They done the work. The crew went in there. But I mean, they kind of mopped up. But it was at this lake. I can't tell you the lake. I don't remember. And they just scooped that water right out of that lake.

**MA:** The helicopter scooped it out.

**RP:** Mm hmm. Yes. Mm hmm. And that same summer, just that summer, they tested it right out in front of the Lake Hotel. They tested it out in front of the ranger station. That's the first time I seen it, just to see how it worked. They used it then. And that was then. It was a no-burn policy then. My idea, if a fire get there, the fastest with the mostest. And that's the idea. Because fire can just, you see what happened. One million acres. It's going to cost three hundred million dollars to fix that before they get done. Three hundred times more than they spent in the history of the park. Because they let it get out of hand. I can't see them letting fire burn like that. I just—maybe, maybe it might be all right.

But gee, you can't—and I seen, last night on the TV, one of these Snow Cats was taking this bunch of Japanese in. And he turned back and he said, "It will look real good from a hundred to 200 years," he said, "it will all grow back." Now it was right on the TV. And boy, he turned around and start driving. But he shouldn't have said that, see? That's what he said. And that's about the truth. It will. And you watch it this summer. You watch it for the next five years. There's some of that won't grow at all. It's cooked. There's nothing there. It killed the soil.

**MA:** So was that the main fire that you remember during the time that you were there?

**RP:** That's the only one that I, in all the time I was there. They had them in other parks, but they had always put them out. Just overnight, they had them out, see. Get out. Get there, like I said, fast, and put them out. You've got an acre fire and you surround that guy, it don't get no momentum, see? But you get it to burning. There was no chance this summer. When we left, we went up there that one time we left Canyon, went over Dunraven. And there was a couple of rangers pulled right in behind us, a lady and a man. So I told them, I said if they had the whole United States Army here, they couldn't put them fires out. He said, "You're right." I said, "But they was saying down at Mammoth that there would be no problem at all." He said, "Who said that?"

I said, "Some of your employees right down at Mammoth." I said, "There's no way they could put it out." And they couldn't. We drove up there when that was coming up, that Lewis River. Old Faithful coming up through there to that north junction, right there. And they shut the road off right on us. That son of a gun was a mile high in the air. You wouldn't get in front of that. They were cutting trees down there right in front of that museum there at Norris Junction. And they had a crew of men there. And boy, they was really cutting trees down. And that fire went right over the top of that thing. But they stood there with about four or five fire engines and saved the buildings. But you don't, you can't fight them. Just, no way. And they talk about they didn't lose many animals up there. I don't believe that. Because I've seen the fire in 1936 up there on 8 Mile. And one afternoon it burned through there and they found fifty plus dead deer in that fire in that afternoon. And they didn't get away. But it was about a 50-mile wind blowing. It was about the middle of August. I know we were thrashing, my folks had a big ranch up the

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valley there. We were thrashing and we seen that fire. And it started at Emigrant and it went that afternoon clear to 8 Mile Creek, about 15 miles in that length of time.

**MA:** I was wondering what you would say were the other main changes in the way they run the park now, and the way that things were done at the time that you worked there.

**RP:** Well one thing, they don't kill the animals. I've got a letter that I wrote back to Mansfield. And they were shooting elk right on, and dressing them out right on the highway. And I wrote to Mansfield and told him. And they wrote back to the Park Service. And I took pictures of it. I think we've probably still got them in our albums. And I said I thought that park wasn't for [hunting?]. And the reason I knew about it, because our son, he was help dressing them out. And they brought them in down there and the rangers would shoot them early in the morning. They didn't dress them out till that afternoon. Well, they were spoiled, see. They brought them down to the packing house down here. And they'd bring in two or three hundred at a time, you know, just had them [ricked?] out there. Half of them was spoiled. And they was taking them to the Indian reservations and someplace, you know.

**MA:** When was this?

**RP:** That would be about 1950, about 1950. Lon Garrison was the superintendent there, I remember, then. And we got a letter back from them. And they turned it over to the superintendent of the park. But they were up there shooting them. And then they'd go on back to Mammoth and have their coffee.

**MA:** You mean that this was not supposed to be official policy in 1950?

**RP:** That was the policy. They said they wouldn't allow hunting, but they could go in and hunt them, see? But if they'd go in and shoot them, why waste the meat, you know? That's the idea. They should have put out some permits and let some hunters go in and get them if they're going to do that. But they spoil. That's the reason, I knew they would spoil down there, see? Yeah, I've got a whole cigar box full of old teeth. Our son, he said he was the head man. He cut the heads off of them. [Laughs] I got the teeth along [with the head off?].

**MA:** So you got the ivories, huh?

**RP:** Oh, yeah. I must have got two or three hundred pair of them.

**MA:** So were the ivories the only ones that people saved?

**RP:** Oh, yeah. That's the only one. They all have ivory. But the older bones have a big ring in them. They're the nice ones, you know, the big, long ones.

**MA:** Oh. So is that basically just two teeth?

**RP:** Two teeth. There's two ivory teeth in there. Cows have them, too. They have them, but they're not very big. But the bulls, the big bulls, they all have the big, twice as big a tooth.

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**MA:** Uh huh. So did you hear very many stories of people from the local area that would go into the park for ivories?

**RP:** Oh, gosh. There was some poaching. I know there was poaching all the time in the park when I was there. Because I could hear them talking, you know.

**MA:** The employees, or—

**RP:** No, no. There was a bunch of construction workers there. They caught a bunch of them one time. They would generally catch them up on Swan Lake Flat, between there and Norris Junction, you know. They'd get [a little timber?] there.

**MA:** You mean construction workers that were working inside the park?

**RP:** Yes, uh huh. But they knew the ropes, you know. Knew how to do it.

**MA:** Knew where the rangers were.

**RP:** Knew where the ranger was. And they had the routine figured out.

**MA:** So they were shooting elk?

**RP:** Yeah. Oh, yes. And we had one boy went to work for, he went and worked for me. He was with Park Gen, what we called it then. He was down, and he was hauling in some material down there where your big power plant is there below the, Montana Power. I walked around and he said, "What are you looking at, Red?" And I says, "You don't have a box built on this." He says, "What for?" I said, "A meat box." And I knew that family was a bunch of poachers. [Laughs] He said, "No, I haven't got one built yet." [Laughs] But he was a poacher. And they'd got one of his brothers. They'd just dumped him off. And they'd caught one of his brothers in there, just poaching right there. But I was just kidding myself. He said, "What are you looking for?" I said, "Well, I was just looking for a place. You don't have a box underneath the truck here." "What for?" I said, "To put your meat in." He said, "I'll get one put on," he says. [Laughter] Yeah.

**MA:** So at the time you were working there, did you sense any difference in the way that maintenance people looked at the wildlife compared with the way that the rangers did?

**RP:** I'll tell you, I think we had a little more feeling for our park. I know I did. This was my park. You know, we had a feeling for it. I think that attitude was more that well, it was our park and we should take care of it. See, I had a good feeling about it, you know. I wouldn't walk by any, if I seen a paper, I picked it up. I just felt that way. Not that I had to do it. And I remember one time we was down at the Dragon's Mouth. And I told one of the boys, "Go down and pick that paper up." He said, "Aw, it's quitting time." And so I went down. It was a ten-dollar bill. [Laughter] He said, "Are you going to split it?" I said, "I'm going to split it right here in my pocket." He could have went down and got it, see. So I went down there. But I mean, I had a feeling that way.

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**MA:** So you're saying that some people felt it was more their park. Meaning?

**RP:** Oh, I think so. They really did.

**MA:** Which people?

**RP:** Well, it was the older people. Then when this new group come in, see, I mean, it was a little change there, I could see.

**MA:** So it didn't matter whether they were rangers or maintenance workers. It was the age that had more to do with it.

**RP:** No, no, no. Yeah, that's right. Yeah. But I found out most of the boys we got, they're from good families, and they wanted to make it. In fact, I was just talking to one of the boys who worked for me. He lives right across behind us here. Don [Craigy's?] the name. I just asked him where he was at. And he said well, he said, he's working for Montana Power. He's a foreman down there. But they were good boys. Just good kids.

And I remember one time we'd sent a crew out, way back out in the lake there to tear out a bunch of fish traps. And two of these boys, it was their days off. But they had to go. They went out and worked, by gosh, with that crew right with the restaurant of them for nothing, see? Because they wanted to be with our gang. They don't do it like that now.

**MA:** No. They'd want double time.

**RP:** Yeah. By gosh, them boys went out there.

**MA:** So when you say tearing out fish traps.

**RP:** Well they built in the 1930s, they had built some fish traps. That would be, you know where the Trail Creek is, cabin, okay, off to the left where the Yellowstone River comes in right there, Trail Creek, you know, and them big swamps. That's the start of the Yellowstone. And off to the left. And you just take it, there's a creek goes back up there. I don't know the name of the creek.

**MA:** Meaning that would be east?

**RP:** That would be east in there, yes. And they had huge, big fish traps in there. Well, they wanted them all tore out. So we took in about ten, we spent all of one night, took ten boys in there. And spent the night in there. Set up a camp. And we parked the old craft out in the lake and then we took the boat, the little boat. Two little boats. And then we piled this [unclear]. And then we went back a couple months later. They had some damage [unclear]

**MA:** What is a fish trap?

**RP:** Well that was where they, for spawning, for spawning for the fish, you know, for the fish, fish and wildlife in the park, they built them, see. Well they're the ones that built the fish in the fish hatchery there. See, that was the Fish and Wildlife had it then. But now they don't do none of that. When I was first there, they had the fish hatchery down there, it was all open. And you had big tanks. Maybe, you ever see them? They're up—

**TW:** I never saw the tanks.

**RP:** Well, they were upstairs there. And they had fish in them. And the troughs, I think we filled the troughs in where the fish swam through. Oh, yes, it was a big, it was an exhibit, exhibit building there. And should have kept it there, you see. But they shut that all down. It's all gone.

**MA:** They should have kept it there for people to see?

**RP:** You bet. Oh, yeah. And they had these big, big glass tanks, big as oh, six, eight foot, you know. And all different fish. They had grayling in them and all the different fish. But then of course they come up that stream right there back there, you know. And they raised the fish there, see, and then they dumped them out in the lake. They had these others back there. They were good. They said it was CC boys back in the early 1930s was when they built all these fish traps back in them areas.

**MA:** So they would put planks in the stream bed?

**RP:** They had it just dammed off, see. Then they had a trough go through so they could let the water out. Then they had troughs all going different ways. How they operated it, I really don't know.

**MA:** But basically they could probably jump over the little dams, and then they could grab them.

**RP:** Well, yes, yes, yes. That's where they had the, then they'd catch the spawns or whatever. I really don't know why they had them there. Then in another area we went, we took out a bunch some other place. But so many places I've been there. It was off on the right toward [unclear] Village.

**MA:** Flat Mountain Arm? Or one of those other arms.

**RP:** In that area right there, in Flat Mountain somewhere, yes, we went back in there. And that's the first time I ever seen 16-inch plank. Two by 16, 16 inches wide.

**MA:** Wow. That came from big trees.

**RP:** You bet. You don't find them now. And there wasn't a knot in them. And they was just like brand new. They'd been underwater, you know. Pile them up and burn them. Yeah. That's what they do. The Park Service, though, I thought it was wrong the way they did it. They'd put a post in the ground, or four by four, for a sign, and paint the top and put their post in the ground. Now to me, I'd have treated the bottom. But they told me, said, "You know, we've got to have a job

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for the next generation.” [Laughter] That’s what they said. But I would have treated that post, see. Because I’ve got posts still all on our ranch up there, that we still have a ranch up there, that I put in in the 1940s, and they’re still in the ground. But I treated them.

**TW:** They don’t even want us to paint the tops now.

**RP:** No, I suppose so. That’s the bad part of it. I seen a lot of things that I’d have done different, you know.

**MA:** Did you have any interest in working in any other national park?

**RP:** No. No, I didn’t. No, I sure didn’t. I didn’t even want to go up there. And it’s just Bill Armstrong, he come, I knew Bill Armstrong from when we were kids. In fact, we [girted?] around together, you know, and a good guy. And he said, “Red,” he said, “you come up and go to work for us,” he said. He said he knew we just sold the ranch and he said, “We sure need somebody that can do things,” see. So I worked there that first year as a truck driver. And then [unclear] the rest of the years. But now Armstrong was a good operator. In fact, when he was there, I’ll tell you, he set the program for the whole park. All the districts. Really, he did, because he knew what he was doing. And Bill Hape and the whole bunch would listen to Bill Armstrong. He lives right down the street here, Bill does.

**MA:** Yeah, I met him at Bill Hape’s retirement party.

**RP:** Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah, Armstrong’s a good guy. And I mean, he was tough on a guy if you didn’t do it right. But if you done right, I’ll tell you, he’d go to bat for you right now, right down to—so that’s the reason I went up there. And then finally when she got so busy, I said, “I want to quit.” So I just quit. And I know they called me and wanted me to come up and help them out for a while. As a guest. I said, “If you don’t have enough money to pay me,” I said, “then I don’t want to come.” [Laughs] But I told them to stop down, this one guy, and I would tell him everything I could tell him. So he did a couple of times. So that was--

**MA:** You could have gotten consultant wages, too.

**RP:** Yeah, well. Put a dollar sign on everything you do, you know. Now the park meant a lot to me, though. See, my dad drove a stagecoach in the years of ’08, ’09 and ’10 up there, for the old transportation, that’s what they called it then.

**MA:** Did you ever go with him?

**RP:** No, no. He was, that was back—

**MA:** Oh, that was before you were born.

**RP:** He wasn’t even married.

**TW:** Six-horse team?

**RP:** Four-horse, four-horse team. Said it took four and a half days to go around the park. That's what it was. He said they used to have a hotel, Fountain Hotel. There's nothing there now. And they had the big barns back of the Lake Hotel. They kept the barn and everything. They tore all that out while I was there. It used to be a bullpen we called it back there, you know. That's all gone now.

**MA:** Is that where the parking lots were behind the—

**RP:** Where the post office is and all that. Because that was all built back when I was there. But they tore all them buildings down, everything. Used to be great big buildings way back, and we went in and wrecked all of that. It was a shame to tear some awful good buildings. They built the old station down over there at east entrance. And the thing was still smoldering when they got the orders to preserve all the old buildings. She was still a-smoking over there. I remember I had this Indian kid, he was working for me. And he said, "I'll burn it down for you." He got there inside and built a fire in the middle of the floor. [Laughs] Pretty quick, by gosh, the wind was busting out of it, it got so hot in there.

**MA:** So that must have been hard for you to see the stage stations go when your father had—

**RP:** Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It was too bad. Yeah. They used to load them up down here at Gardiner. That's where they had to load them in there. And it took a four and a half day trip to haul about eleven people to a stage. He said they had one holdup along Craig Pass somewhere. The road used to come in over by the natural bridge, back of Bridge Bay now. There was a highway then. It went up through there and come out. It didn't go where it's at now. That was the old stage road, the old road.

**MA:** So the holdup was—

**RP:** Up Craig Pass, on top of, above, between Old Faithful and [unclear] where it was at.

**MA:** Did they rob the people on board? Or did he have—

**RP:** Yeah, he said they just robbed everybody on it. That's when the soldiers run the park then, see. See, 1915, it started as Park Service. And that was the Army camp. And the soldiers, they run the park. So then they said for a long time they run four soldiers, two ahead and two back in front of the stage on horseback.

**MA:** Was his the first holdup?

**RP:** No, they'd had them before then, I guess. But he said it was, he just took the money and moved on. But then he said it was mostly all people from Poland, Europeans. He said they was the people that had, that's the one who was there then. He said there was hardly any American people traveling. He said rich people from back east and Europe. And he said that they would, he said they made more on tips than they did on their wages. Just from the tips. Yeah, and they built

the whole town, he said. It was brand new when he was there. It was about 1906, I think, they built the Lake Hotel.

**MA:** So did he tell you stories about what the roads were like?

**RP:** Oh, they had the water wagons. And they watered the roads all the time, sprinkled them all the time.

**MA:** That would be a big job to—

**RP:** Oh, yes. He said they'd pick up like at, any of the streams there, they just had an old hand pump, and they'd pump her in by hand.

**MA:** Just trying to keep the dust down.

**RP:** Keep the dust down. Yeah. Yeah. All through the whole thing, he said, they had these wagons. They used to have one down at the CC camp down there in one of the buildings, but it's tore down now. They had all them old stuff, antique deals there. But they're all gone. I drove in there, and they tore that all down. I don't know what they did, they had a little water wagon and two or three old stagecoaches in there. And firetrucks and stuff. But whatever they had—

**MA:** Uh huh. Did he say anything about having any famous people ride with him?

**RP:** No, he didn't. Not really. No.

**MA:** Did he like, was that a [unclear]

**RP:** He just worked in the summer there. He just come in—oh, he did say when they come in, they come into West Yellowstone. And they hadn't got the railroad built in there yet. So he said that they stole a handcar, he said, and come as far as the track. [Laughs] They come in, that's where he signed in at West Yellowstone.

**MA:** That's how he got there?

**RP:** Yeah. He said, him and two boys, he said they stole the handcar off of this—[cuts off, probably end of second tape side]

**MA:** --his son?

**RP:** Yeah, because it was nepotism, see, then. And he wanted for a ranger, you know, seasonal ranger. And of course he's college educated and he could have got it, see. But he couldn't do it because I was working in the same district.

**MA:** He couldn't work anywhere in the park?

**RP:** He couldn't work in that district there when I was there. Because he was going to stay with me. And that would have been, they said, well, whatever. Yeah. But they changed that the very next year. But they called it whatever it is, the nepotism or whatever you call it.

**MA:** Yeah. So you were talking about how your father stole a handcar. He had come on the train that far?

**RP:** I can't tell you how he come, I don't know. He said when we got to this construction place, he says, he says so we stole this handcar and drove as far as the tracks went. Wherever this was. And he said they walked on in to wherever, into West Yellowstone. And that's where they hired out. So then before that, they'd come out of Bozeman on a stagecoach, see, into Bozeman. And then take from there, go through the park, see.

**MA:** Yeah.

**RP:** But that was a Union Pacific built that engine.

**MA:** So did he tell you how much he got paid?

**RP:** Forty-five dollars a month.

**MA:** A month.

**RP:** That's what he got.

**MA:** And then did they eat him?

**RP:** They fed him. They eat him. [Laughter] But he said he made that, he said he'd make that almost every trip on tips. About thirty, forty dollars every trip. It's a four and a half day trip, he said.

**MA:** That would have been good money then.

**RP:** Oh, yeah. Then it was, yeah. So it was a, have you been in that old cemetery there?

**TW:** Out of Mammoth?

**RP:** Right out of Mammoth.

**TW:** Old soldiers' cemetery?

**RP:** Yes. Yeah.

**TW:** We've been by it. I haven't been—

**RP:** We go down there, a couple of years ago, more than that, we went down, we looked in, and we seen the casket where a badger had dug it out, we seen the casket down in there.

**MA:** So when your father talked about his work in Yellowstone Park, did it sound like it was one of his favorite memories? Or did it [unclear]

**RP:** Oh, he talked about it. My dad was a champion cowboy. Well, it wasn't rodeo then. He was a bronc rider, was what he really was. And he come from eastern Montana. So he was quite a, even when we was growing up, he had a relay [screen?]. He could come to the rodeo down here and ride these relay horses in the rodeos. Yeah, he was a cowboy. Raised 14 of us kids. But he said then, he said there wasn't, thirty, forty thousand a year's all that went through. Not many. I don't know, just not very many. You know, you got to take—

**MA:** In terms of visitors.

**RP:** And you couldn't, you know, when you take them through on the stagecoach, it's going to take a lot to haul ten thousand people, a lot of trips. Then he said they used to go through with horses and they'd camp, people would camp. You know, just different ones. Well, I've talked to old timers. They'd spend five, six days going through the park just with a wagon and they'd camp out. They had to be careful where they'd camp because of the bears, you know. It was different than it is now. A lot different.

I remember the first time I went to the park, there was only about, oh, two or three hundred thousand people went through then. I remember in 1948 it was the year they had a million. Now it's two plus. And on the same roads, just about. You think about it, you put that much traffic, a million people, two million people on about a hundred days on a single-lane road, there's a lot of traffic on that road. You think about it, a lot of traffic. It's like a big city, almost.

**TW:** A lot of patching.

**RP:** A lot of patching, you bet. And you've only got a hundred days to do that. You don't even have that. You can't put patches in on a wet road, so what do you do? But I think the park, I still think it's all right. I think the park will [make out?]. Sure, we had a big fire, and I think they learned something about it. I'll bet you, though, that the next time they have a big fire, I bet they're out there a little differently than what they're doing now. They don't like to admit that, though. But I bet you they do, I just from my lifetime, I can see what I think they should do. I know you can't burn your house down and still have a house. I know that. You can't burn nothing down and still have it. It takes too long, when they say a hundred years to come back, that's two lifetimes, you know, of living, of growing lifetimes. And that's too long. And when you take half of our park burnt, that's too much. It got away from them. And it was the driest year we've ever had. So it really got away from them. Too bad, but that's what it is.

**MA:** Did you have anything else you wanted to ask?

**TW:** No, I can't think of anything.

**MA:** Well, thank you very much.

**RP:** Okay. That's all right.

**MA:** Is there anything you wanted to add?

**RP:** No, I can't think of really anything. A few little old crazy stories I could repeat, different things.

**MA:** We're ready to hear them, if you're ready to tell them.

**RP:** No, not really. But I still like our park. Yeah, you bet. Well, I like my country. When the flag goes by, I take my hat off. [cuts off, starts up again] Well that morning we left the barn area there, we discovered a bear in their packer so we slammed the door on him. Then we started picking up garbage. And he was getting a little bit tight, time we got over to that trailer court over there. And this girl out in front, she heard a bunch of thumping. She said, "What's that?" We said, "We've got a bear in there." She said, "If you've got a bear in there, I've got a moose in this trailer." We opened that door. And that bear got out. [Laughs] So she opened the door of her trailer and her dad came out and he was this wide. [Laughter] [unclear] So we got the end of the [day?] and we just opened the door and let the bear out, see. We really had one in there. But he was getting pretty tight as the old garbage was coming in on him, see. But he was really pounding on the side there. And her dad, by golly, she come out to the door and he listened to this and he was playing the game. He come out a-grinning, and he just filled this door plum full. Weighed about four hundred. [Laughter]

[End of interview]



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**MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL  
HISTORIES**

**WILLIAM “SCOTT” CHAPMAN  
PARK RANGER  
WITH COMMENTS BY LOUISE CHAPMAN**

INTERVIEWED BY  
MARJANE AMBLER  
AUTHOR

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**NARRATOR:**

William Scott Chapman was born July 20, 1907, in the Big Sioux River valley, Iowa. His parents were William Winchester Chapman and Lois F. Scott. Scott, as William Jr. went by, moved frequently as his family pursued opportunities in agriculture, timber, and mining. Between 1926 and 1930 Scott attended the school of forestry at Colorado State University, where he met Yellowstone chief ranger George Baggley. Upon Chapman's graduation, Baggley secured a placement for him as an emergency permanent ranger.

Chapman worked at Yellowstone until 1962, a record breaking thirty-two years without transfer. For the first twelve years, Chapman manned backcountry ranger stations including Hellroaring, Gallatin, and Bechler, where his duties included wildlife control, trail making, and patrolling for poachers. In 1932 Chapman married Louise Elizabeth Gibbs, who took to the isolated lifestyle quickly. The following year, the first of the couple's three sons was born: William "Bill" Chapman.

In 1942 Chapman was reassigned to the work for the head ranger's office in Mammoth, and the family enjoyed a more conventional way of life. The couple purchased property in Gardiner, Montana, in 1946 where Louise lived while Scott continued working in Mammoth. Sons Dan and Jon were born there in 1948 and 1950. Following his retirement, Chapman lived in Gardiner until his death on December 6, 2000.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Born May 19, 1948, in Colorado, Marjane Ambler began a career in journalism in 1968. Ambler worked in various positions including as editor of the "High Country News," an environmental publication, from 1974 to 1980.

In 1984, Ambler's husband Terry Wehrman accepted a position as a snow groomer in Lake Village, Yellowstone National Park. The couple spent the next nine years living year-round in the interior of Yellowstone. Ambler worked as a volunteer during the early years and as an interpretive ranger during the summers of 1990-1993.

During her time at Lake Village, Ambler began to collect the recollections of the other park employees and family members within her small social circle, as well former park employees who experienced living and working in the park interior in past decades or whose careers were otherwise notable. These activities culminated in Ambler's 2013 book "Yellowstone Has Teeth," which narrated the recollections of Ambler's interviewees interwoven with her own experiences.

Ambler and Wehrman left Lake Village in 1993, after which Ambler served as editor of the "Tribal College Journal" from 1995 to 2006. Ambler is also the author of "Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development" published by University Press of Kansas in

Scott Chapman, December 15, 1988, and January 21, 1989 (YELL 188046-OH5)

1990. Ambler and Wehrman split time between homes in Atlantic City, Wyoming, and Lake Havasu, Arizona.

**SUMMARY:**

This interview is wide ranging, covering stories and experiences from Chapman's extensive career at Yellowstone. Major topics include the nature of ranger work in the 1930s; winter living conditions; Chapman's work on the Lamar Buffalo Ranch; transportation (skiing and horses); challenges raising Bill in backcountry isolation; family and social life in Mammoth, West Yellowstone, and in backcountry posts; the Park's history of wildlife management (especially the elk culling program, which Chapman helped administer); run-ins with poachers; firefighting; and Chapman's recollections of other influential rangers including George Baggley, Joe Douglas, and Harry Trischman.

**Restrictions:** None

**Format:** Three cassette tapes, 148 minutes total recording time. Digitized using TEAC player/recorder on June 27, 2019.

**Transcript:** Transcribed by Marjane Ambler, January 1989? Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Barrett Codieck, Yellowstone National Park Archives Intern, July 2019. Transcript 38 pages.

**Technical Note:** There are gaps in audio at the beginning of each side, possibly due to an error in copying the cassette tape. The original transcript provides the missing text, which is indicated in this document by brackets.

**Scott Chapman interviewed by Marjane Ambler  
in Gardiner, Montana, December 15, 1988, and January 21, 1989  
with comments by Louise Chapman and Terry Wehrman**

**Narrator:** Scott Chapman (SC)

**Interviewer:** Marjane Ambler (MA)

**Also present:** Louise Chapman (LC), Terry Wehrman (TW)

**First interview: December 15, 1988**

**SC:** [...a few times before I came on as a permanent ranger] in 1930. I came from Colorado State, "Aggies" they called it at that time, in June of 1930, and there was a vacancy on the staff at that time, so I was put on as an emergency permanent as of June 1930. I came up from Livingston on the old excursion train, and I sure was glad I didn't miss that. That was an experience I loved, gee I liked that trip from Livingston up here. I only made it two or three times, but it was always much more pleasant than coming up in a car, especially with the roads they had in those days.

**MA:** Let me interrupt just a minute, Scotty, and we'll try a little formal introduction. I'll just say I'm Marjane Ambler and I'm in Gardiner, Montana, and this is December 15, 1988, and we're interviewing Scotty Chapman. What's your official name?

**SC:** William Scott Chapman. I use Scott mostly.

**MA:** We want to have a little bit more background about where you were born and your parents' names.

**SC:** Oh, I was born on the Sioux River in Iowa, on the South Dakota line, July 20, 1907. My dad was one of the pioneers there, kind of a pioneer, along the Sioux River at that time. He and his father used to cut prairie hay there before it was farmland and sent the hay to Chicago for race horses. It was much better than any hay they had in the East. They did that until it became corn, wheat, grain farming there in western Iowa. Then my dad and his father went into thrashing grain and shelling corn. I was there until I was about four, and then my father moved to New York because my mother was an Easterner. Her father died, and we had to go back and sell his farm. My dad in the meantime bought another farm, so we stayed nine years back there before we returned to the West.

**MA:** In New York?

**SC:** Yeah, the central part of New York, in the Mohawk Valley. We had a beautiful farm there, with two forests on it. Probably fifty species of hardwood trees, as well as cedar and hemlock and things like that. A beautiful place. I grew up there, and that's where I got the bug to be a forester and a ranger. I got it right there on my dad's place. Before we did move back West, my dad got into the lumbering business in the Adirondack Mountains of New York. He drove a

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logging tractor with about four or five trailers behind it on an ice track. They would bring them out of the woods and boom them along the river. In the spring, they'd drive them down to the pulp mills for pulp.

**MA:** Your father's name?

**SC:** His name was William Winchester. He was a Westerner at heart, so after being there for nine years, we sold that place, and we went to the Black Hills. We got in the Black Hills in 1924. That was before Mount Rushmore was carved, you know? He ran a mine there. Keystone was the name of the town. Still is the name of the headquarters town at Mount Rushmore. We had a little cabin right there under Mount Rushmore. It was the most beautiful mountain before it was carved you ever saw in your life. I don't think the Park Service did anything to be proud of when they put those faces on Mount Rushmore because it was just the most beautiful... And one of the last wild elk herds in the West was living right under the thing so when they had the dedication, they killed the elk, and they had a big barbecue there. And they had Calvin Coolidge there to dedicate the thing. I'd gone then. I left there in '25, and it was '26 when they started carving on the mountain.

We went from there to Colorado. In Colorado we got into a business of shelling beans and corn from the great big American plains east of Colorado Springs. In the '20s there was enough moisture in that country to raise a crop now and then. So when some of these poor Oklahomans and people from the Southwest would take up a little homestead, and they'd put in a little corn, a little beans. They just barely got by. The living conditions were horrible. They'd have a little one room shack, and they'd have about five people living in it. They just barely made it. Then of course when the weather became more...drought, especially in the early '30s, they all moved out. It just wiped them out.

**MA:** So that was about the time you were called on an emergency basis to Yellowstone?

**SC:** Well, no. That was in 1925. About that time, I decided I would go to college. So I went up to Fort Collins and entered the forestry school there in 1926. My dad and mother were still down in southern Colorado, but they decided they didn't have any reason to stay there. So they sold the thrashing outfits and moved to Fort Collins, where the school was. They bought a small irrigated ranch west of Fort Collins and that was where I lived while I was going to school there. I graduated in '30. The chief ranger, George Baggley, had gone to Fort Collins to school. He had taken an adult special course, and I became acquainted with him and also with one or two other people that came up here in 1929, the year before I came on. There was Rudolph Grimm and George Baggley and John McLaughlin, who later was superintendent here, and a fellow by the name of Don Field and George Walker. Those are the ones I can think of right now. They came in '29. Then George, he and I had known each other in college so when...

**MA:** George Baggley?

**SC:** Yeah, so when I took the examination the first time in '26, he kind of put my name on the list. After I got on the list, he told me to come up. He thought he would give me a seasonal job for that summer. I came on up. Sure enough, when I got here there was a vacancy, an emergency

permanent, as soon as I got here. So for all practical purposes, I was a permanent ranger from June 1930 until July 1962. That summer of 1930 I spent at Mammoth. That was the summer that I will always cherish. Harry Trischman, who was one of the old legends of rangers, was my supervisor here. The first thing he did was to say, "Well, come over to the barn, I'll give you a horse." So we went over to the barn, and he gave me a great big old blue roan horse that kind of looked at me out of the corner of his eye. I think he was trying to job me. On account of the Aggie boys were beginning to take over up here, and he thought, "Maybe I'll just give this boy a little funnin' before we do anything else." The first time I rode the horse, I knew there was something a little bit wrong. Sure enough, he was a loco horse, but I hadn't been raised on a farm all my life for nothing. The horse and I got along fine; we never had a bit of trouble.

**MA:** You passed the test?

**SC:** Oh yeah, I passed the test. Another one was Joe Douglas. He was an old Philippine campaign veteran. He came in the service in Yosemite two or three years before that. He came up here as a ranger in the late '20s. I think it was the late '20s. It was in the '20s anyway. He was working in the ranger storeroom one day. He was making a bunch of sling ropes for the old sawbuck saddles they used to use for packing. I guess he was the only one of the ranger force that was any good at whipping ropes and putting loops in ropes and braiding and so on. I had learned that down in Colorado, of all places, in college. [Laughs] I said, "Do you want some help?" He looked at me and said can you do it? I said, "Sure." So I sat down, and from then on, Joe Douglas was the best friend I ever had in my life. In fact, he was such a good friend that he gave my wife a horse when we were married about a year later and a set of silver. He said you guys can't live on pewter. Joe Douglas was the best friend I ever had on the ranger force. He died in the '30s after retiring, and that was certainly a big loss. But he was certainly a friend to Louise and me while we were...

I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit. June of '31, I was assigned to Soda Butte. The Soda Butte Ranger Station was right across from Soda Butte. There's no buildings at all there now. But at that time, there was a two room ranger station directly across from Soda Butte and a little bit to the east of that were a stage station and a horse barn and a bunkhouse. The mail was carried from Gardiner to Cooke City by horse team during the winter, they used a sled in winter. In summer they used a little truck. It was a three day trip in the winter. They would put in on the sled, and they would go from Gardiner to Tower Falls--Vancy's old place there at Pleasant Valley. Then they would change horses the next day, and they would go to Soda Butte. The third day they would go from Soda Butte to Cooke City. They would stay one night at Pleasant Valley, one night at Soda Butte in route, and then they would lay over a day at Cooke City and then get the mail and come back. The return trip took three more days, so it was just weekly. It took seven days for them to go and come to Cooke City. The roads in those days were poor up there--that was before they built the Cooke City highway--they were just like a person's lane going down to the cow barn. It was just an old dirt road and no bridges over most of the creeks, so we just forded them. The cars even in the summer would ford the creeks instead of using a bridge. They had a road crew there, a Mister Briar. He and his wife had a sheep wagon.

[Telephone rings, pause in recording]

**MA:** Yeah, but it's so wonderful I don't want to cut you off. You were just talking about a Mister Briar.

**SC:** He maintained the road between Tower and the Northeast Entrance. He had a team of horses and two boys working for him, and his wife did the cooking. And they ate and slept in a sheep wagon. They had a tent for the hired help. They would camp near the Buffalo Ranch, which is the Lamar Unit now, for the first part of their summer. They would work up that far, then they would move camp up to Pebble Creek and work that section of road with just their team and a horse-drawn grader. They had a camp or two between there and Northeast Entrance. So they spent the summer camping along and working on that road. That first summer that I was at Soda Butte, I used to eat with them once in a while. It was a government mess, and all I would have to do was tell Mrs. Briar I wanted to eat. She would let me eat and charge it to my account in Mammoth. Let's see, that was the summer of '31, the first summer at Soda Butte. I missed the first winter I was on the force, I wintered at Hellroaring, up here on the Yellowstone River.

**MA:** So that would have been 1930?

**SC:** Yeah, the winter of '30 and '31, I was at Hellroaring and most of our duties there were killing coyotes. There were also so many elk there at that time that we kept track of them and what they were doing.

**MA:** Was that an isolated post at that time?

**SC:** Well, yes. It's isolated now. In fact, it was more isolated then than it is now because they have two suspension bridges over the river to get to it that we didn't have then. We had to ford the river to get in at that time, either the Lamar or we used to ford the river just above the present lower Blacktail cabin. An old Indian ford near the corner of the Indian reservation at that time.

**MA:** That would be the Crow Reservation?

**SC:** Yeah. We used to cross, it was about three quarters of a mile above the present cabin that we would cross and go on up to Hell roaring.

**MA:** So did that freeze in the winter?

**SC:** Yeah, but we had horses that were pretty good, and they would come to the edge of the ice and step off, drop into the river, walk on across, and climb out on the other side. It was a little harrowing at times, but we always got through in good shape. We'd come into Gardiner--once in a while we came in during the winter--but most of our groceries we put in in the fall. We put in about six packhorse loads of grub. So we didn't have to buy much in the winter. We'd just use what we put in in the fall.

**MA:** When you say we, how many of you were there?

**SC:** Two of us, two rangers. Fellow by the name of Guy McCarty. He was a ranger who had been on for three or four years so he was station chief, and I was his flunky. I was the buck

ranger. We had nice weather though up until February. We shot a bunch of coyotes, and we kept good track of the elk, and we did this and that. In February there was a seasonal ranger over in the Gallatin Ranger Station over in the northwest corner whose appointment had run out so they had to have someone over there. So they called me up and told me I'd have to go over there the rest of the winter. So I took a horse or two and packed up what stuff I had, and we carried that over to Tower Falls. And then Harry Trischman, who was the ranger who started me out at Mammoth, and I skied from here [Mammoth] to Fawn Pass. We stayed there overnight and then skied on down into the Gallatin. And that was the way I changed stations; I skied to my new station. My grub and other things were brought over by truck to Gallatin Gateway, and then they came in by a team and sled from Gallatin Gateway to the Gallatin Ranger Station. So that's the way I came to the station in 1930-31.

**MA:** Is that Gallatin Ranger Station still there?

**SC:** No, it was abandoned about ten or fifteen years ago.

**MA:** So can you describe more about where it was?

**SC:** It was right on the Gallatin River and across from the mouth of Bear Creek, Black Bear Creek, there right on the Gallatin Road where it crosses. There's a bridge across to it. It was right on the park line there across the river.

**MA:** So you were there by yourself?

**SC:** No, the fella whose appointment had run out had some grub. He said, "Can I stay with you?" He stayed, and I was glad because he helped me break trail, which we had to do for our monthly patrols. If it hadn't been for him, I would have had to do all the trail breaking myself.

**MA:** So he wasn't getting paid?

**SC:** No, he wasn't getting paid, but he was helping me so it was fine. Art Jacobson. He was an old time ranger.

**MA:** Jacobson?

**SC:** Yeah, Arthur Jacobson--s-o-n. He just died here about six months or a year ago in California. He was the ranger with Harry Trischman that built the Cache Creek cabin in about 1923, up the other side of Thunderer Mountain on Cache Creek.

**MA:** So when you were out at Gallatin, did you go out at all that winter?

**SC:** We made monthly trips to Sportsman Lake, and up Black Butte Creek to a patrol cabin up there, and also back to West Yellowstone. The trip to West Yellowstone took us two days skiing, and the Sportsman Lake trip was a day over and a day back, plus any days that you might ski around the lake. So our biggest job there was skiing, patrolling.

**MA:** Patrolling, looking for poachers?

**SC:** Poachers, also making game observations, see where the elk were eating. We did a lot of that in the '30s. While we were out skiing, we would map the area that the elk were actually able to use during that period of time. As the weather progressed and the area became a little smaller, we'd have that on the map, see, so we'd show the least forage available and in the spring, as they would open up, what was available again.

**MA:** So when you got to West Yellowstone, it wasn't exactly civilization then?

**SC:** There were no snowplows then. We might say that there were no snowplows, no snowmobiles, no radios, and the park phone lines usually fell down in the winter, so we were pretty isolated. That was OK with us.

**MA:** You didn't have a two-way radio to headquarters?

**SC:** No, we didn't have any radios until about ... Well, we had some in about 1934, but they weren't any good. They didn't work. No, it's only been since I've retired that the radios have been good enough to really have a radio network. We never did have satisfactory radio communications while I was on the force. They had a big radio in Mammoth, and they would broadcast instructions and things out to the different stations. Sometimes you would get them, and sometimes you couldn't. They were awfully poor. So, that was the big thing in those days was communication. We just didn't have any.

**MA:** Did you have any trip when you were at Gallatin to get more groceries?

**SC:** Yeah, a rancher, Nelson Story, was the son of the original Nelson Story who brought the big trail herd from Texas in the early days. His son lived there. He was the ex-lieutenant governor, and he had this ranch right on the park line. His hired man, who later turned out to be the grandfather of my son Bill's wife... [Laughs] And his son, Bill's father-in-law, was there, too, but none of us were married then. He wasn't married, and I wasn't married. But we'd go down to a place called... Eldridge, I believe was the name of the little post office down there, about fourteen miles from the Gallatin Ranger Station. We'd go down there with a sled and a team every two weeks and get our mail. This...what was his name...[Pause] Al [Leavy?] would take us down in a sled and a team to get our mail. We'd have some things maybe come up from Bozeman just to supplement, but we had put in enough to last us all winter long. So we didn't have to bother with it that much.

**MA:** When you say all winter long, how long would that last?

**SC:** Well, winter, it depended upon the severity of the winter. We have several times been snowed in for six months. We'd put in enough groceries to last us for six months. We'd put them in, let's say, in November, and then we'd get out maybe in May, April or May. Especially down in the Bechler river country where the snow got deep. We'd put in there in November, and we never did get out of there until pretty near June, did we? That was our next station. Well, at Soda Butte, I didn't say much about, we'd have to help with the roundup at the Buffalo Ranch. I'd

spend a month or two helping with the roundup of the buffalo and feeding them. Then when we weren't on the buffalo run, then we'd make our patrols, up Miller Creek, up to the northeast end, up Cache Creek. So we were really busy all the time. In those days, you didn't have any days off. We just worked as long as there was anything to do, thirty days a month and seven days a week.

**MA:** You didn't have any supervisors either.

**SC:** Oh, we did, too, have supervisors. Joe Douglas was the buffalo keeper at this time, and he ran a pretty tight ship, by golly. You worked! I was living at Soda Butte, but I would ride down, about five o'clock in the morning, feed the horses at the ranch. Then I'd eat breakfast, and then we'd all ride after buffalo until noon. And then change horses and then ride the afternoon. Between November and sometime in January, we'd try to have the whole bunch to the corrals. We'd cut the calves out and feed them and wean them from their mothers. We'd have some shippage, probably, and then there would be some they would butcher. They had a little butcher abattoir there on the ranch. We'd keep the herd down to about one thousand head, as near a thousand head as we could. Then of course we would take blood samples there at the corrals to find out if we had any sickness. That's where they found out that they did have some brucellosis in the herd.

**MA:** That must have been a little bit chilly between November and January?

**SC:** Yeah, we rode lots of days when it was twenty and twenty-five, almost up to thirty degrees below zero. As I was telling Louise yesterday, winters aren't as cold as they used to be. [Laughs] She said no, I don't believe they are. We had to ride pretty fast after buffalo, and we didn't want to be hung up in the stirrups, so we didn't wear overshoes, we just wore boots so if we did get thrown, we'd come loose. We used to have more [side break, gap in recording] [spills on some of those roundups.

**MA:** Did you have any serious injuries?

**SC:** No, not too serious, nothing worse than a little sprained leg.

**MA:** You said that] [recording resumes] you killed a few bison?

**SC:** Sometimes, we'd get going pretty fast, we'd get the herds coming in pretty fast as we came in the gates there at the ranch, and once in a while, a buffalo would take a quick turn there and break his neck. We had that happen quite often. One time a ranger come up beside one; he was going to put him in the gate, and swung his hat at him like that, you know, and the buffalo turned quick, fell over, and never got up. Great big bull, probably weigh 1,800 pounds at least, had to be. Even bigger.

**MA:** Didn't you ever have any horses that did that?

**SC:** No, our horses were pretty darned good. No, we didn't. We had very good luck with our horses. The Park Service had about twenty-seven darned good buffalo horses that knew what

they were doing, were real sure-footed, and then, of course, we sharp-shod them with caulks so we could ride on ice and hard snow.

**MA:** What does that mean?

**SC:** The horseshoes we used in the winter had caulks that were screwed in that wouldn't slip on ice.

**MA:** They were like studs?

**SC:** Yeah, studs. Just like studs on a pair of shoes. They were sharp, but they were necessary. You couldn't ride a horse like we did without them in that ice and snow. Of course sometimes we would cross the river with the buffalo, and the ice would break, and sometimes the horses would have to scramble up on the ice. With regular shoes, you couldn't have done a thing. We had darned good luck with our horses. We never broke a leg on a horse while I was there when we were working with the buffalo. I might say another thing. In the spring, we always brought a show herd from Lamar down to Mammoth where they had a show corral and pasture to show the dudes that came through on the bus. We would move about twenty to twenty-five head of buffalo from the ranch down to Mammoth in one day and never lose a one. We would have enough good riders. We didn't push them, we went real slow and tried to keep them real calm and let them graze a little, but we kept them coming. We always had good luck bringing that show herd into Mammoth. They say you can't move buffalo, but we moved many buffalo on that trip. You can always move them. Sometimes they move too fast for you. One year we rode two months to get our main bunch into the corrals there at the ranch so we could work them over and take out the ones we were going to kill and get the calves separated from their mothers. Then in the spring, there would be about a hundred fifty to two hundred calves we'd turn loose when the grass got green. That always was the durnedest snake dance you ever saw in your life. We'd look out there at the ranch, and they'd troop across the Lamar Valley single file, on a high run. You'd see a hundred and fifty of them going for miles up there. New found freedom. That was a big show.

**MA:** Did you ever have trouble with frostbite on the roundups?

**SC:** No, I had froze my feet on another occasion.

**MA:** Where was that?

**SC:** On a trip from here to Sportsman Lake one winter I froze my feet...

**MA:** From Mammoth to Sportsman Lake?

**SC:** Yeah, I started out from Reese Creek. I had a fellow who couldn't ski. He had never done much skiing, and I had to go so slow, and I finally got my feet a little wet in a stream, and before I could do anything about it, my feet froze up, and I had to stop and build a fire and spent the night. The next morning my feet were so durned swollen, I had to cut my shoes so I could let them (my feet) back in the ski boots. They were kind of touchy for about two months. I couldn't

walk on them for about thirty days, and then another thirty days I wished I couldn't walk. They finally came out of it, though. I still got a little scar tissue after fifty years.

**MA:** So how cold was it that day?

**SC:** It was fifty-six below one of the nights we were out.

**MA:** You got your feet wet, and then how far was it that you had to go with your shoes all cut up?

**SC:** Five miles the next morning with my shoes cut up. But that wasn't bad, I made that alright

**MA:** But that was to get into Sportsmen Lake?

**SC:** No, I had decided to come back. I came to Corwin Springs down here, and Lee [Jordan?] [According to Chapman later, Rudolph L. Grimm], the ranger, was going to meet us down here anyway. So he met us there. I was sure glad to see him there. I didn't want to walk any farther on those. [Laughter]

**MA:** It's amazing there wasn't more of that kind of thing.

**SC:** If it hadn't been for that character who was with me, I wouldn't have had any trouble. That was the only time I ever had any trouble at all on a ski trip with cold. I've been out many times at forty-five below and haven't had any ill effects. But that was a little ill-fated, that trip. Then in 1933 we went to Bechler. Louise and I were assigned to Bechler over in the southwest corner of the park.

**MA:** We better introduce Louise and tell what her maiden name is.

**SC:** Well, I'll tell you what. We got married in 1932 when I was still at Soda Butte. We spent our honeymoon on the Upper Lamar. I was on a hunting patrol during the big game season up on Cold Creek and Upper Lamar. We spent our honeymoon on a two week trip up in there, and then we spent the rest of the winter after we came back at Soda Butte. Then this next spring we went to the Bechler River. The road was a very poor road down there then. It was a dirt road. Our truck got stuck going in, and the Idaho authorities spent that whole summer building a new road from Green Timber which is about fifteen, sixteen miles below the park, up to [Gated?] Falls. There was no visitation. They didn't even try to keep the road open. So Louise and I were at Bechler River the summer of 1933 without any visitation at all. All we had to do was clear trails. We had a beautiful summer. That was a dandy. Oh, yeah. One of the best. We were there in '33 and '34. In '34 we had a few fires, and they got the road fixed in there so we got a pretty good visitation at Bechler. But we were pestered with fires the summer of '34. Louise at this time was pregnant with our first son, Bill. I was on a fire up at Summit Lake, and Louise was alone down at the station. I had the two fire guards with me. The assistant chief ranger, [Fred] Johnson, called up and wanted to know if there was anyone there who could climb the lookout. He didn't know she was pregnant. The lookout consisted of two pine trees about seventy-five, eighty feet

tall with some boards nailed across in between the two trees and a little platform up there with some kind of a make-shift fire finder up on top.

**LC:** It swayed back and forth.

**SC:** Well, anyway, Louise said nobody but me I guess. He said would you do it? She said sure.

**LC:** First he told me not to do it.

**SC:** He didn't know your condition, did he?

**LC:** No, he didn't know my condition.

**MA:** How pregnant were you?

**SC:** Well, about six months in.

**LC:** Yeah, it was a wonder I could squeeze through.

**SC:** Anyway, she climbed this thing. Twice or three times a day. Later he found out the condition she was in when she was doing this, and he said, "By golly I wouldn't have gone up there at all, and I'm not pregnant." [Laughter]

**MA:** That's a wonderful story. Were you wintering at Bechler during this time period, too?

**SC:** Yeah, we wintered there in '33 and '34. [Inaudible] September we were at Bechler River. Louise went out for part of the winter of '34 to our home in Fort Collins and had her baby. Baby Bill.

**LC:** Went out on a sled, didn't I? How many miles was it?

**SC:** Oh, twelve, fourteen on the sled. When she came back, the road still wasn't open so we put Bill in a...I Carried him, didn't I?

**SC:** Yeah, you carried him on your back.

**SC:** We had snowshoes, and I carried him. The snow was just about breaking up in the spring. I'd break through, and I'd get my feet wet. It was a miserable trip, but we got in back in there in March.

**MA:** So how were you traveling, Louise?

**SC:** She was on snowshoes. She was doing fine.

**MA:** This is how long after you'd had the baby?

**SC:** About three months.

**MA:** And how long a trip was this?

**SC:** We only had to walk in about seven miles. It had melted out that far.

**MA:** So during the winter you sometimes had to go farther than that to get out of Bechler?

**SC:** Twenty-five miles we had to go. Louise and Bill and I went to the dog races at Ashton [Idaho] the winter of 1934. We had an old German shepherd dog that pulled the sled, and we put Bill in the sled, and the dog would pull him. I would walk along and try to keep the thing from falling over, and Louise would come along behind on her snowshoes. It worked fine until the dog got sick of pulling. Eventually, he quit. [Laughs]

**LC:** We knew he was going to. He had a bitch friend over there, and he stopped. Always. He wouldn't go another step.

**SC:** I had to pull the sled the rest of the way.

**LC:** On the way back, the dog was waiting for us.

**SC:** I picked him up, and we'd go back to the station. We had to go twenty-five miles, on a sled with a team from the last ranch for the last twelve miles, but we'd come out the first fourteen on foot with snowshoes.

**LC:** One thing I do remember is when the sled tipped over. I grabbed Bill when he slid off. Bill was just a baby.

**MA:** Was he already in the snow bank when you grabbed him?

**LC:** No, I could see the sled was going to tip over. Everybody else did, too.

**LC:** As soon as he got flipped right side up again he'd quit crying, but one time we give him a sandwich to chew on back there. He didn't quit crying. I said, "What's the matter with him?" "Oh," she said, "I guess he lost his sandwich." So I had to go back about fifty feet and pick his sandwich up out of the snow and hand it back to him. He quit crying then. We were pretty tired by then, and I tell you, it was a long fifty feet to go back and get that sandwich. [Laughter]

**MA:** So I suspect you didn't make a lot of trips to the dog races or anything else.

**SC:** No, once a winter was all that she went out. That fellow that was my partner there at Bechler [Don Kipp], him and I would go down to the first ranch, about fourteen miles, and pick up the mail about every two weeks. That was the only outside contact we had.

**MA:** You used to go how far for that?

**SC:** Fourteen miles. We'd ski down fourteen miles and pick up the mail and come back.

**MA:** So at least you had some mail contact with the rest of the world.

**SC:** That was it. The phones would always go down early in the winter with snow, and we had no radio, no communication at all to headquarters.

**MA:** Was it just the three of you at Bechler?

**SC:** One winter, we had a partner and his wife. It was a duplex house, and they lived on the other side. He and I did the patrolling. Louise and this partner's wife held down the fort while we were out. We'd patrol to Cascade, toward Snake River. We'd patrol up Bechler Canyon to Three River Junction. And we would patrol to Summit Lake...south river side...and what was the other...Oh, that is enough.

**MA:** Did you ever have any close calls when you were out on patrol, when you thought you might not make it back?

**SC:** No, I tell you the thirty-two years I spent on patrolling and corralling, I never did have anything that was...It was just a nice, pleasant, uneventful life. Some of them were kind of cold and kind of miserable, but we didn't have any trouble. Now you talk about all of this adventure stuff, but shucks, if you know how to live in the outdoors, in the woods, you get along fine. You don't have any trouble. You know what you want and what you need, and you get along with what you've got, and you do fine. You're living, just like you would anywhere else.

**MA:** You mentioned that you had a lot of fires that one summer. Were there any that endangered your house?

**SC:** No, not at Bechler River. From Bechler River, we went from there to West Yellowstone in the spring of '34. We were there that winter, and then the summer of '35 we were at Lake, district ranger at Lake. We were there that summer, and then we moved back to West Yellowstone that winter. We were at West Yellowstone the summer of '37 and the winter of '37, in West Yellowstone in [summer] '38 and the winter of '38. At that time, the roads weren't plowed into West Yellowstone. We used to patrol down the main highway, back to Grayling Creek and the Gallatin Ranger Station, skied right on the highway. One time on the Grayling Divide, we saw a bump in the middle of the road, and I stuck my ski pole down, and here was a Model T Ford, right smack in the middle of the road. [Laughter] Next spring after they...They didn't plow the road out. They didn't have snowplows in the early days. But after it melted out, somebody came and got it; I don't know whose it was.

**MA:** So at West Yellowstone, you had more people around you.

**SC:** Yeah, about seventy-five people there in those days. We'd have a dance, every two or three weeks or so, but of all the winter stations, I think it was the most uncomfortable of all. I'd rather be completely isolated rather than half-way like that.

**MA:** Why is that?

**SC:** Oh, I don't know.

**LC:** You get used to something, you just don't like...

**SC:** Yeah, the Bechler River and the Snake River were our favorite winter stations. Oh, we enjoyed those. They were six months of winter, and we knew what we were going to have to do. We just enjoyed them no end.

**MA:** So in West Yellowstone, you had certain amenities. The mail came to you...

**SC:** There again, the mail only came in by horse from Ashton. It was pretty near as bad as the Cooke City mail. It only came through in when the horses got in. I don't think it was as dependable as the Cooke City mail had been in the early '30s. But anyway, the last winter we were at West Yellowstone, they had an airplane bring it in from Ashton. There was a two week period when they couldn't fly the mail in over Targhee Pass; the weather was too bad. We didn't have any mail for two weeks, and everybody was hollering for horses to come back. [Laughter] That way they could get the mail in better.

**MA:** Do you think that part of the difference between being at Bechler and being at West Yellowstone was that you had to deal with other people's cabin fever?

**SC:** Oh, there were certain amenities you have to adhere to in a town like that, whether you feel like it or not. If you're coming back from a big, tough ski trip, you might not want to...

**MA:** Go to a dance that night?

**SC:** No, or anything else. You might want to go home and sleep by the fire.

**MA:** I really am interested in that because I suspect there would be very few people who would understand why you would prefer to be...

**SC:** We had some good friends in West Yellowstone, in fact very good friends. Some of them are still our friends. It was just trying to live kind of two lives--the complete wild life and then the half--half-civilized. [Laughter] You traveled around on snowshoes there at that time. They just had a snowshoe trail right down the middle of the street in West Yellowstone.

**MA:** Did you have any stores open?

**SC:** Oh, a few of them. But they depended upon fresh stuff coming in with a team from Ashton, and sometimes they would get in with some steaks, and sometimes they wouldn't.

**MA:** Did you have any restaurants or bars?

**SC:** The restaurants didn't stay open in winter at West, but the bars, anytime there was a chance of selling a drink, they'd open.

**LC:** They had dances there...

**SC:** Yeah... We went to Snake River in 1939. We were at Snake River in '39 in the winter and summer; and then in '40, the summer of '40, we were at Snake River. 1940 was the big fire year, one of the worst fire years we had in those days. I was on the fire at Pitchstone Plateau that summer when the station at South Entrance burned down. The reason for the burning was, although we had forest fires all around the place, the kerosene refrigerator malfunctioned and flooded and burned the house down. It was an old log duplex building and as dry as tinder, and Louise says that it didn't take 15 minutes for the thing to just completely go down. Everything we owned at the time was there. We didn't have anything left.

**MA:** You say that you had some photographs?

**SC:** Oh, yes. We had so many... All the movies that I had taken up to that time. Haven't taken any since. We had some wonderful photographs of the buffalo herds in the early days. I had eight hundred fifty buffalo in one picture on our feedlot out there at Lamar. Then I had movies of the roundup, when we used to round the buffalo up. I had a lot of movies of that. That was kind of a loss as far as we were concerned.

**LC:** He was gone at that time.

**SC:** I was on a fire up on Pitchstone.

**LC:** It was a duplex, and there were two women visiting us, and they both had little kids. I had one. And then when this fire took off, [inaudible] up there, up to the top story, picking the kids up. We've got no electric lights, of course. You had flashlights, or you'd pick up something, whatever you could get, to see where you was going. We got all the kids out, and the last one, Bill, I took him outside. He was just half awake, and he turned around and ran back in again. I had to rescue him twice. We had about four kids. We told them to beat it out to the checking station and stay there until we came to get them. They did do that. The whole house burned to the ground. We drove out, went out and took the kids...

**MA:** This was in the summer?

**LC:** Yeah, it was in the summer. We got down to where there was a road camp...

**SC:** Lewis River Road Camp.

**LC:** Lewis River Road Camp. I went over to their tent where they were sleeping. I told them the Snake River house was burning down and if they would please get up and go back in and keep it from spreading. And they did. By the time we phoned the station in Mammoth, they were just pulling out. They couldn't save the house, but there was no spreading. I told them to get the horses out of the barn.

**SC:** I missed a very important part. In the summer of 1931 before Louise and I were married, was a bad fire season. It would make a good second to the year of 1988 if it had half a chance. It wasn't as bad a year as 1988 because there wasn't as much wind. But the conditions were just as dry. It would have been terrible if we hadn't caught a good many of them in the bud. So '31, '40, and '88 were the three bad fire years that I remember.

**MA:** What did you have to fight a fire in 1931?

**SC:** In 1931 we had manpower with hand tools, and that was it.

**LC:** And did a lot better than they did this year.

**SC:** And you would be surprised to see what you can do with manpower and hand tools. I was lucky to have some old timber men from Missoula on my crew, and they taught me more about fighting fire in two weeks on that Snake River fire of '31. Oh, they were marvelous fire fighters. They had been through the fire of 1910 in the Missoula country, and they knew how to fight fire, and every lick counted. You'd be surprised how they could make the old dog lay down. I still give them credit for everything I know about fighting fires.

**MA:** Did you have many injuries?

**SC:** No, we didn't. I had a hundred Basque men that were on a construction crew. They came as a unit. None of them could talk English. We had to depend upon pack strings--horses--for the food. There were two full days and part of another without any food. Those Basque never gave me a minute's trouble. They were the best crew I saw in my life, and they kept on fighting fire.

**MA:** That was on the Snake River fire in '31?

**SC:** Yeah. That broke the summer up considerable. I was fifty-six days on the fire line that summer. Then we went back down to Snake River in 1940. That was a bad fire year. But that's past history now. From then on, we were at West Yellowstone until 1942. They called me into Mammoth in 1943. That was the end of my backcountry stations. I was in the chief ranger's office mostly from then on, except that I did do a lot of field work. I used to do a lot of field work.

**MA:** It sounds like from the lack of communication that you had that you were your own boss for a lot of years.

**SC:** Not really. They had various ways of finding out whether you were doing your work [side break, gap in recording] [or not. We did all those patrols that we said we did. We had voluminous observations of wildlife and maps on available range. We used to...]

**MA:** [Recording resumes] You were talking about how you had moved up to Mammoth, and you did go out on some excursions.

**SC:** Oh, yeah. My assignments varied from time to time there in the chief ranger's office. I was assistant chief ranger in charge of the chief ranger's office for a while. I was in charge of forest fire protection for a long time, about fifteen years I was on that. I was on all the elk and buffalo reductions. In fact I was assigned to them for about seven years. There was a lot of field work connected with my Mammoth assignment. My old friend Curt Skinner died the other day. There was an article in the Courier [an NPS publication] in 1978 that he wrote. He wrote up about the trapping program, buffalo and elk trapping. I am going to let you take them and read them at your leisure, but I want them back.

**MA:** Oh, thank you. That would be wonderful. You were mentioning that you were involved in the elk reductions?

**SC:** Oh, yes, all reductions. From 1942 until I retired in 1962, I had a lot to do with all the reductions. I worked as an elk shooter, and trapper, and the whole ball of wax. This was a big part of our work for a good number of years. Especially during the '40s and '50s. We had just about accomplished our reduction goal in '62 when I retired. We had the elk herd at the size that we wanted it at that time. Also the buffalo or bison, we had got the numbers we wanted. We thought we had things in pretty good shape. So I retired with a good taste in my mouth--a real good taste.

**MA:** Was that satisfying work?

**SC:** Very much so. You knew you were accomplishing something. You could see the results. The range really bounced back after we did some of the reduction work. In my estimation, if they had maintained the herds in the size that we had them at that time, they would be in much better shape to talk reintroduction of wolves than they are at the present time.

**MA:** Why is that?

**SC:** The stage would be set because they would have more small game; they would have more deer; they would have more cover. It would be much better habitat for wolves under that management than they have now. The stage just isn't set for wolf reintroduction in my estimation now.

**MA:** Do you think if the stage were set that it would be a good idea?

**SC:** Oh, yeah. It wouldn't be a bad idea. Sure. But there are so many things that are wrong there now that that would be the last thing that I would think of right now. If things progressed as they were in the '60s, then...

**MA:** Meaning that the things you would think of before wolves would be beavers and small animals?

**SC:** Well, a well-rounded ecosystem and suitable habitats for a much larger number of animals. You know, I haven't seen a sharp-tailed grouse in the Yellowstone Valley in fifty years. So you know there is something missing in the habitat. That's why the sharp-tailed grouse aren't here

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anymore. At one time, there were sage hens up here, but with the over use of sagebrush by some of the larger animals, they're completely gone. There are no sage hens in the Yellowstone Valley at all. I saw a few sage hens around Livingston about 45 years ago, but I've never seen one at this end of the valley.

**MA:** I heard someone say that he didn't know anyone who was involved in the Yellowstone reduction program that hunted any more.

**SC:** I don't know of anyone, but it's not because I was on the reduction. I just have no reason to hunt. There's one thing about it...you lose your blood thirstiness, I guess. I like to see things right. I like to see the right number of animals on the range, and I like to see things be healthy and good--the plant and the animal life; the streams are much better off. Now the streams are suffering terribly from overgrazing by buffalo and elk. They're kicking the banks in and tromping them down, and the willows and things are disappearing from along the streams. It's not nearly as healthy of situation as it should be for a well-rounded...

**MA:** One of the things that struck me was that if I had been working in the backcountry for that many years, it would be difficult for me to come into headquarters where I had bunches of different people at my elbow all the time with different ideas of what I should be doing.

**SC:** Well, I was pretty hard to ruffle. [Laughter] I used to speak my piece, and it would be heard [wife's laughter]. So a good many of the things that went on then were things that I promoted.

[Growling by dog, Griz, and shouts, recorder turned off.]

**MA:** You were talking about how you found your work in Mammoth satisfying.

**SC:** Oh, yeah, the work I had in Mammoth was very satisfying. We had some good programs, and we brought them all to fulfillment, and I thought we did a lot of mighty good work.

**MA:** Did you live in Mammoth during that time?

**SC:** We lived in about a dozen or fifteen places.

**LC:** Always glad to get back.

**SC:** Yeah. We bought this farm here [Gardiner] in 1946. Louise has spent most of her time here since. I had to stay up in Mammoth quite a bit of the time.

**LC:** All my time. I spent all my time here.

**MA:** You were saying there was one year when you were in the Army.

**SC:** That was 1945.

**MA:** So that was before Louise had this place?

**SC:** I think we bought it the day after I got out. She found the place while I was away.

**MA:** I was interested in knowing a little bit about the park during the war. You were there for most of the time?

**SC:** Most of the time, yes.

**MA:** Was it really a cut-down operation?

**SC:** Very much so. Of course we tried to keep our fire operation up and our patrols against poachers. We did a pretty good job, I guess. Because the visitation wasn't too high and so many people were gone anyway in the Armed Forces and things like that, it was kind of a rest for the park. The fish increased, and the game increased. Everything was kind of on deep freeze during the war.

**MA:** Was the park open to visitation?

**SC:** Yes, it was open. Louise, as I say, was assigned to the Northeast at Cooke City...

**LC:** Yeah, I ran every gate but one...

**SC:** ...and she was down here. You never worked on the West Gate?

**LC:** Yeah, I worked on the West Gate, just off and on.

**SC:** Oh, uh-huh.

**MA:** So do you have any estimate of how many people were working for the Park Service during those years?

**SC:** Well, we had pretty near a full complement of permanent rangers, but they were war-time appointments. Some of them were A-Number One excellent, but some were really to fill in while the regular rangers were gone. A lot of the ranger force was in the Armed Forces.

**MA:** Mammoth must have been a much different community, like any other place, I suppose, a much bigger percentage of women than men?

**SC:** No, not really. I'd say about the same, a lot of married people.

**MA:** So did you have dances?

**SC:** Oh yeah, we used to have dances there every week.

**LC:** Scott was the chief. They asked him if he would assemble the whole group or do the whole job himself.

**MA:** You were the social director, huh?

**SC:** Part of the time. We always had a different one every now and then. The employee's union would appoint a social director, and we'd put on a dance and this, that, and the other.

**MA:** Did you have live music?

**SC:** Yeah, we had pretty good music. We had one of the rangers was a piano player, and one of the fellows who worked in the storehouse down there... What did [Raz?] play?

**LC:** I don't know. The horn or something? Or drums?

**SC:** Drums, right. He was a drummer. We had a pretty good little band, and we had a lot of fun.

**MA:** So did you play anything?

**SC:** Me? No! [Laughter] All I did was dance.

**MA:** I figured you had a vested interest in there somewhere.

**SC:** Louise and I did a lot of dancing.

**MA:** Where would you have the dances?

**SC:** In the canteen.

**MA:** Which was?

**SC:** Right across from the old garage. Where the credit union is. They had a kind of gym there, a small basketball court, and we danced in that.

**MA:** So did you call these dances, someone said "formations"?

**SC:** Oh, no. You're getting way ahead of yourself now. In the old days, in the summer when the Yellowstone Park Company had the lodges and hotels going, you know, they had a dance practically every night in the lodges. Then we'd have a formation, and they might have it in the hotel. They'd call it a formation, and in the '20s and '30s, they had a beautiful orchestra in the hotel in Mammoth, Gene Quah and his Orchestra.

**MA:** Gene what?

**SC:** I think it's Q-u-a-h. You'd have to check that spelling. But Gene Quah. They would have Sunday night music and play for the guests. It was quite a social life there in Mammoth in the early days when the hotels were all full of people from buses. They'd have formation dances

there. They were a little more formal than the regular ones. We'd wear our best uniforms, and the girls would all dress up in evening clothes and stuff. Big deal.

**MA:** Why were they called formations?

**SC:** I don't know why they called them formations.

**MA:** But it meant a formal dance?

**SC:** Yeah, a little more formal. Kind of a nice dance.

**MA:** I was interested in knowing...

[Lengthy discussion with Griz about waiting for dinner.]

**MA:** I wanted to know about Joe Douglas. You say he was your closest friend. What did he look like?

**SC:** He looked like a first sergeant in the horse-drawn artillery. He was quite a man. I've got pictures of him. My oldest son has all my pictures.

**MA:** He gave you a horse for your wedding present?

**LC:** Yeah, he gave me a horse.

**SC:** [Bringing back stack of photos] We used to take our horses and our food and everything into Hellroaring. That [photo of pack string crossing river] was the winter of '29, the winter before I was there. We used the same pack string. We moved a hundred bales of hay, and we had a lot of lumber that we tandemed between two mules. We took that in and we were going to put a new roof on the cabin, and our grub for the winter and so on. That's the Lamar River there. I told you my dad was in the lumber business in the Adirondacks? [Looking photos] That's the Gallatin Ranger Station in 1930.

**MA:** Skis and long snowshoes.

**SC:** That was the Heart Lake cabin in '31 when the fire was going out.

**MA:** That was what you called the Snake River fire?

**SC:** Yeah, the Snake River fire.

[Crash in background from dog throwing metal food bowl]

**LC:** He's getting kind of panicky there.

**MA:** So you didn't find one [photo] of Joe Douglas. But he looked like a sergeant in the artillery. That tells me quite a bit. When was that one taken?

**SC:** '41. I've got that picture somewhere. He was definitely the old type. He could ride a horse forever, and it wasn't at any walk either.

**MA:** I was interested in knowing what traits were respected in rangers at that time, compared to what might be considered a good ranger now?

**SC:** I tell you, good rangers then were judged on their skills at ranger work more than they were on anything else.

**MA:** Ranger work was?

**SC:** Oh, packing, riding, skiing, using a saw, ax, shooting. We had to shoot a lot of things. Well, horsemanship--rangers didn't have cars when I came on.

**MA:** Did you have motorcycles?

**SC:** Had a few, but they used them just for patrolling on the road. Most of our work was done on horseback. If we wanted to go someplace, we'd go horseback.

**MA:** So Joe Douglas didn't have the kind of formal education that you had.

**SC:** I doubt if he had any formal education other than probably just...He was a Californian, a good family back there, but he went into the Army early, and was in the Philippine campaign about the turn of the century, wasn't it? Several of the old-time rangers came from that group. The chief ranger at Yosemite, and we had two rangers here that were old Philippine campaigners besides Joe. They were just good ole packers and horsemen. They were good enough to uphold the law and everything.

**MA:** So do you think when you first showed up from the Ranger Factory that maybe Joe Douglas and some of the other guys didn't think you had the other traits?

**SC:** There was some testing. They liked to job you if they could.

**MA:** They liked to "job" you?

**SC:** Oh, yeah, full of jokes. But I got along fine. I came from a farm anyway.

**MA:** What about George Baggley? I have heard stories that maybe he had more in the academic field than in the woodsman.

**SC:** No, his only formal education above high school was in the adult special school at Colorado Aggies in the late '20s. He took a few forestry courses down there. They had a short course for people who wanted to go into the Forest Service and the Park Service. They'd go and take these

special courses for a couple years in [agrostology?] and wood tech and stuff like that to get some of the forestry education under their belt. That was his background in education.

**LC:** Look at the birds! Quick! Look at the birds! You missed most of them. That's just the tail end.

**MA:** Wow!

**SC:** That's a nice bunch. They have been around here a couple of days...He was no superman, any way you put it, George Baggley. He was alright, but he was just like the rest of us, just one of the boys.

**MA:** Did anyone job him?

**SC:** No, because they were scared of him. Jimmy Dupuis, a little Indian ranger--quarter-breed--got mad at him one day and popped him in the chin. He lasted just about as long as it took George Baggley to get down to headquarters and fire him. He put him on the run right now.

**MA:** I heard a story about George Baggley packing a mule and heading out to Hellroaring?

**SC:** Let's see. Yeah, there were several stories. There was a point out there, Baggley Point, and there was some doggone chair or something hanging on a tree for years after he went through that came off of his pack outfit. He was not an expert packer. A lot of them weren't. They had to learn that, and he didn't take time to learn because he was chief ranger about a year after he got here. But anybody who didn't get side-tracked as chief ranger or something, learned to pack or else.

[End of first interview]

### **Second interview: January 21, 1989**

**MA:** This is our second tape with Scott Chapman. It's Jan. 21, 1989, and we're in Gardiner, Montana, and you had a story to tell us?

**SC:** Oh, sure. I was up on the buffalo ranch. Joe Douglas was the buffalo keeper at the time. A fellow by the name of Joe DeVass, he was a local contractor and log man, was going to bid on a cabin up on the head of Miller Creek, about twenty miles from the ranch. Joe had somehow or another in the past worked up a kind of dislike for Jay [DeVass], so there were about five of us who were going to ride up and locate this cabin. Joe gave him the roughest horse on the ranch. By golly, it would kill a person to ride that thing a mile. Joe [DeVass] hadn't ridden for years, and he was kind of fat. So we started off from the ranch, and Joe [Douglas] didn't go off at a walk, he went on a trot. All day long. We must have gone fifty miles that day. We located the cabin at the head of Miller Creek, and then, he cut loose and trotted all the way back. Old Joe [DeVass] was so sore, he couldn't get off the horse when we got back. I gave him credit. He stayed with it and got back, but his legs were just like hamburger, raw. Then he didn't bid on the cabin. I guess he didn't want to go back up there again. [Laughter] A little time later, I don't

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know whether it had anything to do with building the bridge across the Yellowstone--the present cement bridge that we have now--but anyway, in a fit of despondency, he [Joe DeVass] jumped off the bridge and killed himself. Joe's ride didn't have anything to do with it.

**MA:** The bridge in Gardiner?

**SC:** Yeah, this one right here. The present one.

**MA:** This was Joe DeVass?

**SC:** Yeah, D-E-V-A-S-S, I think. He was nice old boy, but Joe didn't cotton to him. That's what I was getting at. Old Joe [Douglas] had been in the Spanish-American War in the Philippine campaign. My god, I never saw anyone who could ride as long as he could. He could ride at a trot or anything you wanted to do, all day long, day after day. Nobody could out ride him.

**MA:** Are there any stories about legendary rides he made where he out rode anybody?

**SC:** Oh, no. Not around here. Nobody out rode anybody except that we all concurred that Joe could out ride anybody, so why try to out ride him? Yeah, Joe could out ride anybody. Albright [Horace] was just an ordinary horseman. Kind of a businessman horseman, pleasure trips and stuff like that. If anybody thought they could out ride Joe, they were in for a rude awakening.

**MA:** Were you here during any of the time that Albright was?

**SC:** I came the year that Albright went into the [National Park Service] directorship in Washington. I knew him well. He came back, and we became good friends. He was certainly a man who could run a park. Everybody wasn't in doubt about who was running it. Mr. Albright ran it. He was good. Of course, they had some funny ideas in those days like they do now. Some of the ideas they had at that time were pretty far-fetched. We had more elk at that time than we knew what to do with. Yet they had us killing coyotes and cougars and everything else to save more elk. I don't know why.

**MA:** Was that something that you questioned at the time?

**SC:** I was pretty naïve, I didn't question much at that time. I was a young pup ranger. It didn't take me long, though, after a few tough winters of big winter losses to know that it wasn't too good of idea not to reduce that herd down. It was only a few years after I got here that we came to that idea that you had to reduce the herd or else we were going to lose all our range. We did in the '30s, started reductions. It was the best thing that ever happened. But I guess finally the people got so they didn't remember the time when the range was bad. They thought, "Heck, we don't need to kill these [side break, gap in recording] [elk now. We can just let them go." So in about '64...

**MA:** Regarding the elk levels,] [recording resumes] I was wondering whether--before television--the general public got very involved in expressing their opinion about it?

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**SC:** Locally, very much so, and statewide, too. When we started the reductions, the public was up in arms. "We didn't have too many elk—we didn't want to watch the government shoot any elk, or kill any elk, no matter what." It was very bitter, very bitter for a number of years, but finally we sold the idea. They could see the range was coming back, and they still were hunting elk. They still had elk to shoot so they finally simmered down. We had our program sold in the '60s--'62 to '64, and there was very little antagonism toward the project then.

**MA:** When you say it was bitter in the initial years, was it to the point that it was dangerous to be wearing a uniform around?

**SC:** No, they might get nasty talking, but they never did anything violent. It was just a matter of opinions. I tell you there were some awful opinions. Everyone was an elk expert. I guess that's true today. [Laughter] But in those days, there were some real, honest to gosh experts. Along toward the end of my tenure as a ranger, I took one of the worst opponents we had on a helicopter ride over the northern range here on a winter that was just about like this one. I showed him where the elk had been and how little grass there was left. We flew the whole darned thing. When we got back, that night at their meeting he said, "Well, I was wrong. My golly they're doing the right thing." From then on, the tide was turned, and they let us go about our game management just about the way...

**MA:** So who was that you took out?

**SC:** I don't remember his name. He was one of the local Montana sports organization club members.

**MA:** You say you went to a meeting after the ride, that was the Montana sportsmen?

**SC:** They had the Yellowstone Sportsmen...Oh, I forget the name of it. They had people from all the sporting clubs and various agencies come, and we'd have a meeting every year and talk over management for the following year. We'd tell them how many we had and the numbers that we were going to kill and all that. Then of course the arguments were on. Some said it was too much; some said it was not enough; others said, "How do you know?" Every year we'd have two meetings--spring and fall, one to tell them how many we were going into winter with. Then in the spring we'd have another meeting and tell them how many we came out with and what the conditions of the hunting season were and how many we lost in winterkill and so on. We sold it to the public, and the public finally became pretty cooperative.

**MA:** So do you think that the public pressure had something to do with why they decided to stop elk reduction?

**SC:** No, I think that came from right here in the service. I don't give a darn what they say now because I don't have to answer to anybody in the service. But we had a new regime come in about '64 [1966], and the superintendent, [Jack] Anderson, had never had a background of any management. He had a few people giving him advice that it was not necessary to have any more reductions. So they immediately shut off all reductions. That was the end of it. From then on, it

was just let 'er like Topsy--grow. He wasn't aware of what could happen and what had happened before.

[Microphone noise]

Let's see, I had something else...Buffalo reductions cut in the Old Faithful area when we'd have the Indians come in from the reservations to get their buffalo. We'd shoot them, and they'd help dress them and load them up on their trucks. We had Weasels from World War II. We'd pull them across [using the weasels] and bring them up to their trucks, and then they'd load them and take them back to the reservations. Gee, they'd have a lot of fun. They'd skin out a cape and dress up. [Looking at photos] See this Indian here, he's got a headdress on with horns with a blanket around. They hadn't changed a bit when it came to stuff like that.

**MA:** What tribes came?

**SC:** Oh, every tribe within South Dakota, North Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana. Yeah, we had tribes from the whole area.

**MA:** So you would shoot and they would take care of everything from that point?

**SC:** On some of the deals. On some of the deals, we would do the skinning ourselves with horses and dress them out ourselves. They'd reimburse us for that work. On others, they did the whole thing.

Meaning you'd use horses to pull off the skins?

**LC:** That's what I was wondering, too.

**SC:** No, they skinned them out by hand. We used to use horses to pull them into the trucks.

**MA:** Did you have any feeling for whether there were enough people left in the tribes to remember how to dress out a bison?

**SC:** Oh, they all knew how to butcher. It was funny, some of the old people back on the reservation that remembered back in the buffalo days, they would tell them what parts they wanted. Especially the book, that's part of their digestive organs.

**MA:** The book?

**SC:** The book, they called it. It's a leaf of digestive organs. So these young fellows would say, "The old boys want the book." So they'd get the book and put it on the truck along with the rest of it. A lot of these fellows had listened to the stories of the oldsters, so there was still a lot of enthusiasm on a life like that with the Indians. We were out by the Firehole River, and there was a hot spring on little island with a bunch of nice wood on it. This one Indian said, "Gee, that'd make a good winter camp with water and everything." Yeah, he liked that. I guess I told you the story the other day of the Indians who had funds and spent them?

**MA:** No, huh uh.

**SC:** Didn't I tell you that?

**MA:** I'm not sure. I don't think so.

**SC:** We had a bunch come from North Dakota. We went out to the east side of Old Faithful and shot a bunch of buffalo for them. They had them all skinned out and quartered and loaded and went out to West Yellowstone. Instead of settling up in the office here with the money the tribe had sent along with them, they went out to West Yellowstone and got drunk and spent the whole works. I had one fellow that I had got well acquainted with. After he got back to the reservation, he wrote me a letter. He said by golly, a fellow by the name of Shooting Bear, I think was the name of the guy who was in charge of the crew that came out. He said, "He's in big trouble! He spent all the tribe's money!" [Laughter]

**MA:** Was that unusual? Did it usually go more smoothly?

**SC:** Oh, yeah. Every one, except for Shooting Bear had to pay back a couple of hundred bucks or something. They were good people to work with.

**MA:** Were you ever there when they made movies at the buffalo ranch with the Indians?

**SC:** No, I guess Albright might have had a few Indians on when they had stampedes. I was never on when they had stampedes.

**MA:** But you were there when the Indians weren't there when they were filming stampedes?

**SC:** Well, they were filming our roundup. Every year we would round them up. Sometimes we would get them easy; they were hungry and would come on down to the corral and eat. Other times we would have to ride for a couple of months to get them all down there where we wanted them. Then we would cut out the calves and wean them and feed them all winter. Then in the spring, we would turn them out. Gee it was fun to watch that. I guess I told you about that.

**MA:** Yeah, you told me about that part. What criteria did you use to decide which of the buffalo to cull?

**SC:** Anything that was poorly formed. A weak back end, or we'd always have a few with some physical handicaps, and those that were out and out not good specimens.

**MA:** So if they looked weak or had bad conformation?

**SC:** Yeah, we'd try to build the herd up and keep it in good shape.

**MA:** So when they were filming the roundup, was that for a documentary or was that for a popular movie?

**SC:** That was just, the movie companies wanted a film. Like these news hawks all around. If anything happens, they'll come take pictures. That's the way they did. They just came to take pictures. They used to have a culvert, and they'd put it out in front of the gate where we were sorting the buffalo out. We would run them by. The guy would be down in the culvert with his camera on the rider and the buffalo, and it would look like they were going to run right over him. At the last minute, they would turn, just off enough so they miss him. They made wonderful pictures. The old Fox Movietone outfits. I had a magazine that had quite a story about that in it. This fellow from Kalispell that wrote the book on old time rangers, what was his name?

**MA:** Oh, Bert Gildart?

**SC:** Yeah, he borrowed my magazine and never gave it back to me.

**MA:** Oh, dear. When they closed the buffalo ranch. Why did they decide to do that?

**SC:** They were going to return everything to the wild. They weren't going to artificially take care of anything. They weren't going to feed anymore. They weren't going to handle them in any unnatural way. They were going to let them all on their own. They mainly changed the pattern of the buffalo. Those in the Old Faithful area, we moved those from the buffalo ranch in I think it was the late '30s, we trucked a hundred so head over there. That was the nucleus of the Little Firehole herd. Up until that time, most of them were up on the Lamar. There were a few up around the headwaters of Pelican Creek, but after we quit feeding and after we quit working them, then they spread out down Pelican Creek into Hayden Valley. There always had been a few that would drift over into Hayden Valley, but after we quit handling them at all, a lot of them moved in there because there could be naturally around the Lamar and on the head of Pelican. So they drifted down there. Some of the buffalo from the Firehole would come up to Mary Mountain, and some of the other buffalo from the Pelican herd came up, and they'd just kind of mix there on Mary Mountain.

**TW:** Those from Old Faithful, did any of them try to return to their former grounds?

**SC:** No, those that we transplanted stayed, right where we put them. After the herd grew awhile, some of them went down into Idaho, down the Bechler, and out west, kind of slopped over. But the main bunches stayed pretty well where we put them until they ran out of food, and then they had to expand.

**MA:** You mentioned that book by Bert Gildart. He tells some stories about encounters between rangers and poachers. I just wondered whether you ever had any interesting encounters with poachers.

**SC:** I never had any trouble with them, but they caused me a lot of trouble. I don't know if I told you before that when I was down in the southwest corner, in the Bechler River country, we used to ride the west boundary there. My partner would take the west boundary one day, and I would take the Cascade route, and the next day we would switch. One night he came back and said, "I've got an elk that has been killed in the park. I saw the skid trail that was going over to the hunters' camp at the head of Robinson Creek down there. So the next morning we got up about

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4:30, and we rode on up. It was about a 14 or 15 mile ride through deep snow to where we saw the skid track. We followed it down into this camp. We put this guy under arrest--there was two of them.

**LC:** They were very surprised.

**SC:** We confiscated his elk, that is we told them they were Park Service elk now. Well, that was alright. We couldn't get out; it was pretty near night then. So we imposed upon them. We stayed in their camp overnight, and they fed us. The next day my partner came up that far in a truck from Robinson Creek, and he went back with the poachers to Mammoth. I went back to Bechler River Ranger Station and closed the place up for a couple of days. I went on and skied down to Green Timber, and, let's see, I think they sent a pickup down to get me. So we came back up here and had a trial, tried this ole boy. He was pleading guilty alright, but the judge was kind of a...It was old Judge Meldrum, one of the first commissioners we had. He swallowed their story that they were such poor little farmers that they couldn't stand much of a fine. So he fined them \$5 apiece and remitted the fine so they didn't even have to pay that! So we spent a week getting that trial and through the court, and it didn't cost them anything. Come to find out, the ole boy who put up the biggest sob story is one of the richest wheat farmers in southern Idaho. [Laughter] You'd never know looking at him, though. He fooled the judge.

**MA:** Did you have any more trouble during World War II than you did at other times?

**SC:** On the highway from West Yellowstone to Bozeman, we had a lot of poaching there. The boys had quite a few cases. The judge confiscated one outfit's car, his guns, and I think he gave him a jail sentence down in the district court in Cheyenne. He really raised Cain with those guys. But anyway, he got to thinking it over, and one of the Fellow's wives gave him a long distance call and said that they were destitute and needed to have her husband back. So he turned the man loose, and I'll be darned if he didn't give back his car.

**MA:** Did you ever hear stories of poachers offering rangers bribes? I know Gildart mentioned a couple of those.

**SC:** Well, I don't know. He might have meant in some other area, some other park. But we never had anything like that in Yellowstone that I know of.

**MA:** You hear some very exotic stories of people floating bison down the Yellowstone River and different ways they would try to get the carcasses out again...

**SC:** None of those are true. If you floated a buffalo down the river, and he gets to the canyon, what are going to do with him when he hits the canyon?

**LC:** Would have to start below there.

**SC:** Well, yeah, might out here, but nobody ever did anything like that. If they get one that they can shoot and take off on a pack outfit, they'll do that. Weren't many poachers ever did anything to our buffalo. You see when we had the buffalo ranch, we managed a pretty tight ship. We had

about a thousand head and we fed them. This time of year, we'd be out with our sled and team, and we'd feed 850 to 1,000 everyday, make a big figure eight in Lamar Valley. If two or three loads weren't enough, get three or four more. They were in good shape.

**MA:** So there was a constant presence there.

**SC:** Right, and they didn't want to leave that valley because that's where their food was. Even when we quit feeding, the meadows were in good shape, they had good feed. It more or less concentrated the buffalo there in Lamar Valley. But in the summer, of course, they would go up the Lamar, up Miller Creek, up Cache Creek, up to the high mountains in the summer. Then when the snow would come in the fall, they'd drift down, and we would pick them up at the drift fence at Cache Creek. We'd try to ease them on down and put them in the corrals. We had big corrals set up--and drift fence clear across the valley there at the ranch so we could bring them down to that and down into the corrals. As I said we would put the calves in a separate pen and get them weaned. After we got done with the big ones, we would turn them loose down below the drift fence. We would get about the whole herd and work them over during the winter, put them through the corrals and through the shoots so we knew what we had. Darned good buffalo.

**TW:** How many acres do you figure you would hay?

**SC:** Oh, gosh, I tell you, I have no idea how many acres there is in that Lamar Valley, but jeeze, we put up hundreds of tons of hay. It was contracted. We would have some of the ranchers come and contract it or regular hay contractors. It was a big job to put up all that hay. We used to go clear up above Cache Creek, pretty near everything above the canyon there on the Lamar River. Everything was just about hayed from there on up to the Cache Creek drift fence.

**MA:** So they would actually plant timothy and...

**SC:** Oh, yeah, those were plowed, seeded, and just like any ranch raises hay. They had a good system of ditches, head gates, and it was a big ranching operation. Only it was not cows, it was buffalo. But those buffalo was just as wild as they are today. You wouldn't want to get any closer to them than you do with these now. We weren't domesticating them. They were never domesticated.

**TW:** That's one reason we were late today, trying to get around them on the road. [Laughter]

**MA:** You were talking about being at Bechler and what your winter patrol was. I was wondering, was that your biggest area in terms of how much territory you were responsible for patrolling?

**SC:** No, that was just one district there.

**MA:** I mean for you personally, which assignment had the biggest territory to cover?

**SC:** Probably West Yellowstone. I had everything from there to Shoshone Lake--the whole west side to Shoshone Lake; I used to ski that.

**MA:** So how many miles would you cover in a week?

**SC:** Oh, during a month, we'd probably ski, let's see...200 miles.

**MA:** 200 miles? In a month?

**SC:** Yeah, very often.

**MA:** So you'd do that every month?

**SC:** Depending upon the winter. That was probably maximum, but anything up to 200. We covered all our snowshoe cabins once a month.

**MA:** So you're saying that you would do 100 and your partner would do 100?

**SC:** Well, when I had a partner, we'd go in together.

**MA:** So you would each do 200.

**SC:** Yeah. At West Yellowstone, I lost my partner over there. He committed suicide. So I finished the winter doing all the skiing myself.

**MA:** That must have been horrible.

**SC:** Yeah, and that was a cold winter, too. By golly, it was awful cold. That was the winter of...I can't remember what winter it was.

**LC:** Well, I was there, I know that.

**SC:** I think I told you about when I was there?

**MA:** Yeah, when you were in West Yellowstone. So did the weather get to him or cabin fever?

**SC:** No, he'd been on annual leave out in California, and he got in some kind of trouble out there. When he came back, it got the better of him. So he sat on the edge of the bed and shot himself.

**MA:** Who found him?

**SC:** His wife. It was a duplex there.

**LC:** We were all in the same house.

**SC:** That log cabin duplex there at the West Entrance? They lived in one side, and we lived in the other.

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**MA:** So that left you with twice as much work by yourself?

**SC:** Well, I didn't mind the skiing. I would ski up to Old Faithful, and the ranger there was Verde Watson. He later became a naturalist. He was wintering there then, and he and I would go on over to Shoshone Lake and make the patrols around there.

**MA:** You said that you went to Mary Mountain by yourself?

**SC:** Yeah, I've been to Mary Mountain. In the spring, I would patrol out of West Yellowstone, and I would patrol the river to see how the game was doing along the river and how many were dying and all that and also watch the waterfowl come in in the spring, watch that migration. Then watch the bears come out. I had to go up Mary Mountain to see if the bears were out and what they were doing. We were always out to see what was going on. We had a lot of good information, by golly, by just being out.

**TW:** Like this winter, you were talking about the snow consolidating earlier, would that make it a lot rougher for the buffalo to feed?

**SC:** Yeah, very much so. They had a big winter kill of elk in... I think it was 1919 that Doug told me. Or 1920.

**MA:** By Doug, you mean Joe Douglas?

**SC:** Yeah, Joe Douglas. He told me it wasn't too tough of winter, but the snow got so icy that they couldn't paw through it, and they had an awful winter kill. The condition of the snow makes a lot of difference. In the '30s, most of the time the snow was loose. When you'd be on skis, you'd break clear up to your knees, at least. Sometimes up to your hips. I've come from Lewis Lake down to the South Entrance and every step, break clear to my hips with 8 foot skis.

**MA:** That's heavy work.

**SC:** That's tough skiing, yeah.

**MA:** We've heard a lot of stories about Harry Trischman and his skiing abilities.

**SC:** He was just a good strong man. He was just as able as he was pictured. A very fine man and a good skier. A good ranger. He wasn't actually too much with the dudes. He'd let them go about their own business. But anything that required ranger ability, like packing and skiing and building a cabin. Anything that required a good mountain man, he could do it. He was just an A-one mountain man. I liked him very much. I made my first ski trip in Yellowstone with him.

**MA:** That was when you went into Gallatin?

**SC:** Yeah. I told you that the last time. A very fine man.

**MA:** We heard a story that his final years in the park, he might not have been treated too well.

**SC:** Well, he had a drinking problem. Don't put that in any...

**MA:** I think it's fairly well known.

**SC:** Yeah, well there's nobody around who knows him now except me, I guess. There's a few, not anybody in the park that I know of. [Side break, gap in recording] [He was just one good man.]

**MA:** [Recording resumes] You were just going to tell a story about Joe Douglas.

**SC:** When Joe retired, he came to West Yellowstone. We were very good friends of his, so he would stay with us for awhile, and then he would stay with Whitefish Pete out on Duck Creek and some of his old cronies. But he didn't want to impose too much, so he asked me if he could go out to the Grayling Creek snowshoe cabin and stay. I said, "Sure, go out there." So he was out there and doing alright, reading his papers and smoking his pipe and one thing or another. The chief ranger came along one day, and we went out there to Grayling Creek cabin. He said, "Who's staying there?" I said, "Ole Joe Douglas. That's alright, isn't it?" He didn't say anything, and I got a letter after he got back to the office telling me that he couldn't occupy quarters without paying rent and that he had no authority to be there. I had to kick ole Joe out of the cabin. [Laughter] That was similar to ole Harry's story.

**TW:** We have a fellow working in the park now, Kenny Whitman, whose father and grandfather were out of that West Yellowstone area and up around Duck Creek. Did you know...?

**SC:** I knew them all. Johnny, he's still teaching up there, isn't he?

**TW:** I don't know.

**SC:** Johnny Whitman. I think he is. He works for the Park Service in the summer. He's kind of a historian. He was a very smart man. A very nice family, but of course, their great grandfather got in trouble poaching in the Mount Holmes country. He was up there in the winter poaching marten. They caught him and put him away, I think down in Cheyenne, for all winter. So that kind of stuck with him, but the family is a nice family. That was the only thing--he got caught poaching. But Roland, his grandson, was a good trapper. He trapped right along the west boundary while I was there. I used his ski trail on my patrol. He'd use the same tracks for his trap line.

**TW:** Roland is the father of the fellow I know.

**SC:** Oh, alright. He married the daughter of Dave Fuller, who had the grocery store in West Yellowstone. I remember when they got married.

**TW:** I wanted to ask you, in the summer when you were packing, did you pack mostly with mules?

**SC:** No, we did have some mules in later years after we got those World War II mules, but most of them were horses in the '30s and before. We used quite a few mules around World War II and afterwards. That's a picture of the pack string taking stuff into Hellroaring cabin, out of Tower Falls, in the fall. We'd take in enough hay to last two horses all winter, enough oats, and all our grub. We also had some lumber and stuff that we were working on the cabin with. So we spent three weeks in the fall just packing. This was the year before I was at Hellroaring. I can't remember this guy's name [in photo]. But I had the same string. I thought that was me when I saw it. Old John Bauman--Scotty Bauman, used to be at Tower Falls, took that picture. He gave it to me when he retired.

**MA:** Do you know if they have a copy of this at the museum?

**SC:** No, no. That was Scotty Bauman's picture. If you want it, take it and get it copied. Scotty isn't going to care. He gave the picture to me.

**MA:** That would be great.

**TW:** We'll do a better job of getting it back than that fellow who took your magazine.

**SC:** I'd like that back. We used that same string the very next year. That was in '29. I used it in '30, the same string. I have a picture of me in the Forest Service.

**MA:** You say that was the Medicine Bow National Forest?

**SC:** No, that was the Colorado National Forest, pretty near on the Wyoming/Colorado line. The Medicine Bow, as I remember it, wasn't it just over the line in Wyoming?

**MA:** I think so.

**SC:** They changed that from the Colorado National Forest to the Roosevelt National Forest. But that was Colorado at that time.

**MA:** I was curious. You came to Yellowstone in '32.

**SC:** No, '30.

**MA:** Did you ever consider transferring to another park?

**SC:** No I didn't consider it. They considered transferring me, but I talked them out of it. I came to Yellowstone because I liked Yellowstone, not because I liked the Park Service especially. [Laughter] I just liked the country.

**MA:** That seems to be something that has changed. Nowadays, rangers are not too likely to stay.

**SC:** Oh, yes. I think I had the longest tenure. I was 32 years without transferring anywhere.

**TW:** I think Jerry Mernin is trying to beat that now.

**SC:** Jerry has been here quite a while. I gave Jerry his first job, as a fire guard.

**MA:** Oh, you did?

**TW:** Do you remember when that was so in case he tries to lie to us... [Laughter].

**SC:** He won't lie to you. I'm trying to think now. '41 or '42, somewhere in there. I know I was at West...

**TW:** We're just kidding. We're good friends with him and Cindy.

**SC:** Yeah, he had been a seasonal for quite a while before he came on permanent. Didn't he transfer to some other place for a while and then come back?

**MA:** I don't know.

**SC:** He's been here a long time. Yes, gosh, yes.

**TW:** His dad was a ranger in Yosemite.

**SC:** Yeah. He was Jerry, too.

**MA:** The other thing I was wondering about. When you showed me the list of where you had been each year, you said you wrote down 1962 to retire. And you wrote that down in 1930?

**SC:** No, I just had a place for it. Yeah, I think I wrote it down that I was going to retire then, and I did.

**MA:** And how did you decide on that date?

**SC:** Because I would have my thirty years in, and I wanted to do something else. I wanted to enjoy myself, which I did.

**MA:** Did you carry a gun?

**SC:** No, only occasionally. When it was needed. I never carried a gun. Only when I was taking some remittance from the gate to the post office or something like that.

**TW:** I think Albright mentioned that at least during his tenure here, the rangers would carry guns during the winter because of contact with poachers.

**SC:** No, we never... Well, if it was somebody who was reported to be kind of a tough poacher, we might carry a six-shooter, but I think I carried a six-shooter just once in thirty-two years. Remember the Phantom of the Tetons? The guy that raised all the hell out of Cody and Powell?

**TW:** Yeah, I just read about that, not too long ago.

**SC:** They sent me from South Entrance up the Snake River over toward Thorofare, and ole Curt Skinner said, "Take your pus-tal with ya." So I took my "pus-tal" with me. [Laughter]

**MA:** So the Phantom of the Tetons was a crook?

**SC:** No, he was just a guy who kind of went off his rocker a little bit, liked to live out in the woods. He would steal stuff out of cabins, poach game to live on. He was just one of these self-styled mountain men, like this character over in the Bridgers.

**MA:** The one that shot the runner?

**SC:** Yeah.

**MA:** Did you ever have contact with him?

**SC:** No, he was over in Cody getting shot about the time I was out there. I still have the pistol, though. That ole Curt was a comic. He was in the chief ranger's office at the time. He says, "Maybe you better take a hatchet along, may have to lay him out." I says, "OK."

**MA:** This was when you were looking for the phantom of the Tetons? You had your pistol and your hatchet.

**SC:** Yeah. I had them in my pack sack; I didn't carry them on my belt. I was having enough trouble traveling without carrying those darned things on my belt. I don't know how these characters around here travel, radio on one side, gun on the other.

**MA:** One of the things you mentioned when we were closing up last time that you wanted me to ask about was the party at Bechler with Tom Gary?

**SC:** Oh, yeah! What were we celebrating? Well, anyway, she was a college girl, and he was a college boy, and Louise and I had been not too long before. So we decided we would have formal dinner down at Bechler River. They lived on one side of the house, and we lived on the other.

**MA:** This is Tom Gary and...

**SC:** Margaret Gary. We got all dressed up, and the girls fixed up a swell dinner. It was about thirty-five degrees below zero, and Tom says, "By golly, I've often wondered if you could make ice cream without any salt and ice." "Well, I don't know." So we got out the ice cream maker, and we got the milk and everything to make the ice cream. We went out on the front porch there,

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and it was colder than the dickens. I had a buffalo coat. We sat and turned that darned thing and turned it and turned it.

**LC:** I can remember them out in the backyard.

**SC:** Yeah, we finally decided, "Na, you can't make ice cream without salt." [Laughter] The gals had their long formals on...we had a good time.

**SC:** How did you happen to have your long formals up there with you?

**LC:** That's where we lived. Everything I owned was there.

**MA:** So did the guys dress up to the same level that you did?

**LC:** They did the best they could. [Laughter] Oh, once in a while someone would have something and you'd go to it, so you had some good clothes.

**TW:** I was wondering, we had run across this before, and I didn't know whether you cleared this up, when you went to the dog races in Ashton, were they dogsled races?

**SC:** Sled races, yeah. One year, we went to them, and they had them on sleds. The next year, it was a very open winter, and they had them on wheels. They had to put wheels on their sleds. We skied in from Bechler River, and we'd stay three or four days during the dog races. That was a big event. Originally, the race went from Ashton to West Yellowstone, but then in later years, they would have a twenty mile track, or thereabouts, in a big circle so people could see the start and the finish within a reasonable length of time. That was quite an event. That was the American Dog Derby. Don Cordingly had the world championship team in about 1934. He came up to Bechler with his girlfriend to visit us. He had the world's championship team with him at the time, but the bottom went out of the snow. By gosh, he was with us about two weeks up there before the snow got crusty enough so he could go out.

**LC:** We thought we were going to run out of food. When we got in there, we knew some people who had a dress shop there. We took Bill in; we didn't know what to do with him. They were good friends of ours, and so we put him in his basket, and they put him in the window.

**MA:** Oh, this is in Ashton?

**LC:** Yeah. He'd stay there the whole time. I'd go in there and gather him up and nurse him and put him back.

**SC:** Next time we took him down there, we had a sled of our own, didn't we?

**MA:** Yeah, we talked about that last time. I was wondering about what Bill did for schooling?

**SC:** We got to West Yellowstone, and he went to school there. Then later, when I got to Mammoth, he went there.

**MA:** Oh, I see. So you were in civilization.

**SC:** Then he went one year to Gardiner High School, but the high school wasn't worth a darn. So I sent him over to Bozeman, and he boarded over there for the last three years of high school.

**MA:** Oh. During his first five years, before you moved to West Yellowstone, he was living in the backcountry with you?

**SC:** You bet, he knows the park better than anybody today, both on the ground and in the air. He's a flyer. He's ridden most every trail in Yellowstone, and he's walked a good share.

**LC:** And now he's flying them.

**SC:** He's got a good sense of direction. I'll put him up against anybody out in the park.

**MA:** I was wondering about when he was real small, if he ever got sick?

**SC:** Yeah, he did. At Bechler River, he had some stomach trouble. That's one reason why this Cordingly came up with his dog team, to bring some medicine up. At Lake, he was about two years old, and a doctor that saw him said he needed vitamins. So we got him vitamins. You know the stuff we'd eat during the winter wasn't exactly the right stuff to start a little kid on. We didn't have enough greens. It was all canned. But he did pretty good. His brothers are all a little bigger than he is, but he's as smart as they are. He as a little bitty kid had a marvelous sense of direction at all times to know where he was in the park. We'd go cut on a cloudy day with snow falling and ask him where home was, and you better go the direction he said. He had an uncanny sense of direction. Still does.

**LC:** We used to test him on it all the time.

**SC:** He still does, being a pilot, he has a fabulous sense of direction. Even while he was growing up. He and I took a pack trip from Lamar over Specimen Ridge and down in to Broad Creek and Wapiti Lake and that country in '62. By golly, he showed me aces and spades how to find direction even then, and I had been through the darned thing--I always had been through there. But he knew exactly where he was at all times.

**MA:** I was curious also about Louise, you were a fire lookout and a ranger?

**LC:** Well, I was a fire lookout and a temporary--very temporary-- ranger. I was on every gate except one.

**MA:** Where were you the fire lookout?

**LC:** Down at Bechler River. I was pregnant at the time.

**MA:** Oh, that was what you told me about.

Scott Chapman, December 15, 1988, and January 21, 1989 (YELL 188046-OH5)

**SC:** Then you were the lookout at West Yellowstone for a while.

**LC:** Yeah, I was.

**MA:** At West Yellowstone did you have a place where you stayed up above the ground?

**SC:** No, that was another wooden ladder. But she wasn't pregnant at that time.

**LC:** Anybody could have done that. [Laughter]

**MA:** That was quite a story.

**SC:** Ole Fred Johnson, he was amazed when he found out.

**MA:** Fred Johnson was his first name?

**SC:** Fred Johnson. He was the assistant chief that asked her to do it.

[Inaudible conversation]

**MA:** I think that was about all I had, unless you had any other stories that you wanted to end up with.

**SC:** I'd probably start repeating myself.

**MA:** One last thing I did want to ask you was about your last day with the Park Service. Do you remember your last day?

**SC:** I had the most wonderful party that was ever given in Yellowstone. The whole Seven Mile Campground was closed off just for our party. Lon Garrison gave us a real one. We were just tickled pink. It was a nice send-off. Nobody ever had a better one. I was just as happy as I could be.

[End of second interview]



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**MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL  
HISTORIES**

**WILLIAM G. "BILL" ARMSTRONG  
MAINTENANCE WORKER**

INTERVIEWED BY  
MARJANE AMBLER  
AUTHOR

JANUARY 7, 1989  
IN LIVINGSTON, MONTANA

Yellowstone National Park Archives  
P O Box 168  
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190-0168

Catalog Number: YELL 188046-OH6

**NARRATOR:**

William Gerald “Bill” Armstrong was born September 19, 1916 in Wilsall, Montana. His parents were farmers Robert O. Armstrong and Alice Williams. The family relocated to property near Mill Creek in Paradise Valley in 1922. Robert’s death in 1927 left the Armstrongs destitute for much of Bill’s childhood. In 1933, Armstrong faked his age to be hired on a road crew for the S.J. Groves Construction Company, a private contractor improving roads in Yellowstone National Park with funding from the Public Works Administration (Armstrong refers to the agency as the NRA, likely referring to the National Recovery Administration (NRA), a predecessor to the PWA). The following year, an injury forced Armstrong to return to the family farm with workman’s compensation.

Armstrong married Mary Elizabeth Perry in 1946. The couple’s first child, Russell, was born the following year. In 1948 Armstrong returned to Yellowstone as a boiler fireman at Mammoth Hot Springs. Over the next thirty-two years Armstrong rose through the ranks of Yellowstone’s Facilities and Maintenance Division, becoming foreman in 1959 and Facilities Manager in 1972. The Armstrongs had three further children during Bill’s career in Yellowstone: son Don, born in 1950, daughter Mary in 1956, and son Ed in 1958. The Armstrongs retired to Livingston, Montana in 1980, where Bill died March 27, 2007.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Born May 19, 1948, in Colorado, Marjane Ambler began a career in journalism in 1968. Ambler worked in various positions including as editor of the “High Country News,” an environmental publication, from 1974 to 1980.

In 1984, Ambler’s husband Terry Wehrman accepted a position as a snow groomer in Lake Village, Yellowstone National Park. The couple spent the next nine years living year-round in the interior of Yellowstone. Ambler worked as a volunteer during the early years and as an interpretive ranger during the summers of 1990-1993.

During her time at Lake Village, Ambler began to collect the recollections of the other park employees and family members within her small social circle, as well former park employees who experienced living and working in the park interior in past decades or whose careers were otherwise notable. These activities culminated in Ambler’s 2013 book “Yellowstone Has Teeth,” which narrated the recollections of Ambler’s interviewees interwoven with her own experiences.

Ambler and Wehrman left Lake Village in 1993, after which Ambler served as editor of the “Tribal College Journal” from 1995 to 2006. Ambler is also the author of “Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development” published by University Press of Kansas in 1990. Ambler and Wehrman split time between homes in Atlantic City, Wyoming, and Lake Havasu, Arizona.

Bill Armstrong, January 7, 1989 (YELL 188046-OH6)

**SUMMARY:**

This interview contains stories and reflections from Armstrong's road crew experience (1933-1934) and his early career with the National Park Service (1948-1960s). Topics include 1930s road construction tools, equipment, and techniques; interactions with CCC workers; challenges accommodating the post-WWII boom in visitation with limited facilities; improvements and problems brought by Mission 66; bear stories, including efforts to discourage bears from campgrounds by improving sanitation; and elk and bear interactions and management policies.

**Restrictions:** No stories from this interview may be used verbatim. Use for developing naturalist programs is allowed. For more information or to access the recording or transcript for research purposes, please contact the Archives.

**Format:** Two cassette tapes, 83 minutes total recording time. Digitized using TEAC player/recorder on June 25, 2019.

**Transcript:** Transcribed by Marjane Ambler, January 1989? Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Barrett Codieck, Yellowstone National Park Archives Intern, July 2019. Transcript 20 pages.



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**MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL  
HISTORIES**

**ROBERT JAMES “BOB” MURPHY  
PARK RANGER  
WITH COMMENTS BY ALICE MURPHY**

INTERVIEWED BY  
MARJANE AMBLER,  
AUTHOR

FEBRUARY 7, 1989  
IN LIVINGSTON, MONTANA

Yellowstone National Park Archives  
P O Box 168  
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190-0168

Catalog Number: YELL 188046-OH7

**NARRATOR:**

Robert James “Bob” Murphy was born May 18, 1918, in Geraldine, Montana. His parents were Lee Murphy and Celia Stanton. Murphy served as chief ranger and superintendent of multiple National Parks. Murphy’s career highlights include:

- 1938-1940: Seasonal worker at Yellowstone while attending Montana State College in Bozeman
- 1941: Seasonal ranger at Yellowstone
- 1942-1945 and 1951?-1956: Permanent ranger at Yellowstone
- 1956-1958: District ranger at Glacier National Park
- 1958-1960: Chief ranger at Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park
- 1960-1961: District ranger at Rocky Mountain National Park
- 1962-1964: Ranger at Devils Tower National Monument
- 1964-1968: Resource management and law enforcement specialist, National Park Service Director’s Office, Washington D.C.
- 1968-1972: Superintendent, Death Valley National Park (then a National Monument)
- 1972-1974: Superintendent, Lassen Volcanic National Park

Murphy was the author of two books; *Bears I Have Known: A Park Ranger’s True Tales from Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks*, Helena: Riverbend, 2006; and *Desert Shadows: A true story of the Charles Manson Family in Death Valley*, 1993.

Murphy met and married Alice Bigelow while working at Yellowstone in 1945. The couple settled on a Paradise Valley ranch south of Livingston, Montana following Murphy’s retirement in 1974. Bob Murphy died October 15, 2008.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Born May 19, 1948, in Colorado, Marjane Ambler began a career in journalism in 1968. Ambler worked in various positions including as editor of the “High Country News,” an environmental publication, from 1974 to 1980.

In 1984, Ambler’s husband Terry Wehrman accepted a position as a snow groomer in Lake Village, Yellowstone National Park. The couple spent the next nine years living year-round in the interior of Yellowstone. Ambler worked as a volunteer during the early years and as an interpretive ranger during the summers of 1990-1993.

During her time at Lake Village, Ambler began to collect the recollections of the other park employees and family members within her small social circle, as well former park employees who experienced living and working in the park interior in past decades or whose careers were otherwise notable. These activities culminated in Ambler’s 2013 book “Yellowstone Has Teeth,” which narrated the recollections of Ambler’s interviewees interwoven with her own experiences.

Bob Murphy, February 7, 1989 (YELL 188046-OH7)

Ambler and Wehrman left Lake Village in 1993, after which Ambler served as editor of the “Tribal College Journal” from 1995 to 2006. Ambler is also the author of “Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development” published by University Press of Kansas in 1990. Ambler and Wehrman split time between homes in Atlantic City, Wyoming, and Lake Havasu, Arizona.

**SUMMARY:**

This interview consists of stories and impressions from Murphy’s career at Yellowstone, 1938-1956. Major topics include cross country ski patrols, with detailed descriptions of ski equipment, routes taken, and memorable trips; backcountry cabins; smoke jumping and fire suppression; poaching and law enforcement; elk and bison reductions; and Brucellosis studies at the Lamar Buffalo Ranch. Murphy also discusses the cultural attitudes of early park rangers, noting the influence of military culture and the wide latitude rangers were afforded in their work duties. Murphy recalls stories from the careers of other rangers, including Harold “Bob” Jones, Hugh Ebert, Bert McLaran, and Harry Trischman.

**Restrictions:** None

**Related Materials:**

- Alice Murphy oral history (YELL 188046-OH8), May 17, 1989, Marjane Ambler Interior Park Employees Oral Histories (MSC 206), Yellowstone National Park Archives
- Robert Murphy oral history interview by Bob Haraden, Spring 1991  
Robert Murphy oral history interview by Sally Plumb, March 1, 2000  
Robert Murphy oral history interview by Jon Dalheim, July 10, 2002  
Yellowstone employee oral history interviews, Yellowstone National Park Archives

**Format:** Two cassette tapes, 94 minutes total recording time. Digitized using TEAC player/recorder on June 27, 2019.

**Transcript:** Transcribed by Marjane Ambler, February 1989? Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Barrett Codieck, Yellowstone National Park Archives Intern, July 2019. Transcript 25 pages.

**Robert “Bob” Murphy interviewed by Marjane Ambler  
in Livingston, Montana, February 7, 1989  
with comments by Alice Murphy**

**Narrator:** Robert Murphy (RM)

**Interviewer:** Marjane Ambler (MA)

**Also present:** Alice Murphy (AM), Terry Wehrman (TW)

**MA:** ...in Livingston, Mont., and it's February 7, 1989. I'm Marjane Ambler, and we're interviewing Robert Murphy. Bob could you start off by just introducing yourself and telling us where you were born and basic biographical information?

**RM:** My parents came to Montana around 1900. I was born in Geraldine, Mont., May 18, 1918. My parents then moved to the Gallatin Valley near Bozeman, where I moved when I was about four and-a-half years old. I attended grade school, high school, and college in Bozeman. It was Montana State College at that time. I majored in plant ecology, which was a branch that they started as a range management course. At the time, I contemplated probably working for the Soil Conservation Service. However, I started working in Yellowstone National Park summers, starting in 1938, in the sanitation department and went there each summer during college. In 1941, I was a seasonal ranger in Yellowstone, and I took the ranger exam, the border patrol exam, and others, but I guess due to my seasonal experience in Yellowstone, I was offered an indefinite appointment in Yellowstone as a seasonal ranger and made permanent in 1942. Then at that time, early in my career in Yellowstone, I was stationed at Lake Ranger Station two summers, and I was stationed at the Crevice Ranger Station on the north boundary near Jardine, Montana, during the winter season. At that time, elk hunting along the north boundary of Yellowstone ran until March 15, and Jardine was a mining operation at that time so there was quite a bit of activity and required rangers to patrol in that area. I spent two winters there at Crevice. During those early years, I was fortunate to be selected in fire suppression and went on a lot of smoke chasing ventures. Early in those days, smoke jumpers were few and far between, it was just getting started, so most smoke chasing in Yellowstone was by foot or on horseback, going back into the country to locate these smokes. It wasn't an easy task that way. We had some large fires. I can remember the Chipmunk Creek fire and the White Lake fires at that time that I participated in, one way or another, and the Grizzly Lake fires. I remember being over in the Fan Creek fire, an early fire in that basin. Frank Kowski was fire boss, I remember, at that time.

**MA:** Were these all in the 1940s?

**RM:** Yes. Then during the war years, I was assigned as a civilian employee with the Armed Services, stationed at different locations. Fort Missoula, at Spokane Air Force Base, at Camp Lewis, Camp Roberts. There was a Northwest manpower pool formed then by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Forest Service, and the National Park Service. We were alerted to the Japanese balloon venture, where these balloons were coming over the West Coast across the Pacific. We were fearful that they might be able to hit our area during extreme fire danger periods. Of course, they carried incendiaries [to set back burns]. However, the balloons were not

Bob Murphy, February 7, 1989 (YELL 188046-OH7)

entirely successful because the jet stream pushed them more southerly routes during the extreme fire season. Most of them came into Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, usually during February, March, and April. After that period, I was back in Yellowstone. Then some of the vets were returning with ten points so there was a chance of being bumped. I was offered a job at Big Bend, Texas. Concurrent with that, I was offered a job as a district agent with the Fish and Wildlife Service in Billings, Montana, where I worked for two years. But my greatest interest was with the National Park Service, and so about a year and a half after the war ended, I returned to Yellowstone Park as a park ranger and was at Lake and worked on buffalo reductions. During that period, in Hayden Valley, we had a reduction there and then in Pelican Valley. As I recall, we killed 192 buffalo in Hayden Valley (1952) and in Pelican, 151 (December, 1953). We were stationed then during one winter at Snake River, South Entrance to Yellowstone.

**MA:** That would have been what year?

**RM:** 1952-53. Of course, in those days, it was a little different. There were no snowmobiles, no tracked vehicles. A few people in Jackson had snowplanes, which were mostly three ski outfits with airplane motors and pusher props. But earlier in our winter there, we would ski out to Moran Post Office below the dam there at Jackson Lake, go down to Burlsheimer's and stay overnight and ski into Moran and back to Burlsheimer's and back to South Entrance.

**MA:** Burlsheimer's? Is that a person?

**RM:** No, it's a lodge. B-u-r-l-s-h-e-i-m-e-r. Slim Lawrence was there. He was the manager and winterkeeper, and his wife was later to be the postmaster at Moran. So then, Karl Johnson of Jackson, Wyo., had a couple of snowplanes. Some friends were using one of them. He offered to sell me one of them, which was in good shape. Fortunately, he had five barrels of gasoline in the fire cache. We enjoyed that. We could go to Moran in about forty-five minutes and come home in an hour, or an hour and fifteen, providing the snow was right. Sometimes, you had to get out and peddle it like you would a scooter when the snow was bad...

**AM:** I had to walk...

**RM:** Or let my wife out and walk. [Laughter] She walked up Huckleberry several times. During the winter there, I had acquired a lot of oak, and we had hobbies, and I made oak furniture and that sort of thing. My wife did fabric painting. It was an interesting winter. Harold ["Bob"] Jones and his wife were there. They had two kids. It was a duplex, and they lived on one side and us on the other. I guess the men enjoyed it more than the women. But we'd ski a lot. I remember that winter, we skied up to Thumb quite a bit to shovel snow from the mess hall and the government buildings up there. We didn't pay too much attention to the snow depths on the cabins. We'd ski up on Pitchstone Plateau just for things to do and over some of the drainages and over to Bechler and back. Grassy Lake country.

**MA:** You went to Bechler to the ranger station?

**RM:** Um-hum.

**MA:** And would you spend the night there?

**RM:** Yes, a couple of days. Two or three days. Shoveling snow off the roofs, and there is a snow course at Bechler and a snow course at Grassy Lake. At that time, there were a lot of snow courses in the park. Some of them surely exist today. But they were quite time consuming because they had eighteen to twenty stations. You would measure snow in eighteen or twenty places in those courses. You would weigh the snow and compute the water content. There was one up the Snake River away and one at Coulter Creek and one up at Harebell.

**MA:** How often would you have to get those?

**RM:** Once a month. The snow courses were usually run. January, February, March, and April.

**MA:** So then you had to get to Bechler and Harebell, and what was the other one?

**RM:** Grassy Lake--Cascade Cabin is half-way between South Entrance and Bechler Ranger Station.

**MA:** So there wasn't any ranger stationed at Bechler at that time?

**RM:** No. But then we would make trips, kind of checking on game. I remember, talking about the long one we made, we went up to Thumb and then we came back to Aster Creek Cabin, which is near Lewis Lake, and then we went into Heart Lake. It was a beautiful day and very late in the season. That evening, just about sundown, a storm came up, and it raged for three days. We had taken notice of the snow on the stake, and it was one of the greatest storms that I had experienced in Yellowstone because when we tried to leave, there was thirty eight more inches of snow on the stake than when we came in there. It hadn't settled, though, it was fresh. We took off about eight o'clock in the morning across Heart Lake, and we realized that we weren't going to make it very far. The snow was terrible. It was up to near our hips, way above your knees, you would never see your skis. In five hours, we made about five miles, so we turned around and came back. The next morning, we got up about 5:30 and left about 6:30.

**MA:** This is you and Jones?

**RM:** Yeah. Bob Jones. The storm let up as we got down Basin Creek, it slowed up a little, and then we got down to the Snake River that night just at dark, and we were wringing wet. A big fir tree had blown over into the river. We had a little hatchet, and we broke off a lot of limbs and built a big fire and tried to dry out. We were there a couple of hours.

**MA:** You were still how far from home at that point?

**RM:** About six miles.

**MA:** And you had come how far?

**RM:** Hmm, not over twelve, thirteen, or fourteen. Anyhow, the women had been alone down at the ranger station. They had a big old coal-fired furnace. You had to carry the ashes out and shovel the coal in. We were a little concerned about them. They were probably concerned about us because we were a little overdue.

**MA:** How much overdue?

**RM:** About two days. No radio, you see. No radio at Heart Lake. So we had something to eat there along the river, hot springs there, and we kind of dried out. We took off, and about two miles out of South Entrance, Bob said, "I just don't think I'm going to make it any farther." I said, "I don't think I am either." We were so pooped out, we would go for twenty minutes, and then we'd just sit down in the snow.

**MA:** It was still hip-deep snow?

**RM:** Oh, yeah. Nearly so, not quite as bad as around Heart Lake and Basin Creek but still bad. Still clear up to your knees. So I took off. I got to the river. The car was on the other side, so I had to holler, and soon the light came on (in the residence).

**MA:** The cable car.

**RM:** Yeah, the cable car. The women came down and ran it back to me. I was thinking I would get some coffee and, I don't know, maybe some blankets or something and go back and get Bob Jones. Just as I was loading my skis into the cable car, he hollered to wait for him. Luckily, he was there. I don't know if it was 1:15 or 1:30 in the morning, but that was the worst ski trip I ever had in Yellowstone.

**MA:** Did you ever feel like you might not make it?

**RM:** No, I didn't really feel that way. I just felt that I needed a lot of time [Laughter] and not really kill yourself off. But I made some others that were comparable to that, from Mammoth to Sportsman Lake and over to Gallatin and down to Grayling Creek. Bitter cold.

**MA:** Comparable, you mean?

**RM:** Longer trips. Right after we were married--we were married in '45. Then in February 1946...Hugh Ebert didn't talk much; he was the district ranger. So I guess it was Babe (Francis) LaNoue told me I was going on this circular ski trip.

**AM:** We had only been married a month, so it must have been November.

**RM:** No, it couldn't have been that early. It was after the first of the year. So I asked Hugh, "What do you want me to take?" He said, "Well, take what you want." I said, "How long are we going to be gone?" "Oh, about a month." I was trying to get out of him, because you know I wasn't that well informed. "Well, he said, "You ought to have a pair of sealskin climbers." Somebody was transferring, so I hurried up and bought them from him. You put them on your

Bob Murphy, February 7, 1989 (YELL 188046-OH7)

skis to go up steep slopes. So we took off from Mammoth to Crystal Springs to Norris and spent a couple of days at Canyon, couple days at Lake, and Park Point and Cabin Creek and Thorofare. We stayed over and washed all our clothes at Thorofare. Then we went up to Lasseter Cabin and Open Creek. There were a couple of trappers up there, marten trappers. Then we went over to Hawks Rest and visited a couple of guys there. One worked for the Forest Service in the summer and trapped marten in the winter. We had a good visit with them.

**MA:** They got to use the Forest Service cabin in the winter, while they were trapping?

**RM:** Oh, it was common...no one was sure who built the cabin. It sat in the hill; it's not like the one that's there now. It was typical Forest Service at that time. They would take over some of these old cabins. Bill, I can't think of his last name, he was there [Bill Daniels]. Then we went up to the Fox Creek cabin. That was a tough trip up Lynx Creek. We stayed over a day and skied Big Game Ridge. Then we came back Falcon Creek to Thorofare. Then we came back to Lake. I don't think we stayed at Park Point. We came from Cabin Creek to Lake, which is a long, long day. We got lost. A storm came up on the lake, and we had compasses.

**MA:** You came from Cabin Creek, not Trail Creek, in one day?

**RM:** Yeah. Long day. We knew we were pressed for time before it would get dark, and we were in this snow storm. Finally, it got so bad, we just had to get out a compass, and then one guy would go ahead. They'd line up, and if you were going too much right or left, he'd holler at you and tell you to veer right or left. We were on a compass course. We knew the reading from Park Point to Lake Ranger Station, but we got too far off before we started with our compass. Sad lesson. We were skiing along, and we could see the shore and couldn't figure where we were at. Finally we realized we were between the mouth of Pelican Creek and the Fishing Bridge museum. So then we turned to the ranger station. So then we came back to Lake, and then we went out to count buffalo in Pelican and up at Fern Lake Cabin. We went up Astringent and back Pelican Creek. Then we spent a day skiing up Raven Creek and back to Mammoth. That trip was twenty-nine days.

**MA:** So was this typical that rangers went on such long trips?

**RM:** Yeah, in fact, they were just starting to get off of that kick. Like I said, they were snow-wacky, couldn't figure what to do, so they I'd go on a ski trip. [Laughter] A lot of guys, my predecessors, had skied more than I had. These were the last of the long ski trips because pretty soon, Tucker snowcats came on the scene and things like that (other tracked vehicles).

**MA:** So when you say "we," how many of you went?

**RM:** Two.

**MA:** You and...

**RM:** Hugh Ebert. He was the district ranger at Lake.

**MA:** Hugh Ebert. He was the guy that didn't talk much?

**RM:** He didn't talk much.

**MA:** Did he talk any more after you...

**RM:** Yeah. [Laughter] After we got to Thorofare, he started talking a little more.

**MA:** You say that you hadn't had that much experience with skiing?

**RM:** Not cross country. I'd down-hilled. I'd raced in high school as a downhill skier. But I had not had any experience in extended trips.

**MA:** You had done some cross country skiing.

**RM:** Yeah.

**MA:** How much?

**RM:** Well, in Bozeman, we lived near Bear Canyon ski area. So as kids in grade school and high school, we also cross country. We even hunted that way--deer. But not to plan for a week or two ski trip.

**MA:** Four weeks.

**RM:** Bob Fleet and I, we skied from Mammoth to Sportsman Lake (cabin) to the Gallatin Ranger Station, do you know where that was? And then back to Grayling Creek cabin and to Cougar Creek and then back to West (West Yellowstone). Another time I skied from West to south Riverside to Buffalo Lake to Bechler.

**TW:** What was the size of your skis?

**RM:** I still have mine. They're seven and a half footers. But a lot were longer than mine.

**MA:** Did you ever weigh them?

**RM:** No, they're not too heavy. Some of the older ones were. I bought these from Jack Emmert, who was the assistant superintendent. He bought them from Austria. Attenhoffer. They are ridge-top skis. There were no edges on them.

**MA:** When you say "ridge-top," what does that mean?

**RM:** Well, the predecessors were just a flat ski on top. These had the in fact, these were made out of hickory. But a lot of the later skis that the Army used for cross country were made out of ash, because they were lighter weight.

**MA:** Ridge top means?

**RM:** They had a reinforcing ridge from the front of the toe that tapers out, and from the heel back.

**MA:** And that's to shed snow or reinforce the ski?

**RM:** Mostly to reinforce.

**MA:** You'd be in pretty big trouble if you broke a ski out there.

**RM:** Oh, yeah, we have. An interesting time, what innovative people do. I remember DeLyle Stevens making the Thorofare trip, and he got down there, and his ski boot came apart. But he was always prepared. He had some of that strong string that cobblers use, waxed it up, and had a needle and sewed his boot back together to get back.

**MA:** What did people do if their skis broke?

**RM:** One guy usually carried a manufactured tip. The greatest damage to skis usually in cross country is that you'd jam it into something and break the tip off.

**MA:** We have a plastic tip. But yours wouldn't have been plastic. What were they made out of?

**RM:** They were made out of metal and wood.

**MA:** So after that first trip, you learned a little more about it. If somebody came to you and asked, "I'm going on a month long trip, what should I take?" What was on your list?

**RM:** I'd at least have a day's rations.

**MA:** Hugh Ebert didn't take any food along?

**RM:** Oh, a candy bar or two. But no, I usually carried a c-ration after that.

**MA:** Literally a C-ration? Army-issue?

**RM:** Yeah. Of course, the cabins were stocked in those days. They had hams hanging from the rafters, as I remember. Canned hams weren't much in vogue. There was cellars underneath the floor that you opened up. Some of the cans would be frozen, but at least they were there. We even had sacks of potatoes. I remember throwing out all the bad ones and salvaging what was good.

**MA:** They'd be down in the cellar.

**RM:** Yeah. It wasn't too long before we went mostly to canned rations and other rations that were packaged. Not much dehydrated yet. That came even later.

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**MA:** So what else did you carry on your person? Did you carry enough that you could spend a night out without a cabin?

**RM:** Yes. To give an example of what to carry and what is deficient: Lee Coleman and I went one time over to Thunderer and then to Cache Creek. It was late in the year, and he decided to take a shortcut to Upper Miller cabin and go around, up by the needle and through the South Fork. We got over on those south slopes at two o'clock in the afternoon, and the snow rotted out on us. We would just fall through it. It was the last week in March. We went down (on the South Fork Creek bottom) and spent the night. I had bought a suit of down--that quilted down--underwear and always carried it in case we spent a night out. So we drug in a lot of trees and built a fire. He had a miserable night. He didn't even have a heavy coat with him. But I put on my down underwear and fared pretty well. The next day we went on up to Miller. But short cuts usually end up being painful. I remember Frosty Freeman and Carl Gruener going from South Entrance, the year after we were there, while Frosty was there. Frosty had only been to Cascade Cabin one time, just to put the rations in. They skied over there, got a late start. They had a conference. It had got dark on them. Carl had never been there. Carl went on later to be a regional director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

**MA:** That's Carl who?

**RM:** Gruener.

**MA:** That's G-r-u-e-n-e-r?

**RM:** He had a degree in wildlife biology. Anyhow, it got dark, and Frosty turned to Carl and said, "The oldtimers tell me that when it gets dark, it's time to camp." So they spent the night under a tree. Carl said, "We woke up the next morning," and he said, "Son-of-a-buck, we didn't go a quarter of a mile and there was the cabin!"

**MA:** Oh, no!

**RM:** [Laughing] "...and we spent that miserable night out there." But, I don't know, skiing was a lot of fun when you look back on it. It was tough. You really got in good condition. You'd go on a month's ski trip and you'd come back and...

**MA:** Did you ever figure out how many miles you went on that one ski trip?

**RM:** No, I did add up what I had skied that winter, which was a little over eight hundred miles. But some before that time claimed that they made like three trips to Thorofare in the winter time. Different guys had made three trips. Or even over to Bechler. I know one trip that went down from Gallatin Ranger Station down the boundary to West and South Riverside and Buffalo Lake and Bechler and Cascade Cabin and South Entrance and back to Heart Lake, Thumb, Lake, Canyon, and back to Mammoth.

**MA:** Were you ever convinced that it was something that should be done?

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**RM:** Not entirely, no. I guess the biggest reason for snow trips at that time was running snow courses. Wildlife observations were probably secondary.

**MA:** Why did anybody care about the snow depths? Was that for water?

**RM:** Well, this wasn't for the information of Yellowstone Park or for their benefit. It was sent to the different states, the Bureau of Reclamation, all these irrigation projects. Some of the greatest headwaters were in Yellowstone. The head of the Snake River. The head of the Madison. The Gallatin. The Yellowstone.

**MA:** I know they have some snow courses in the Lake area now. But I'm sure no one goes out to Harebell for snow surveys now, do they?

**RM:** I doubt it. I think the course up at Coulter Creek is still run by the people at Jackson Lake with the Reclamation. They used to come up and help us at Coulter Creek.

**TW:** Did you have an experience there with the Harebell cabin? Weren't you on that trip?

**RM:** Yes, that was that same year. It must have been in late March. We had about eighty-six inches of snow at the South Entrance when we left and went to Harebell. We got a late start, and Bob hadn't been there. I had rationed the cabin that fall. I don't remember the snow depth at Harebell, whether it was a course or just a single station. They were always interested in what the snow depth was there because that tapered back to Mount Hancock and back onto the Big Game Ridge country and gives you a pretty good idea of what snow depths you got at that elevation. But anyhow we got up there. I don't remember if Jimmy [Braman, superintendent for the Jackson Lake Dam] went up to Coulter Creek with us and then went back or not. But anyhow, we got delayed. We got up there, and it was pretty dark when we got to the meadow to where I figured the cabin was. Fortunately, I had hung a snow shovel in a tree that fall. I remember Lee Coleman had told me, "If you put that shovel in the tree, why really hang it up high because you'll never find it if it's just beside the tree." So we got in there, and we went across, and I stopped, and Bob said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Damn, this is where this cabin should be." He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "No, I'm not sure. So we went on through the timber, and pretty soon after we I'd skied over there, I knew then that it had to be back, and we turned around. We didn't go over a quarter a mile. We got out a flashlight. I had the flashlight, and he was skiing off to the side. There was a little rise in the snow, a hummock.

**MA:** Bob Jones had hit the mound with his ski pole, and it turned out to be the...

**RM:** Cap on the stove pipe. So when we went over to the tree. I had hung that shovel way up there, and it was just about right in front of us. So we dug'er (the cabin) out on the end, and those cabins had the overhangs to stash wood in. We finally got to the peak of it and slid down in, in front, and opened the door. We had to shovel out the top of the chimney, but we never got a window. I think we stayed over a day, and I think maybe we shoveled out a window. I don't remember. But there was a heck of a lot of snow.

**MA:** It must have been kind of late when you got there if you had to get out your flashlight. So you wouldn't have had any alternatives if you hadn't kicked that stove pipe. Right?

**RM:** We weren't thinking about the consequences. [Laughter]

**MA:** Well, that's a good story. The reason I was curious about how much skiing experience you had when you went out on that month long trip was because I have heard a couple of stories of where people were sent out to do things that they might not really be trained to do...

**RM:** Or not in shape. And equipment. Bob Fleet and I started on a trip, and he had bought a new pair of cross country skis that were a combination, with cables. These are just spring heels or sandal type. He got blisters. We were going up on Quadrant Mountain to count elk. Gawd, he just had to give up. We never even got there. He had to go back. He had blisters like that [dollar-sized; The trip was up Fawn Pass to Quadrant Mountain]. Equipment was important.

**MA:** Because of binding?

**RM:** Because the cables held his heel in tight, and he didn't have that freedom. A good cross country boot has to flex and get your heel off the ski. He didn't realize it, but the cable was holding him down; he was wearing his heels out trying to cross country ski.

**MA:** So you're saying that the bindings that you were using, you just stuck your toe in it?

**RM:** No, they're Attenhoffer, special cross country bindings. Now the new ones are much improved. It was just a spring toe iron. Spring steel. It would flex. Then it just had leather straps on the side and a spring heel. But it swiveled and let your ski boot come clear up until only your toe was touching the ski. You had a lot of flexibility.

**MA:** Did you have any other stories about ... Did you want to ask something, Alice?

**AM:** How about Harvey Jamison putting his climbers on?

**RM:** Oh, yeah, gawd, that was an episode! Bert McLaran was a ranger at Lamar. In fact, Bert's whole family has been in the Park Service and retired. His father retired at Rocky Mountain, and he had two brothers, Doug and Dick, with Park Service--career. Doug was at Teton, retired now, I guess. Bert worked for me at the buffalo ranch. He was really a skier. He tried out for the Olympics at that time, and he was qualified, he just couldn't afford to go. He was the wildest downhill skier I have ever been with, or nearly so. But anyhow, we inherited a young fellow from Salt Lake City who just got on with the Park Service at the end of the war. I'll never forget, Harvey Jamison. He weighed about 224 pounds, and he was so out of shape, it was pathetic. So we went from Lake to Pelican cabin. We went out in the Tucker snowcat to Lake and then went to Pelican. Bert and I, we waxed our skis and set them out the night before. "Harvey, are you going to wax your skis?" "No." We used wax usually pretty conservatively, you know. We noticed he was really gobbing it on. The next morning, we took off, and we didn't go 3 miles up toward Mist Creek Divide, and he was carrying about 6 inches of snow. So I took time off and some steel wool and mopped all the wax off his skis, and he still had a terrible time. Then Bert

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wanted an adventure so we went up to Upper Lamar, and then we went up to Frost Lake. Coming down that night, Bert, even with a pack on, was a real skier. Poor old Harvey was coming down, and he just went over those young trees and stripped them. He was totally out of control. Then we went down to Upper Miller and made a nice track up to Upper Miller. Harvey couldn't see why we wouldn't go back that nice track. Bert and I wanted to go to Hoodoo Basin, Parker Peak. So we went up there and climbed. You climb all day long to get up there. We were coming down that night, and we were having a nice...The snow was good and big, open slopes. We were skiing down. Harvey didn't come, and Harvey didn't come. Bert said, "What's keeping that guy? Let's go. It's getting late." So I waited, and pretty soon, here comes Harvey down the slope. He had put on his climbers to keep his skis from going too fast. He was getting a nice, slow ride down. [Laughter]

**MA:** You mean like sealskin climbers?

**RM:** He had a pair of these mohair climbers, but he was just afraid to come off that hill. Then we went to Canoe Lake the next day and skiing down the ridge between Calfee and Miller Creek, we were having a lot of fun. Then a storm came in. It got so bad, I knew where the cabin was, but I had to fall off into Calfee Creek because it's (the cabin's) closer to the mouth of Calfee Creek. Well, and it was more protected down there. So we got down there along Calfee, and we were skiing along these pools. It was early spring, and some of the pools were open. Bert weighs about 128 pounds, and he's skiing along, and I'm in his tracks. Harvey, 220 some pounds, and he's coming along, and all of a sudden, boom, he's down in the creek standing up to his knees in the creek with his skis on. He's screaming at me, so I went back there. He asked, "How in the hell do I get these things off?" So I helped him and got his skis off, and we got him dried off.

**MA:** Didn't you have to get into the water to help him?

**RM:** No, I made him put his ski up to where he could use it as a brace and then pulled him. But he was wringing wet. So we took off his boots and made a fire. By an hour later, he was dried out, and we were going. But the humor in this whole thing was we were skiing along...Let's see, I don't know whether I had a headlight on or not. We had flashlights. We were just going down the creek. We got down there [near where Calfee Creek joins the Lamar River], and I crossed some buffalo tracks; just two or three had gone across. I suspected then that might be the trail. But I wanted to ski on out. I skied out, and there we could hear the rushing water, which was apparently the Lamar River. Bert skis up behind me, and he never says much, he just stands there, and we're resting. Harvey comes up, and Bert liked to joke with him anyhow. He says, "Hey, Murph, what river is this?" "Damn," I said, "I don't know. It's making a lot of racket. It must be the Yellowstone." Harvey says, "The Yellowstone?!!!" He says, "I knew if I followed you bastards long enough I'd get lost." [Laughter] Bert said, "Where's the trail?" I said, "I think it's back where we crossed those buffalo tracks." We got our flashlights out and went back, and there was the orange tags, and it was just a few hundred yards up to the cabin. But poor ole Harvey, what did he lose? seventeen pounds on that trip? Bert gained about five.

**MA:** I want to know how Harvey would end up on a trip like that. Did he want to go, or was he just told he had to go?

**RM:** I think he was probably told he was going. I don't know whether it was Maynard Barrows [chief ranger from 1943-1947] or who, but the chief ranger told me, I was supposed to be in charge of the ski trip, that "We're sending Harvey Jamison with you. He was the new guy who came in, but he's not in too good of shape."

**MA:** It seems to me it would be kind of dangerous to send someone like that out.

**RM:** Of course, he had skied downhill at ski areas. He just hadn't had this kind of experience.

**MA:** Did he ever want to have that kind of experience again?

**RM:** No, he didn't stay too long. [Laughter] Like Harry Trischman told me one time, he was over at Cold Creek, and it was terrible in the early days when the park was pretty G.I. He was skiing with Jimmy Brooks. Jimmy went on later to Grand Canyon. They were in the cabin in this wet snow, and Harry says, "We better not go anywhere today." Brooks says, "We got to go. Those are the orders." Harry said, "We're going to get in trouble." So Harry said he broke trail down along the river about a little over a mile, and Harry was a pretty gruff guy. Jimmy skied up to him, and he said, "Jimmy, I'm going back to the cabin." Jimmy said, "Harry, I order you, we got to go on." He said, "I went back to the cabin. That was the last time I saw Jimmy Brooks."

**MA:** What does that mean?

**RM:** He went on out, and later he transferred someplace.

**MA:** Oh, I see. I was going to say maybe he got hurt or something.

**RM:** I think a lot of times at that time, unless you were working in the saddle room or something, repairing stuff or that, there were a lot of guys just skiing around the park in those days.

**MA:** You say the park "was pretty G.I."? What does that mean?

**RM:** Well, you know how the military says, stand at attention or go, you go. Just like Otto Brown, when he was chief ranger. One time out at Pelican, we said it (the weather) was no good to hunt. We were hunting buffalo. He said, "Well, we got to go." So we ran two Weasels out into the timber and sat in them all day long. You couldn't see 50 feet.

**MA:** Was this more true during World War II than after?

**RM:** It was tapering off. Yes, that kind of activity was subsiding. It had been...

**MA:** We had the impression that because the military had been involved in Yellowstone in the beginning, that maybe the Park Service--and particularly the Park Service in Yellowstone--tended to be more military than like the Forest Service.

**RM:** You're probably right. I was lucky to work with Harry Trischman down in Thorofare. You know Harry was a scout. He used to tell some great stories about how G.I. the organization was even then.

**MA:** You mean the Park Service?

Yeah. Because it came from the military. Harry was a scout with the military before the Park Service was ever created. So it kind of inherited some of that.

**MA:** Well, now that you brought up Harry Trischman, could you tell us a little bit about him. What did he look like?

**RM:** I'll never forget the first time I met Harry. It was early, when I was driving freight truck for Bob Robinson, and I was hauling oats out to the buffalo ranch. I knew there was a guy named Harry Trischman out there that was supposed to be in charge of whatever it was. I had these sacks of oats that we unloaded, and here came a fellow with a cowboy hat and a red bandanna around his neck and "Ho, ho, lad," he said. "What do you got there?" I said, "A load of oats." He said, "Well, come on down. We've got a bunch of monkeys around here that will throw it out." He hollered, and it was a CC spike camp that was there. These young guys came over, and anyway, that was my introduction to Harry Trischman.

**MA:** Was he saying anything...Were these people...any particular racial group?

**RM:** No, no. I remember his expressions just cracked you up. One time we were in a house, and he was talking about these children and how they were behaving. They were very active. He said something to the effect, "Those are some interesting little animals, aren't they?" [Laughter] He just had expressions that were hard to beat. But down at Thorofare, I'll never forget. He went down to remodel the cabin at Trail Creek dock. It never had any windows in it. So he was putting a new roof on it and a door and windows and that sort of thing. But we were down at Thorofare one time, Harry and I, and you know the man was very deceiving. We got the tub out, and we were going to take baths. The man wasn't...I doubt if he was quite six feet tall, probably about 5 foot 11, but he had a fore arm on him that was just unbelievable. And his thighs--he was a very strong man. When he stripped down to take a bath, I remember thinking, "Gawd, he was really a strong person."

**MA:** I remember your saying at one time that his forearm was as big as most men's thighs?

**RM:** Yes, nearly so. He reportedly skied across Mary Mountain to Old Faithful when the naturalist...He wasn't the naturalist. Someone was out doing a plant study at Old Faithful, and he died. The stories are great. Whether this is true, I don't know. A couple of guys came in from West Yellowstone with a toboggan and brought this guy (who had died) on a toboggan to that little ole cabin that's on the Fountain Freight Road. I remember Joe Way and I stayed there one night and will never stay there again. The wind went in one side and right out the other. It had bunk beds in it. They evidently stood the toboggan up on the outside, and these fellows got into a poker game. There was a lot of that because there wasn't TV, and radio wasn't much. A lot of card playing, whether it was Pitch or Pinochle, or 500. But they got into a poker game. And

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somebody was losing all the time. Harry was kidding the guy losing because he was sitting with his back to the window. He said, "No wonder you're losing with that naturalist looking at your hand all the time. [there are several version of this tale]" [Laughter] Jokes like that. But others ... Bill Wiggins was a great storyteller. He was chief of sanitation. See, Bill come out of the military, too.

**MA:** Bill who?

**RM:** Wiggins. Great storyteller. He told more stories on Harry Trischman than anyone in the park. This one was one of them. Then there's Trischman Knob and Douglas Knob [located west of Shoshone Lake near the headwaters of the Bechler River]. Bill told a story, and I don't doubt that it is true. They didn't have an administrative officer. They had chief clerks at that time. The chief clerk heard the guys talking about going to the dog races at Ashton. They didn't have sleeping bags at that time. They had down quilts that the guys would pack in their packs. They were down-filled. They would just roll up with them at night. These people like Joe Douglas and Harry Trischman and Bob Lacombe, they...they liked to give people a little bad time. It was just part of their make-up. They enjoyed it. So they took off with this poor soul to go to the dog races, and they got over into that country. They would go down into Raymonds', and then Raymonds would take them in the sled. Raymonds were potato farmers or something just out of Bechler. But anyhow, they got up there, and it was late in the day, and this guy got to asking, "Where are we going to stay? Where are we going to stay?" They kept telling him there was a cabin ahead, a cabin ahead. And then finally, "Where's that cabin?" Harry reportedly skied up to a big tree and said, "Here's your cabin, fellow." And they parked under it for the night. He wasn't as well equipped as they were.

**MA:** So that's where Trischman Knob is?

**RM:** I don't know. I guess Wiggins had some influence with geographic names later, that something ought to be named after Joe Douglas and Harry Trischman. Harry Trischman was a drinking man, too.

**AM:** Tell them about Mr. Emmert.

**RM:** Well, Bill Wiggins tells this story, I wouldn't say it's authentic. Harry Trischman was suspended for indulging. He was at the buffalo ranch at the time. He was the chief buffalo keeper at the time. Babe LaNoue was chief ranger [Francis "Babe" LaNoue was chief ranger from 1935 to 1943], and Jack Emmert was assistant superintendent [John "Jack" Emmert was assistant superintendent from 1934 to 1943]. Jack had just come into the park. He went out to kind of straighten Harry out. Harry's wife was (the sister of) Mrs. Pryor of the Pryor Store. Harry lived out there, and she lived in Mammoth.

**AM:** Her name was Mrs. Trischman.

**RM:** Trischman, right. And Anna K. Pryor. They were sisters?

**AM:** Right.

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**RM:** Anna K. Pryor was the sister to Harry's wife. So he went out to try to reprimand Harry, and Harry says, "Oh, I don't want to talk to you." He went down to the house. He lived in the one that they brought in from Soda Butte, the second one up, that used to be at Soda Butte. He had some potatoes on the stove, and Emmert followed him in there, and they got in a big argument. Old Harry, he just went into the bedroom and slammed the door. Emmert pursued him and was still lecturing. Harry listened to his spiel for a while. (This is Bill's story. How authentic it is, I don't know. Harry confided in Bill Wiggins a lot, too.) Harry got tired of this spiel, and he had probably had a few belts, too. He got up, and he looked at Mr. Emmert in the eye, and he said, "Mr. Emmert, how would you like to wrestle?" and picked him up, threw him on the bed, and messed up his hair. And so Harry got suspended. [Laughter] Well, whether that is true or not, I don't know. What's interesting is that when Mr. Emmert went to Glacier, Bill Wiggins [ranger] and Joe Joffe [assistant to many superintendents, 1929-1960], who was a fixture in Yellowstone for years, came in with Albright, assistant to the superintendent, had Harry reinstated. That summer they sent him down to Thorofare. I was there, too, and so I got to have a good summer with Harry in his reinstatement years that were kind of interesting.

He was funny guy. Carried a fish pole all the time, and he's never fished in the Yellowstone. He told me, "You better take your fish pole. We're going up to Fox Creek cabin." We got up to Mariposa Lake, and ole Harry had his fish pole. We worked trails. We did a little of everything, you know. We had a packhorse and we had a pair of boots, so he put them on. He said, "Why don't you go down to the outlet and catch a couple of small fish for dinner tonight, bring them back to the cabin, and we'll cook them up. So I come back, and he was stretched out in the grass and, "Did you have any luck?" I said, "Yeah, a little." Gee, he had a nice, three and a half or four pound trout. But he said, "Every time. I've never been by this lake but what I don't catch a fish." Quite a guy. He really knew the country, too. He took me in to...They had started to build a trail in the Army days up Beaver Dam Creek to take in some of that country where they poach sheep a lot. That was the purpose.

**MA:** What area of the park is that?

**RM:** That's the southeast arm of Yellowstone Lake as you're going down there. The first creek you come to as you're coming down the trail at the end of the lake is Beaver Dam Creek. But way up in there there's some old blazes, but they never completed that (trail). Used to be quite a sheep population there. Then it kind of died out. Then when Dale Nuss and them was doing this resurvey, in the 1960s or something, it had repopulated. Or poaching died out, or Billy Howell died off or others. Before it came to that.

**MA:** I remember one time that you were saying that even though Harry Trischman was a good drinking hand, he was also pretty fastidious.

**RM:** Oh, immaculate. We'd get to Thorofare, all these little dish towels had to come down. He'd get a pan of water and put lye into it and everything and boil them all up. We'd clean things up. First thing he would do. Yeah, he was neat and clean and a good cook. Really was. Yeah, he was all for washing dish towels. You know they'd have them hanging there for a couple of years.

**AM:** From the rafters.

**RM:** Yeah, well, where they hung the blankets and mattresses--up on those poles. Then they'd have towels above the stove. The first thing he would do if there were any mice traps set or had been set, he'd clean those out. Quite a guy. An interesting guy. He didn't talk as much about other things. Some of the guys like Joe Douglas and Bob Lacombe, I never did know those people, and some of the others that came back to Yellowstone that were military that I had met. But Harry, I spent a good part of a summer with him.

**MA:** You said something about him moving a green log?

**RM:** We were riding up Mink Creek. I'll never forget. That's where you see what a strong man he was. A tree had fallen just the length of the trail. They had cut it off in about 16 foot lengths, and they were going to roll it down below the trail. But this particular section--the butt section of the tree--was pretty heavy. There was a tree in the way, so they couldn't roll it. They had to pick it up and throw one end around. They were tugging on it, and they weren't too big. They were trail crew men. Harry always rode with one horse, and he was in the lead. I remember I was leading a couple of mules. We were going to Fox Creek. He says, "Ho, ho, laddies!" you know he had that expression. "How are you doing? Having a little trouble here?" He stepped off that horse, and he said, "Stand back, stand back. Just get back out of the way there, and I'll take care of it." He just reached down and picked that tree up and literally threw it off the trail. I had thought, "Man, I was going to get off and help, but I am still sitting on my horse." [Laughter]

**MA:** How many trail crew people were there that had been struggling with it?

**RM:** Two. They were young guys.

**MA:** That's a good one. Did you get the feeling that maybe the park changed a little too fast for Harry Trischman? That different qualities became respected?

**RM:** I suppose. You know one thing was obvious. I think there's quite an adjustment. Guys like Lee Coleman, who would roam around up the Lamar and get lost, and the chief ranger would send someone looking for him. He was down at Crandall Creek helping some cowboy gather cattle for a couple of weeks, and then he comes back. [Laughter] He really didn't see anything wrong with it. That's PR work. Poor ole John Jay went up the Lamar looking for Coleman for a week and didn't find any horse tracks or nothing. Coleman later: "Oh, he was all right. He was down on Crandall Creek helping some cowboy gather cows." I guess a lot of those guys went through that sort of experience. You never knew where you might find them. They weren't as attached as we are later. They weren't report organized, or requirements weren't that much. They roamed a lot. A lot of the earlier guys, if they were out in the park, they were doing their job. Or even close to the park. [Laughter] There was quite a bit of that. I remember even way later, guys like Frank Kawski and Bill Bugas who were down in the Thorofare just all summer. They weren't too accountable. The phone line never worked but about four days out of the month. Ground line was twenty-six miles long. There was always a tree on it. Someone was always running up and down the trail trying to fix the phone lines. A lot of them kind of threw their hands in the air and said, "Too hell with it, we'll go about our business."

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A lot of trails. A lot of places. Like with Coleman, I came off the Two Ocean Plateau to Badger Creek and back, which I didn't know these routes existed. Just elk trails. And off the Pitchstone a number of places where I was told to go. Like picking up smokejumpers. I used to do quite a bit of that. They would jump, and they'd send you in with a mule for each smokejumper. Look for those guys. I hunted on Pitchstone one time for three days to find six smokejumpers. We had no radio communications. The lookout on Mount Holmes reported them at the head of Moose Creek, see. I looked for two days there. Finally I went out around on the other side, into the Fall River side, the wind was blowing. I just happened to see this man run up a hill, and then he ran down. I wondered, "Who is that?" What he had, he had a white flag on a stick up on a rock, knowing I would be coming sooner or later. It had blown down, and he had just run up (to replace it). They had a camp down below.

**MA:** This is at Pitchstone?

**RM:** Yeah, Pitchstone Plateau.

**MA:** They have a Mist Creek down there, too?

**RM:** No.

**MA:** I must have misunderstood you then.[Moose Creek]

**RM:** No, they were on the Union Falls side. See, between the Bechler and the Fall River comes in on one side. Like poaching. One time Coleman and I were riding from South Entrance to Bechler in November in quite a bit of snow, and we came across some tracks. Later he backtracked these guys, and they had had a hunting camp up on the Pitchstone.

[Tape change]

**RM:** You talk about carrying a pack and a Pulaski and a shovel, and you hiked eight miles to a smoke and stayed 3 or 4 days. But my first experience at delivering cargo was kind of interesting because Hugh Peyton was fire chief at Yellowstone at one time. He came in here from the Forest Service. He had a brother that was pretty high up in the Forest Service. He was the fire chief so he said he wanted me to go (deliver cargo). They had a fire down the Snake at the Two Ocean Plateau. I guess you didn't get the training you need today. The pilot would tell me after we jumped these guys, "Well, you can kick cargo out." But this first experience, they had already jumped the guys. They came back (from the airport at West Yellowstone), but the reason was it was a tri-motored Ford. I thought, "Gawd, do I want to go in that thing or not?" When you took off, the metal was vibrating, and you think the sides are going off the thing. It was at the old airport at West Yellowstone. We about took the tops of trees off going off the end of it. But then you get over there. But the beauty of the old Ford is you can fly such a tight circle compared to a DC-3. We just went over. I was busy. You're strapped in so you can't fall out. When he hit the buzzer or whatever it was, well you kick it out. But you're real busy because you just get the next cargo ready, and you're kicking the next one out. It was a little spooky because you're always

banking to the inside, and the floors were slick. They're not like they are now. You've got your foot--toe--anchored with a piece of angle iron or something. A little bit Western, you know.

**MA:** A little bit Western?

**RM:** Yeah, but it was fun. It was good experience.

**MA:** So were you working for the Park Service or Interagency?

**RM:** Park Service.

**MA:** You say you got food poisoning?

**RM:** I went out on Pitchstone one time. I remember Harvey Reynolds gave me a box of stuff that had been there, and I put it on a mule. Going up there with six mules to pick up six jumpers. I couldn't find them that night so I made camp. I opened some of this stuff that didn't have labels. We called it surprise packages. You would open up grapefruit, and it turned out to be beans, and things like that.

**MA:** There were no labels on them at all?

**RM:** No, uh, uh. Well, anyway, gawd, I got sick during the night. I was really sick. And I had a radio, one of those old AM radios. I had made this big pot of coffee. I'd drink two or three cups, and it would come up, and I'd drink some more. By morning I was just weak as a cat. So I radioed, and they sent...four...Was it a ranger and four fire control aides? I don't know. Anyhow, they came in and found this camp. I wasn't at Phantom Camp. I was up on top. I said, "Well, I think if you can catch the mules, I can tell you which saddles go, and you can go get these jumpers." Well they chased mules all afternoon. This black horse of mine was out on a picket rope. I wasn't aware of this because I was too sick to even care. Finally, they came in; no luck catching mules. They had chased some of them a mile away. So I said, "You go bring that ale black horse in here." They brought him in. I heard a mule bray way out there. That horse wasn't there ten minutes, until all the mules were back. If they like a horse, they stay with it, see. If you can catch the horse, you can usually catch the mules. We finally resolved that thing. I came in, down to the hospital in Livingston for two or three days and got well.

**MA:** You had a long ride to get from Pitchstone to Livingston.

**RM:** I went from Pitchstone to Lewis River road camp, you know where that trail takes off? The old Lewis Rive road camp?

**TW:** The trail that goes over to Shoshone and Lewis River?

**RM:** No, just above the canyon in the Lewis River. Just where you start down into the canyon, off to the right, was the old Lewis River road camp. There's a trailhead there. That goes over to the Phantom Camp on the Pitchstone. Harry Trischman tells a story about the Phantom Camp and where it got its name. He said he was over there, and he had a big horse. There were guys

fighting fire. There were fires on two sides. There was fire on the Moose Creek side and fire on the Fall River side. And so he said, "Every night I'd get on my horse about 6 o'clock when these guys were getting off the fire, and I'd ride out across that plateau. I'd see some guys heading off, and I'd say, 'Where are you going?' And they'd say, 'We're going to camp.' I'd say, 'Well, you better turn around and do a right angle.' That's where it got to be Phantom Camp," he said. You could never quite find the damn thing.

**MA:** Before we completely leave Harry Trischman, you had said one time that the Park Service didn't treat him real well at the end right before he retired.

**RM:** Oh, yeah. I don't know whether that was deliberate or not. I remember the last day they had Harry cleaning about three bear traps.

**MA:** His last day of work?

**RM:** Yeah.

**MA:** Oh-h-h.

**RM:** Poor old guy. I don't know whether that was deliberate or just that he wanted to do it. Harry was the type of guy that he just wouldn't know. He'd do the darnedest things just because they needed to be done. It may not have been as it might appear.

**MA:** So then when was it that he finally retired? Do you remember what year? There were two different dates in Aubrey Haines' book.

**RM:** No, I don't remember. But Joe Joffe was responsible for getting him reinstated.

**MA:** What did Harry Trischman do after he retired? Do you know?

**RM:** He didn't live very long. He was around Pryor Store, and then he died before the Hamiltons bought them out, didn't he? He used to kind of be around the store at Mammoth. You'd see him up there quite a bit. He'd go fishing. He died of liver cancer.

**MA:** I was just wondering if when he left the Park Service if he kind of lost the purpose to his life.

**RM:** He could have some, although he always seemed cheerful. I talked to him a number of times after he retired.

**MA:** You had mentioned poaching. At one time you said that along the Forest Service boundary the marten trappers were regularly spaced?

**RM:** Oh, yeah. You see, even in the '30s and '40s, (pine) marten pelts were a pretty good price. When you figure \$35 or \$45 for a marten pelt, and a dollar was a lot of money. Down in Wyoming, on the boundary, every township that touched the park was a trapping district. I didn't

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realize that until I got acquainted with Leonard Morris and Ron Bell, who was the supervisor with the Wyoming Fish and Game. So every six miles down the park line, especially along the south end, there was a trapping district. Then, too, guys could go together and stay in one cabin like Morris stayed at Elk Creek and Leonard, who was out of Cody, and another guy, they had two (districts). But on the boundary, you used to patrol for that reason, too. I remember Verd Watson. Who was with him when they picked up Shorty Nichols and Allen down on the Upper Yellowstone? Well, they didn't pick them up there. They had gone from Eagle Pass through and set traps, right on out through the park. Two or three days later, they'd come back. They just happened to fall in the same day the guys were across and over into Mink Creek cabin. They had an old cabin, and they followed them in and skied in at night. First thing, what do you do? You've got two poachers and two rangers in an eight by ten cabin? So they just stayed all night with them and took them back to Thorofare and radioed in. And then they skied out with them. I don't know why. I think they went out Atlantic Creek and down Pacific Creek with Johnny. I talked with Johnny later about that. He was in the hospital. [Murphy added later: this referred to Johnny "Shorty" Nichols and a Mr. Allen out of Cook City and Cody. The old trapper cabin was on Falcon Creek.]

**MA:** Johnny?

**RM:** Nichols. He was a little ole guy that hung around Cooke City. His imagination gets away with him. He said, "They had us right. They had our finger prints and our tongue prints and this and that." [Laughter] It was kind of funny. Some of that went on occasionally. Over in the Gallatin there was poaching. I remember during the war, the start of the war, we got into a deal that involved the butcher shop at St. Anthony and a truck and a '39 Plymouth sedan, which the judge took away from them. What they would do would be they'd come through with a car from West and go through the park. The truck would go through, and they'd check. Then the car would come back through and kill like four or six elk. The guy would take the car and go on. A couple of other guys would have them dressed out. They didn't have communication radios. But then about forty-five minutes later, the truck would come through, and they'd throw the elk quarters in the truck and away they'd go. You'd have two and sometimes three vehicles involved. We got over there, and Hugh Ebert and I stayed in the Grayling Creek cabin. Art Jacobson was there and DeLyle Stevens and Joe Way. The night they caught the guys, I think Art Jacobson and somebody were parked in a gravel pit, which was clear down the Gallatin in an area there. These guys came through and shot these elk right in front of them. Four elk.

**MA:** Did they suspect that something was going on?

**RM:** Oh, yeah. They had been at it for quite some time. But anyhow, there eventually was four guys plus the operator of the butcher shop. But they were selling meat over the counter, I guess.

**MA:** As elk meat?

**RM:** Well, I don't know. Rural people, they probably asked, "Do you want some elk meat? So much a pound." I don't know. Inspections at that time weren't that great. But I think they killed twenty some elk before they were caught. But that was the only one of that. Then the others here

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on the north boundary that I got into were like a Jardine miner that got over into the park. There was, right there at Fishing Bridge as you're turning to go to Canyon, a humorous incident. Guys killed four elk there right in the meadow. I don't know how we happened to find it. We was coming back from Mammoth. We saw where they'd drug them into the road. We headed back to the ranger station and knew the car was going to Cody. So we told the ranger over at East to check every car going out to Cody. We knew they hadn't been gone twenty minutes. These guys coming out of there, he knew them. They had this panel sedan, so they came through and said, "Hi, Bob, how are you doing?" and he (Bob Sharp) let them go on. These were the guys that had the elk. So you can't win them all.

**RM:** But the greatest thing I had was up at Cooke City. What was Peterson's name up at Northeast Entrance? He (Delbert) was on vacation. I kept patrolling up there. There were a lot of elk up around Soda Butte. I went up one morning, and there was a lot of blood on the road. They had loaded an elk. There were two 30-06 spent cartridges there. Another elk was over in the water, in the spring, they hadn't even dressed it. So I went up to Cooke City, and I had no idea who it was. The mine had been reopened for a while there. I went up to the postmaster, Gene Wade, and asked who had been busy around town. "Well, I don't know," he said. "You might check a fellow up at the other end of town." There was a cabin with the fresh paunch of an elk and a camp robber--a bird--on top of it. So I went back and, "Who owns that place up there?" "Well, a policeman in Billings owns it, but he's got it rented." So I went up to the house, and one of the boot tracks was a very peculiar design in the blood in the road. So I went up and knocked at the door, and one woman comes to the door. There's another woman sitting there. I asked if her husband was home, and they didn't seem to have an answer. So I just sat down and started visiting with them. Pretty soon this guy comes in from the outside john; he'd been out there. I think he had seen me and had just gone outside to hide. He came in. So I asked him what kind of gun he had and something like that. I ended up taking his boots, because I knew they were an unusual style, and I asked if I could give him a receipt for his rifle. I had nothing--I didn't tell him. It was a 30-30 rifle, and the cartridges I picked up were 30-06. So I gave him a receipt for his rifle and this sort of thing. I went back to the postmaster, just buffaloed. I didn't really have anything. The guy had said, "No, he'd killed this elk." He had a tag, and the season had just ended on Sunday, and he claimed he had got it on Cooke Pass. He took me out and showed it to me. A bull elk.

**MA:** So he had it tagged?

**RM:** Had it tagged. So I went down to the ranger station and didn't know what to do. Called in. He had to go to work at noon up at the mine. So I went back to the postmaster and borrowed his Jeep because I never would get the government pickup up to that mine. The foreman met me and said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Oh, have you got so-and-so here? I'd like to talk to him." He said again, "What's the matter?" I said, "Oh, some of the boys have been busy down in the park last night. He said, "Gawd, I hope not him. He's the best cat skinner I got." I said, "I'm afraid it's him." I figured I'd take him in the Jeep down to Cooke, and if I don't learn anything, what will I do? I'll just have to turn around and take him back. So I got him in the Jeep, and we went down the road about half a mile. We weren't saying anything. I was just talking about the weather. "Well, I'll tell you," he said. "I didn't kill that elk, but I know the guy who did. But I admit I took it, and that's where it came from. I didn't get it up at Cooke (Pass)." So he just told me about

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everything. So I said, "Okay" and had him write out a statement and took him down toward the Northeast Entrance. Then I took him back to the mine. That night, the foreman called me and said the "Well that guy that shot the elk with the 30-06, he's single up here. He wants to take the rap for killing the elk because this other guy is supporting two women." I met the foreman and the two guys up there that night. Anyhow, but the poor guy. They went to court, and the judge just didn't make too much discrepancy that the one guy shot him and the other one had the elk. So he sent them both down to Cheyenne. Fined one \$300 and six months in jail and one \$250 and two hundred days in jail. The poor guy that had the two women, he had to go to Cheyenne. Well then to climax this thing, later (Lee) Robinson called me from Tower. It was in January, bitter cold, and he said there are two women stuck down on the old bridge. The old bridge that crossed the Yellowstone. He didn't know how to start the Weasel that was parked down there for elk hunters (rangers in reduction program). I went down there and started it and went tearing up that bridge and pulled up along this car. The gal rolled down the window, and it was one of the women that...He had been married to one, and now he was living with the other one. I thought, "Man, they'll slit my throat." But I hooked a chain on that old car and drug it up to Tower Falls, and the one gal insisted upon riding with me. She was telling me that she was glad I caught her common law husband and put him in jail, and maybe he would learn something. She was real friendly. [Laughter]

**MA:** What I can't figure out is that there doesn't seem to be the kind of concern now that there was about winter poaching. Do you think it isn't going on?

**RM:** It's just like fire suppression or poaching. You went all out. But how important is it, really? Because somebody's going to do it. You're probably going to miss some anyhow. We look at elk a little different. You went through a long transition when it was preserve elk, antelope, at all costs. Poaching prevention. Winter kills were bad. It was a great effort. There was a period in the 1880s when they damn near devastated the elk in the park. So then it came on--preservation of the elk, the deer, and the sheep. So that run a strong course for many years. Now someone poaches an elk, maybe the attitude isn't as concerned as it was in those days. I guess it's going to happen, so why spend a lot of time and effort on it? If there's an opportunity to apprehend them, fine.

**MA:** Do you think that change is why they don't bother to man the back country cabins?

**RM:** I think poaching has changed. You went from the horse and buggy day to something different. You know the poaching of the sheep--you remember the incident on Mount Norris a few years ago? A guy hires a helicopter, comes up to get a couple of nice rams. Then we went through Jonas down in Denver. See I was involved in Death Valley at that time. We had the same thing.

**MA:** What year would that have been?

**RM:** Oh, golly. That would have been '68, '69? They were tried. It was never proven, but there's some documentation by this fellow that comes to Yellowstone that's with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, their special agent, that that did occur there and in other areas. [Murphy added later: they were tried in court. Some were fined and served jail terms. The charges were not

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proven against the others.]We had desert bighorn sheep being poached in Death Valley by 'copter, too. I think it's a different ball game. Before you were either catching them on horseback or afoot or automobile. Now you have the guy who goes to Gibbon Meadow or somewhere and shoots a quick elk and hopes he can get out of the park with it. The real damage is being done by the trophy hunters, and I guess they're more alert to that. I think it's backed off a little bit because there was some apprehensions and some very severe fines.

**MA:** We're getting to the end here, but I asked one of the rangers here now why she thought there weren't any effort to have rangers in the back country, particularly for winter poaching. She said she thinks the poachers are wimps just like the ranger are now. [Laughter] What do you think of that?

**RM:** Well, there are some exceptions. There's a guy over at Boulder. What's his name? He was up... they never pinned it on him. Yellowstone had an episode. Remember the guys in Gardiner they arrested, the horn hunters so to speak? The one guy really got racked? You can check back on that. Oh, what's his name over there? I know two or three poachers that go in Yellowstone now. Whether they poach or not, I don't know. Pete, what's his name? Clark? Joe Gaab, who was the warden with them? We rode in on him one time in the damndest place you'd ever see. He had about twelve head of horses and all the gear and three guys. Had a nice visit with him, no guns in sight or nothing.

**MA:** When you rode in on him, was that in Yellowstone?

**RM:** Yes, I wasn't with the Park Service then. I had retired.

**AM:** One was from Big Timber.

**RM:** Yeah, Big Timber. The guy from Big Timber got about a five year ride. Pete was in with them, but they never convicted Pete. But boy, he's just like a coyote. I think it takes a poacher/ranger type to catch one of those guys. They're so seldom in the country. I ran into one when I was with that Langford/Doane expedition [a 1983 horse tour of Yellowstone by descendants of the 1870 Yellowstone explorers], clear down at the south end of the park. All alone. Had three pack horses. When you meet a guy way down in the Heart Lake area or something and you ask him where he's going and he don't volunteer any information, you get a little suspicious. The poaching at Jardine when the mine was running was pretty common. It's still done. Guys drive down through Stevens Creek at Gardiner and take an antelope. We used to get up in arms about those things. I don't think we get as excited anymore.

**TW:** Do you think it will start up again up in the north Park as the mine gets started again?

**RM:** Yeah, I would suspect it might, a little. When I was at Crevice, I guess maybe I bent over backwards because you can do it one way, or you can do it another. I've had guys shoot an elk and obviously stand on the park line and shot it, but you couldn't quite prove it. So you'd help them get it out. Some of those guys became rather friendly later and reported other renegades. You can go all out and treat everybody the same, or you can compromise a time or two. I had

some of that. The guys used to come in--I had a big pot of chili on the stove--and have a big bowl of chili later. I arrested them; I arrested one of them twice. [Laughter]

**AM:** He used to ride horseback down the river to see me.

**MA:** You were at Mammoth?

**AM:** Gardiner.

**MA:** That's when you were courting?

**AM:** Yeah. He moved on horseback once.

**RM:** Yeah, I moved from Crevice to the Buffalo Ranch on horseback.

**AM:** That's all he had.

**RM:** I went there for the buffalo reduction.

**AM:** He hung his good clothes in some girl's apartment at Mammoth.

**RM:** I left my blue suit. They chased buffalo for years in Lamar. Then about 1935 or '36, somewhere in there, they gave it up. They fed them in the winter so they put hay lines out. So when I went to the Buffalo Ranch, you might trap for three weeks. One time we trapped 720, and then we killed 397. You'd work them in the corrals. For a week, you'd sort weak cows, or conformation wasn't good, or one-horned bulls, or one-horned cows, or one-eyed ones, or old. We'd kill off that way. Selectively. Quite a bit of it was selective. Then one year there, we killed only reactors to the brucellosis test. It was a slow process because Dr. Quorthrup of Oregon State College, who had a PhD in medicine, did the early studies on brucellosis. He was never quite convinced that...It is a bovine type, he said, but why do buffalo seem to have a certain amount of immunity to it compared with domestic livestock? But he said that can also be attributed to sanitary conditions. If you get dairy herds in some real unsanitary things, yeah, it goes like mad. Or congestion. But still, my experience with buffalo here and at Wind Cave (National Park), you have high positive readings but minimal birth defects.

**MA:** Bob, I think we could probably talk for another hour and a half.

**RM:** Yeah or two days.

**MA:** Maybe we'll get a chance to do another tape. But for now, I would just like to ask you one question if you could describe your last day in Yellowstone. Do you remember your last day?

**RM:** My last day in Yellowstone?

**AM:** Everyone helped us move.

**RM:** Everything shut down. We had more help than we needed to load that van up. I was being promoted to West Side District at Glacier, which was bigger than anything I had had at Yellowstone. So I was quite excited about going. But then, at the Buffalo Ranch, we had quite a crew at that time, so then they all turned out. We really didn't need that much help. It was kind of sad leaving where I started and my first love in the Park Service. But still, I was looking for new adventure and a different type of park, more rugged. But the experience in Yellowstone was great. We were sad on leaving. Everybody was there and hated to see me go, too. It was a good leaving experience. It can be a sad one, but no. My leaving of Yellowstone was a good experience, looking forward to something else.

**MA:** OK.

[End of interview]

**Postscript by Marjane Ambler:** Bob and Alice worked at Glacier from 1956-1958; at Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Parkway from 1958-1960; at Rocky Mountain National Park from 1960-1961; at Wind Cave National Park in 1961; at Devils Tower National Monument from 1962-1964; in Washington, D.C., headquarters from 1964-1968; at Death Valley National Monument from 1968-1972; and at Lassen National Park from 1972 until his retirement in 1974.



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**MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL  
HISTORIES**

**ALICE BIGELOW MURPHY  
PARK EMPLOYEE AND RANGER'S WIFE  
WITH COMMENTS BY ROBERT "BOB" MURPHY**

INTERVIEWED BY  
MARJANE AMBLER,  
AUTHOR, YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

MAY 17, 1989  
IN LIVINGSTON, MONTANA

Yellowstone National Park Archives  
P O Box 168  
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190-0168

Catalog Number: YELL 188046-OH8

**NARRATOR:**

Alice Murphy was born Alice Ruth Bigelow to parents Dan Bigelow and Laura Gausted in Absarokee, Montana, on July 17, 1923. In 1932 the Bigelows moved to a ranch property in the Tom Miner Basin. To finish high school, Alice boarded with relatives in nearby Gardiner. After graduation she found work as a stenographer with the Yellowstone chief ranger's office in Mammoth Hot Springs, Wyoming, in 1943. While there, Alice met ranger Robert "Bob" Murphy, whom she married in October, 1945.

The Murphys served at several posts in Yellowstone including at Mammoth, where Alice worked as secretary for chief naturalist David Condon, and an isolated posting at the Snake River Ranger Station. There the couple experienced a snowed-in winter in 1952-1953.

Alice subsequently followed her husband's career in the Park Service, including his job with the Director's office in Washington D.C. (1964-1968), where Alice rose to a GS level 7 as a management analyst; followed by Death Valley National Monument (1968-1972) and Lassen Volcanic National Park (1972-1974). Bob served as superintendent at the latter two locations, and chief or district ranger at several other parks.

The Murphys settled in a Paradise Valley ranch south of Livingston, Montana following Bob's retirement in 1974. Alice Murphy died November 1, 2013, in Livingston, Montana, five years after her husband's death.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Born May 19, 1948, in Colorado, Marjane Ambler began a career in journalism in 1968. Ambler worked in various positions including as editor of the "High Country News," an environmental publication, from 1974 to 1980.

In 1984, Ambler's husband Terry Wehrman accepted a position as a snow groomer in Lake Village, Yellowstone National Park. The couple spent the next nine years living year-round in the interior of Yellowstone. Ambler worked as a volunteer during the early years and as an interpretive ranger during the summers of 1990-1993.

During her time at Lake Village, Ambler began to collect the recollections of the other park employees and family members within her small social circle, as well former park employees who experienced living and working in the park interior in past decades or whose careers were otherwise notable. These activities culminated in Ambler's 2013 book "Yellowstone Has Teeth," which narrated the recollections of Ambler's interviewees interwoven with her own experiences.

Ambler and Wehrman left Lake Village in 1993, after which Ambler served as editor of the "Tribal College Journal" from 1995 to 2006. Ambler is also the author of "Breaking the Iron

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Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development” published by University Press of Kansas in 1990. Ambler and Wehrman split time between homes in Atlantic City, Wyoming, and Lake Havasu, Arizona.

**SUMMARY:**

This interview mainly focuses on Murphy’s experience at the Snake River Ranger Station in the winter of 1952-1953. Murphy discusses the details of her home life: appliances, radio communication, food storage, transportation, hobbies, and social life. Murphy’s living conditions were primitive, but growing up on a ranch prepared her for the hardship. Murphy also discusses her time in Mammoth, with a general discussion of job opportunities for women in Yellowstone; and relations between rangers, maintenance workers, and concessions employees.

**Restrictions:** None

**Related Materials:**

- Robert Murphy oral history (YELL 188046-OH7)., February 7, 1989, Marjane Ambler interior Park employees oral histories, Yellowstone National Park Archives
- Robert Murphy oral history interview by Bob Haraden, Spring 1991  
Robert Murphy oral history interview by Sally Plumb, March 1, 2000  
Robert Murphy oral history interview by Jon Dalheim, July 10, 2002  
Yellowstone employee oral history interviews, Yellowstone National Park Archives

**Format:** One cassette tape, 63 minutes total recording time. Digitized using TEAC player/recorder on July 1, 2019.

**Transcript:** Transcribed by Marjane Ambler, May 1989? Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Barrett Codieck, Yellowstone National Park Archives Intern, July 2019. Transcript 24 pages.

**Alice Bigelow Murphy interviewed by Marjane Ambler  
in Livingston, Montana, May 17, 1989  
with comments by Bob Murphy**

**Narrator:** Alice Murphy (AM)

**Interviewer:** Marjane Ambler (MA)

**Also present:** Bob Murphy (BM)

**MA:** I'm Marjane Ambler; we're at Livingston, Montana; and we're talking with Alice Murphy on May 17, 1989. Alice, is that your official name?

**AM:** Alice Bigelow Murphy.

**MA:** And your maiden name was...

**AM:** Bigelow. B-i-g-e-l-o-w.

**MA:** OK, and when were you born?

**AM:** July 17, 1923.

**MA:** Ok, where?

**AM:** In Absarokee, Montana, in a little white house that is still there. I was born in a little white house.

**MA:** Oh, it is?

**AM:** To Dan and Laura Bigelow. I spent quite a bit of time there and at Fishtail, Montana. My dad worked for different people down there. Then we moved to Tom Miner Basin [near Gardiner, Montana]. I forget what year we moved up there. But when we moved up there, I helped my dad move the horse herd to Tom Miner from Absarokee, and we took the back roads.

**BM:** It was about 1935 when you moved.

**AM:** 1935.

**MA:** Boy, that must have been quite a ride. How many miles would that be?

[Inaudible]

**AM:** We'd camp alongside the road at night.

**MA:** Do you remember how many nights you had to camp?

**AM:** I think it was three.

**MA:** Then you came through the mountains when you say you took the back roads?

**AM:** Yes. I had a little spotted pony, which was real cute. Called her Spotty. Then my mother and my sister drove the car, and they were at the campsites each night with us at the different places.

**MA:** Oh, I see. So you were only thirteen or fourteen years old? That must have been quite an honor to help your father.

**AM:** Yeah, and then at one place, I remember this big ole red bull came after us. I forget how many horses we had at that time. That was a long time ago. [Laughter]

**MA:** Yes, that was a while ago.

**AM:** Then we went to school at Gardiner, Montana, and we'd stay up there with my aunt, Mrs. Scott. She owned half of Gardiner at that time, the Scotts did. My folks were in Tom Miner. My father would come after us every Friday night, no matter what the weather was. Sometimes he'd have to bring the sleigh the ten miles to meet us. But we always wanted to go home rather than stay in town.

**MA:** Mrs. Scott, what was...

**AM:** That was my dad's sister.

**MA:** What was her husband's name?

**AM:** Charles, Charley Scott. I was related to almost everyone in Gardiner, and then in Absarokee...

**MA:** So she owned the property through the Scott side of the family and not the Bigelow?

**AM:** Scott. Then we went to school in Livingston.

**MA:** To high school? They didn't have a high school in Gardiner?

**AM:** No, just through the eighth grade. Let's see, what else...

**MA:** So then you graduated?

**AM:** I went three years of high school down here, and I went my fourth year back to Gardiner, and they had the high school in the basement of the Eagles Hall. I was salutatorian.

**MA:** That's pretty good. So did you work off the ranch at all initially?

**AM:** When we were on the ranch, I always drove the hay stacker and helped put the hay up. Then when I got to Gardiner, I went to work for Moore's Jewelry Store that was there. Then I went to work in the drug store. And then after I graduated, I went to work up in Yellowstone, and I worked for the chief ranger's office.

**MA:** So that was right after you graduated then?

**AM:** Uh-huh. In '43, I guess it was. Then I saw Bob. [Laughter] Where'd we meet, up at the ski hill, Bob? I think we met up at the ski hill. He says, "You're Alice Bigelow." I said, "Yeah, you're Bob Murphy." Then he asked me for a date, and I'll never forget, I was sitting there waiting, and waiting, and waiting. [Laughter] It had snowed, and he couldn't get up the hill. My folks lived in Gardiner, and the road was kind of bad when it snowed, so he didn't come. Then the next day, here he came, after it had frozen. He said, "I couldn't get there." I said, "You could have walked!" You know, from just downtown to up there.

**MA:** How far would that have been?

**AM:** Quarter of a mile, Bob? About a quarter of a mile. Anyhow, then we got married on October 29, 1945, and let's see...

**MA:** So you were saying that when he was still courting you, he lived up at Crevice [Ranger Station]?

**AM:** Yes, he lived at Crevice, and he'd come down to see me horseback. I guess he left his clothes at some girl's apartment in Mammoth. His good clothes. Then he'd come down and get these, and he'd come and see me. When he moved to the Buffalo Ranch then, he moved from Crevice horseback. I said in later years, you sure couldn't move by horseback then with all the stuff we accumulated. But that's the way he used to move, by horseback. We thought we were going to move out there to the Buffalo Ranch, and we got all our stuff out there. After we were married, they decided they wanted me to work in the offices at Mammoth. So we had to move everything back into Mammoth. They put Bob on ski patrols and game counting and all that stuff.

**MA:** So what were your duties in the chief ranger's office?

**AM:** I was a secretary, stenographer.

**MA:** How many years did you work there?

**AM:** Oh, dear. How many years did I work there, Bob, in the chief ranger's office? Oh, I just worked on and off.

**BM:** You were there during the summer for about three years. Then you worked for Dave Condon [Chief naturalist, 1946-1959].

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**AM:** Yeah I worked for the chief naturalist, Dave Condon. What a time that was. He dictated all the monthly reports. And I could barely read my shorthand. It would take me a long time to get them done.

**MA:** How long would they be?

**AM:** Oh, ten, twelve pages.

**MA:** Single spaced?

**AM:** Yeah.

**MA:** Wow.

**AM:** Yeah, wow. But I enjoyed working in the chief ranger's office when we were married because I could keep track of Bob. He would go on these ski trips, and a lot of times I got to run the radio so I could talk to him.

**MA:** His first big ski trip was soon after...

**AM:** A month after we were married. He come home and said he was going on a ski trip. I said, "Oh, how long are you going to be gone?" He said, "Oh, about a month." [Laughs] But, like I said, I worked in the chief ranger's office, and he called me quite a bit, and I'd know he was OK anyway. At the buffalo ranch when we were out there, we had kerosene refrigerators and wood cook stoves. That was at the time when they had the horses and the mares and the colts that Bob took care of. Morgan stallions. In the summer, I'd go on the trail clearing with he and the... What was he called, Bob? Fireguard? Davey Mitchell?

**BM:** Yeah, they called him fire control aide.

**AM:** Fire control aide. So he and Bob would clear trails, and at night they'd tell me to go catch some fish. So I'd go catch the fish and have supper ready by the time they got the horses taken care of.

**MA:** So how many years did you do that?

**AM:** Three, I guess.

**MA:** That sounds like a pretty good assignment.

**AM:** Yeah, it was. They assigned me a horse, too.

**MA:** Did you get paid for doing that?

**AM:** No, huh-uh.

**MA:** That was just helping out?

**AM:** Yeah, helping out.

**BM:** The government furnished her a horse.

**MA:** The government furnished you a horse, huh? That was your payment.

**AM:** One time we went up the Lamar River at Cache Creek, and a mule tipped over on its back. They had to cut the pack off to get him out. The chainsaw was all wet so we had to dismantle all that and put it out in the sun to dry. But the fellows put it back together and away we went the next day. So that was exciting.

**MA:** Yeah. Now we can go back to your paper there, but I wanted to ask you about how the girls in Gardiner looked at the rangers? Were they considered more glamorous than the cowboys or the miners?

**AM:** Yeah, I think so. The uniform was nice. He always looked real nice.

**MA:** Let's see. You got married during the war?

**AM:** Yeah, I think so. Wasn't it Bob?

**BM:** Oct. 29, 1945. The war was pretty well over then.

**MA:** So that uniforms were...

**AM:** Yeah, there were lots of uniforms then.

**MA:** I know I talked with Archie Martin one time, and he said that the wranglers impressed the Eastern girls more than the rangers did. [Laughter] I just wondered what the Montana girls thought.

**AM:** Oh, I don't know. Of course my dad was a cowboy. He rode in rodeos. I don't know if I was looking for something different or what. [Laughter] Like I said, in the winters, they'd take me back to Mammoth, and I'd work in all the offices. I think I worked in every office up there. Mails and files, naturalist's office, personnel office, stats office. That's where they kept track of all the automobiles--the states--that came through. I worked in almost every office up there when they'd bring us back in to Mammoth. They'd always put us in an apartment house with those Murphy beds that come out of the wall? Us having no children, of course we got the smallest place in the world up there.

**MA:** A little discrimination there?

**AM:** Yeah. [Laughs]

**MA:** So in Mammoth, was that the only place where women were allowed to work at that time?

**AM:** Uh-h, yeah.

**MA:** Was there a time when women weren't allowed to live inside the park?

**AM:** I don't think so, was there, Bob?

**BM:** Not in our time.

**AM:** Not in our time.

**BM:** Peg Arnold worked. [Inaudible]

**AM:** She was a naturalist?

**BM:** Yeah.

**AM:** Well, Marge Somerville was a...

**BM:** Well, some of the women worked as seasonal rangers during the war. Scotty Chapman's wife.

**AM:** During the war, they worked as seasonal rangers at the entrance stations. Marge Somerville. Peg Arnold. How about Herma Bagglely, what did she do?

**BM:** Yeah, she worked.

**MA:** So they worked in the interior?

**AM:** I think they had them mainly at the checking stations, didn't they, Bob?

**BM:** Yeah, during the war they operated the checking stations more to distribute information. There was a time that they didn't collect fees and a time that they did.

**MA:** So there were certain jobs that were considered appropriate for women at that time?

**AM:** I don't think women were allowed to work for the concessions, were they, Bob?

**BM:** It was not a regulatory thing, Alice. I think it was just people just frowned on it. I know DeLyle Stevens said it poses a problem. His attitude was that if someone's wife works there, you were reluctant to turn the decision making over to them. I don't know. It was more of an atmosphere more than a regulation.

**MA:** Now they have a policy of encouraging hiring of spouses. So you liked your work in Mammoth?

**AM:** Um-hum. That was fun to work there all winter, and in the summer, they'd put me out in the park, and I'd fish all summer. [Laughter]

**MA:** That doesn't sound all bad.

**AM:** When we were at the Lake Ranger Station, Bob had a lot of bear trapping, so I'd go with him to let them loose. That one night we trapped three. We didn't even get the bear trap cleaned out, and we'd be trapping bears. They'd still go in there whether it was cleaned out or not. We'd take them out toward East Gate to let them out.

**MA:** Meaning you hadn't even put in new bait either?

**AM:** No, didn't have to. There were so many around.

**MA:** Did you have any close calls yourself?

**AM:** No, not really. Then I used to go on the boat with him. One time we were down at Flat Mountain Arm, and the fellows were out. Was that Mrs. Stevens and I, Bob?

**BM:** Yeah.

**AM:** We were still in the boat, and we were getting our fishing gear together. Good grief, we looked up, and here we were, floating. I hollered, and Bob said push this button, do this and do that, and I got it back to the shore. [Laughter] But we were afloat for a while.

**MA:** That was Mrs. Stevenson?

**AM:** Stevens. DeLyle Stevens, he was the district ranger when Bob was park ranger.

**MA:** Did you have any exciting times on the lake with waves?

**AM:** Oh, Lord, yes. One time we had a bunch of people from Washington, D.C., with us, and those waves would just crack! You looked down, and all you could see was that deep, green water. I thought if I ever get back to shore, I'll never go again. And I haven't.

**MA:** Haven't you?

**AM:** Uh-huh. Not on that lake. We go out on Lewis Lake. We have our boat, and we go out on that. But I'll never go on that Yellowstone Lake again. I don't like that.

**MA:** I can't really blame you. What was it like living at Lake when there were bears all around?

**AM:** It was like living in a fish bowl because we lived in the back of that ranger station, and people would be walking around and looking in your windows and whatever. But, I don't know. You learn to live with that kind of thing. And you learn to live with the bears. Bob was gone a lot then, too, because there was always fights up at the hotels. He'd have to take them to the hospital in Mammoth, huh, Bob? They had the hospital in Mammoth at that time.

**MA:** So you would be there by yourself. Did you worry more about people or animals?

**AM:** People.

**MA:** But you didn't have anything happen?

**AM:** No.

**BM:** Although we had grizzly bears in our garbage cans and that, we never really gave it a thought--the danger aspect.

**MA:** Did you go walking by yourself?

**AM:** No.

**MA:** Not night or day?

**AM:** Couldn't. When we were...

**BM:** You and Walker's wife hiked a lot. Two women.

**AM:** Not at Lake we didn't. That's when we were at South.

**BM:** Well, at Crawfish Creek [near South Entrance] and...

**AM:** Yeah. When we were at Lake, we had a lot of seasonal rangers, so on their days off, I'd go fishing with them, and we'd catch fish. Then on weekends I'd tell them to bring their girlfriends, and I'd fry the fish and make potato salad. They could bring the beer and their girls and that kind of thing. Almost every weekend, we had something for our seasonals, which was fun.

**MA:** Oh, how nice. I bet they really appreciated that.

**AM:** Yeah. They liked the food. I always made potato salad, and I had them bring the potato chips and the beer and their girls. It was fun to get acquainted with all of them.

**MA:** Was that expected of you? Did other wives do that kind of thing?

**AM:** No, we just like people.

**MA:** You like people, but you ended up being at the Snake River Station for a whole winter without any people [1952-1953].

**AM:** Right. We had people come up from Jackson to see us.

**MA:** Oh, did you? Very often?

**AM:** Almost every weekend. I don't know how many cases we went through of rum and coffee.

**MA:** And would they stay?

**AM:** No, they'd just come up for the day.

**MA:** How far were the roads plowed?

**AM:** To Moose, was it, Bob?

**BM:** No, they were plowed to Moran Junction.

**MA:** So then the people would snowmobile up to see you. How did you have so many friends in Jackson? Were they people who had worked with the Park Service before?

**BM:** We shopped in Jackson. The business people that had snowmachines, with the airplane motors? They would come up. We had nine just in our yard one Sunday like late March.

**MA:** This is snow planes?

**AM:** Yeah. They liked to run up there and back just for something to do. Sometimes we'd have some rum or something, and then we'd go to Thumb and back. Then they'd go home. Some were from Pinedale and on down.

**AM:** We bought a snowplane while we were down there, too, from one of the fellows at Jackson. So Bob would go down and get our mail, which would usually take a couple of days on skis. He could just buzz down and back and get the mail and get a few things. Those that came up on weekends always brought him Copenhagen. But they couldn't bring anything that would freeze, like oranges or fresh things. But we enjoyed having everybody come up.

**MA:** Did you miss the fresh food?

**AM:** Yeah. But of course. Well, when they decided to send us down there, Dave Beale was down there as a ranger with the Joneses, Bob and Pat Jones.

**MA:** Did Bob Jones have two names?

**AM:** No, it was Harold Jones, but it was Bob Jones, and Pat is his wife.

**MA:** Where does the Harold come from?

**AM:** It's Harold R. Jones.

**BM:** His first name was Harold, but they called him Robert or Bob.

**MA:** Oh, okay.

**AM:** They had two children, and the Beales had two, didn't they, Bob? Boys. Then the Beales got on as the naturalist. So who do they plan to send down to South Gate with no kids? The Murphys. You know, we could pick up and go. Good grief, was it the tenth of...

[Phone rings, pause]

**MA:** So before we paused, you were saying that Dave Beale had gotten a job in Mammoth as a naturalist. So he was moving. When did they ask you to move in?

**AM:** I think it was the ninth of December.

**MA:** That they notified you? Or that you actually moved?

**AM:** No, I think that's when they told us we would be moving to South gate. They usually told the people in the summer so you could get your mind set to be snowed in. But this was a surprise. Bob's dad was in the hospital with pneumonia. We didn't have our Christmas shopping done or anything. In those days, they moved us in the horse truck. So they had to clean out the horse truck. The road was already snowed in, so they had to plow the road down to South Gate.

**MA:** Bob's father was in the Livingston hospital?

**AM:** Bozeman. So we just had a couple days' notice. We dashed to Bozeman, and he bought me a sewing machine so I'd have something to do. We got our Christmas packages ready, and I think we left them with my folks in Gardiner. They distributed them for us. When we got down there in the horse truck, they put our stuff out in the snow, and moved the Beales' stuff in the truck. It was a mess; it really was.

**MA:** What did you do about food?

**AM:** Well, see I think the Beales bought about a thousand dollars' worth of food before they went in there. They had to buy all that stuff. They decided we should buy their food. Well, people just don't eat the same, and they had the two kids. But it was all down on the shelves. It was just like going to the store. We put fresh tomatoes in little brown sacks and hung them from the ceiling, and they lasted a while. We had carrots and rutabagas and there was some celery in sand down in the basement. And they lasted. The eggs we put in galvanized garbage cans, a layer of oats, a layer of eggs, and oats, and eggs. I don't know how many dozen eggs we had. By spring, they got a little rank. [Laughs] We had a lot of oats growing outside because we kept throwing the oats out beside the house there.

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**MA:** How did you know those little tricks? Was that from your ranch background?

**AM:** No, they already had that done when we got there. I guess a lot of people had to do that. We didn't have electricity either so if you wanted to wash, you had to go start the generator. If you want to vacuum, you start the generator. Of course there's no TV. We had our radio.

**MA:** What kind of radio reception did you get?

**AM:** It was good. When we got there, Pat Jones met me at the door and said, "We really didn't ask for you people. We wanted people with children." I said, "Well, Pat, we didn't ask to come here either, but we better try to get along because it's going to be a long winter."

**MA:** These were your only neighbors, right?

**AM:** Right. It was this dumb duplex though. I had my cigarettes in the refrigerator, and Bob Jones said he quit smoking. But after we'd go to bed at night, I could hear the door opening, and there goes my cigarettes. [Laughs]

**MA:** You had to share a refrigerator?

**AM:** No, he came over and got into ours. We all had our own kerosene refrigerators. And then when the fellows would go on the ski trips, Pat wanted to run the radio so she could talk to headquarters all the time. And she had the two kids. So I always got to go get the coal and the wood and carry out the ashes from the big furnace.

**MA:** That'd be a big job.

**AM:** Yeah, it was. And get the kerosene for the refrigerator.

**MA:** Was it very difficult to start the generator?

**AM:** No, I don't know. You just pulled the rope, didn't you?

**BM:** Here are these photos.

**MA:** We'll worry about the photos later, I guess. Did you worry about the refrigerator?

**AM:** Yeah because before they had caught fire. Was that on our side before we got there, Bob?

[Inaudible, looking at photos]

**BM:** They even had some interesting winterkeepers. This Mrs. Bateson sang with the USO in Greenland and Germany. She was a great musician.

**MA:** That's a great picture of her.

**AM:** When we were at Lake killing buffalo, before we'd leave for the winter, she'd always have us over for spaghetti and Chinese food.

**BM:** She was a great cook.

**AM:** She'd sing and play. Bob had a little accordion, so he'd take that over, and they'd play music.

**MA:** Oh, huh! So you say you were worried about the kerosene refrigerator?

**AM:** Yeah. Well, Bob, didn't the ranger station burn down?

**MA:** That was while the Chapmans were there.

**AM:** Boy, you had to learn how to cook all over with the coal and wood stoves. But I did angelfood cake. We had to make bread. That's when I started cutting Bob's hair. Got to get him set down now, too. Then before we got snowed in, I bought those ballpoint paints or liquid paints and I gussied up everything--the pillowcases, the curtains, the sheets. Anything that was plain got gussied up. [Laughs]

**MA:** What kind of designs did you put on them?

**AM:** Oh, I had transfers. Then I ordered a bunch of buttons one time I saw in a magazine, and then I made earrings.

**MA:** You made them for presents?

**AM:** Yeah, and gave them away. And then my little niece was only, what, about three or four? I had my sister send me a blouse and stuff, and I'd make blouses for her out of material I had left over. I made aprons for everybody in the world. That was when they were using those half-hoops, and you'd just make a hem, and run the hoop through, and just put it around you. That was neat. Didn't take much to do that. Then of course I'd go with Bob. We'd ski down to the Flagg Ranch. We knew those people real well. They'd come up to see us in the snowplane, and then we'd ski down and have lunch with them.

**MA:** What is that, about two miles?

**AM:** Oh, it's about three miles, isn't it, Bob?

**BM:** It's three miles.

**AM:** Then for Christmas, I know one time I invited the people down at Pinedale, was it, Bob? Not knowing how far Pinedale was, I told them to be there at noon. They went so far by car, and then had to take their snowplanes. But they got there. I forget what time I got up to put the turkey

in. Before, they were killing buffalo at Lake the year before we got snowed in, and the Indians had given us... We got a half of a buffalo calf?

**BM:** They gave us half of a young cow and the hind quarter of a buffalo calf.

**MA:** Half of a young cow and a quarter of a young calf?

**AM:** Um-hum. So we had that out. And of course no refrigeration, so it was out in the fire cache hanging up. He wanted me to go out and hack...

[End of side]

**MA:** So you were saying that was the men's job to hack off the meat. What other kind of meat did you have, other than bison?

**AM:** Oh, probably hamburger and roasts. We had quite a few buffalo hearts.

**MA:** Hearts?

**AM:** Yeah, the Indians gave us the hearts. I boiled them and baked them and stewed them. Did a little bit of everything with them. But they were real good. Then we'd grind them up for sandwich meat.

**MA:** Did you have any poultry or...?

**AM:** Yeah, we probably did. I don't remember, do you, Bob?

**BM:** What?

**AM:** Do you remember what we had for meat? We had some chickens, didn't we?

**BM:** No. We had some beef.

**MA:** What were some examples of food that they chose that you wouldn't necessarily have chosen for yourself?

**AM:** A lot of the canned foods. Then, of course, them having little boys, they had a lot of cereal.

**MA:** Dry cereal?

**AM:** Dry cereal. When we come out, we had more than enough dry cereal, toothpaste, and toilet paper, wasn't it, Bob? An excess amount of that stuff.

**BM:** They had put down sixty dozen eggs.

**AM:** Yeah, I told her about that.

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**MA:** Sixty dozen? No wonder some of them were a little rank. So was there anything in particular that you really had a hankering for that you couldn't get?

**AM:** Oh, fresh salad. But no, not really.

**MA:** What about milk? What'd you do?

**AM:** I think we had powdered milk. Of course when anyone came up, or when we went out, we'd bring in fresh milk. Then I had bronchitis when I was down there, too. That seems to be a yearly affair for me. And people in Jackson took better care of us than in Yellowstone, didn't they? They were always calling on the radio to see how Mrs. Murphy's cough was. [Chuckles] But boy I really had bronchitis.

**MA:** That must have made you feel good.

**AM:** Yeah, it did.

**BM:** Dr. McCloud.

**AM:** Yeah, he'd always call to see how I was.

**MA:** That was the doctor from...

**AM:** Jackson. Then Elton and Kay Davis, he was the ranger down at Teton, and they'd come see us, and we'd go down and stay with them.

**MA:** That was Elton and Kay?

**AM:** Um-hum. Then there was the time the two Bobs [Bob Jones and Bob Murphy ] went on the ski trip and were supposed to be gone, was it three days?

**BM:** Five days.

**AM:** Was that on his tape?

**MA:** Yeah, that he was two days' late getting back? I was real interested in what was happening on your end.

**AM:** Pat and I got together and had our meals together because we were really getting worried. We didn't know what to think. We decided we better not call the office or do anything because then there would really be things in an uproar. So we thought we'd wait it out one more night. Then that was about one o'clock in the morning when we heard him holler, and we knew they were back. But you do get real worried about what had happened to them.

**MA:** What kind of things would go through your mind about what might have happened?

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**AM:** Oh, broke a leg. Heart attack. Who knows? Then it had stormed so much where we were that we wondered if they would ever get back.

**MA:** Was that a hardship for you to have to take care of the stove and haul kerosene when they were gone?

**AM:** Oh, not really. Being on a farm, I'm used to all that stuff. And then of course she stayed in with the children. I remember that one time, she let them play on top of the roof, and Charley fell off the roof and had the wind knocked out of him. And we didn't know what to do. What did you do, Bob?

**BM:** [Inaudible] Oh, I loosened up his snowsuit and relieved the pressure on his clothing.

**MA:** To me that's the scariest part, being so far from medical help. Of course, now they have the helicopters. Then we had the snowplane, I guess, but you have to get in gear with that too, to get it thawed out and get it going.

**MA:** Did the kids have any other close calls that you remember?

**AM:** No, I don't think so. When she started to spank them, they'd run over to me and get behind me. [Laughter] But like I said, we were both Catholics so on Friday night, one of us would fix fish and the next Friday night, the other one, and we'd go to each other's houses. Just for something different to do, we'd sort of dress up and go to each other's houses.

**MA:** When you say dress up, what do you mean?

**AM:** Oh, put a dress on.

**MA:** You'd actually put a dress on! It must have been twenty below sometimes?

**AM:** Yeah, but we'd just go next door. [Laughs] So we did that. Birthdays, we tried to make it special. Then those people come in and wrote that story about the Joneses. I should dig that out. Don't put that in there though. That's when she told us to stay on our side of the house while they were having the story done on them.

**MA:** Oh, you're kidding. They were reporters?

**AM:** Yeah. What magazine was that, Bob?

**BM:** A national women's magazine.

**AM:** Yeah, someone sent us a copy. Everything is in red, underlined. It said, "This could be the loneliest family in America" or something. Then right at the end it said, "These people didn't live alone. Ranger Bob Murphy and his wife, Alice, lived next door. It was a duplex." [Laughter]

**MA:** They were real lonely because they only had the Murphys next door.

**AM:** No, it didn't mention that anyone else was around. I'll have to dig that out for you sometime and show it to you. Became it's hilarious, the way our friend underlined it.

**MA:** So when did the plows come that year?

**AM:** Twenty-third of May.

**MA:** Twenty-third of May! That is very late! That must have seemed liked a real long winter.

**AM:** Well, yeah it did.

**BM:** See, usually we didn't start plowing from Thumb until after the first of May. We plowed Teton's roads, too, since they didn't have plows like we did. We'd plow clear to Moran Junction.

**MA:** So did you do anything special to celebrate when the plows arrived?

**AM:** Well, we heard them coming, and one of the fellows was driving our car right behind so we could get out of there, you know, if we wanted to. I don't know about the Joneses' car. Was somebody driving it, too? Of course, we all couldn't leave at once. I remember Easter that one year we took our snowplane and went down and got our car and went to Idaho Falls for church.

**MA:** Oh, you did? So your car was parked where?

**AM:** Moran, wasn't it, Bob? So if we did get out with the snowplane. Bob took the Joneses out a lot, too, on different weekends.

**BM:** Yeah, they went out a couple of times.

**MA:** You went out a couple of times?

**AM:** They did. We just went out once.

**MA:** So when you went out for Easter, that was the only time you went out that winter?

**AM:** That far. We'd go out to Moran and Jackson once in a while.

**MA:** Do you remember how often you'd do that?

**AM:** Not very often, was it, Bob?

**BM:** No, I think it was only twice.

**AM:** Then Jimmy Braman...

**BM:** He was superintendent of the dam down there.

**MA:** Jimmy Braman?

**BM:** B-r-a-m-a-n.

**AM:** His wife was named Eunice, wasn't? She was the post master at Moran. They'd come up, and we'd go down and stay with them once in a while.

**MA:** So you'd have some visitors to break the monotony once in awhile.

**AM:** Yeah, to break the monotony.

**MA:** So, looking back on it, I know Bob said that it was more enjoyable for the men than for the women. Do you think that was true?

**AM:** Probably. Because they'd get out on their ski trips and get away from the house more than the women would. But I enjoyed it. I think it's good for everybody to be snowed in like that. You learn to get along, you know? I don't think we ever got cabin fever, did we, Bob? Bob reloaded shells, and I'd help him clean up the shells and take the primers out and get them ready for him to reload.

**MA:** This is muzzle...

**AM:** Rifles. He has tools he uses, you know, to reload. So I helped him with that. We played cards quite a bit with the Joneses. We always...

**MA:** Could you get good radio programs?

**AM:** Yeah. We always had a set time to get up and go to bed. Which you almost have to do if you're snowed in like that so you don't get in a rut, like sleeping in until ten o'clock. You can't do that. The other side did, believe me. [Laughs]

**MA:** Yeah, I can imagine that that would be something that would be easy to do. The other thing that I could imagine would happen would be that certain people would have trouble with alcohol under those conditions.

**AM:** Oh, no.

**MA:** You never heard of that happening, in other parts of the park?

**AM:** No, we had our rum and stuff when people came. I suppose we had our bourbon, too, but Lord no.

**MA:** Cause that would be a way to make a winter miserable fast.

**AM:** It really would. And then to try to get out if you had to. You have to have your faculties when you're in something like that. If you have to get out, you got to know what to do.  
[Laughter]

**MA:** Yeah, you have to have your faculties. That's really a good point. Did you ever hear stories of wives that really couldn't handle the isolation?

**AM:** Well, there were some ladies that didn't stay in there, weren't there?

**BM:** Yeah, a few. [Inaudible]

**AM:** Yeah, I don't remember who they were, but there were some that couldn't hack it. But that was why they usually told you in the summer so you could get your mind set on what you were doing. We didn't have time to think about it, so what the heck?

**MA:** So what qualities do you think were most important for particularly wives that had to live in that isolation?

**AM:** You have to be able to get along with everybody, that's for sure. You have to know how to cook and cope with the wood and coal stoves. Of course now they don't do that. There's electricity, and they have TV, and they have snowmachines for whoever is snowed in, don't they? I don't know.

**MA:** No, everybody has to provide their own.

**AM:** They have snowmachines, don't they?

**MA:** Yeah

**AM:** See we had the snowplanes that had three skis that went over the snow.

**MA:** And you had to do some walking, didn't you?

**AM:** Yeah, if the snow was bad, Bob would say, "I guess you're going to have to get out." So I walked up Huckleberry Mountain more than ten times. [Laughs]

**MA:** Huckleberry Mountain is the one between Flagg Ranch and Snake River station [Actually located between Moran and Flagg Ranch]?

**AM:** Yeah.

**MA:** How much skiing did you do?

**AM:** Oh, we'd try to get out at least two or three times a week. We'd just ski around to try to get out of the house. And I'd say we'd get out to the Flagg Ranch about every two weeks, wasn't it, Bob? Cross country. I'm not a downhiller. Just cross country.

**MA:** So that was your most isolated winter, right?

**AM:** Right.

**MA:** So after that you went to...I saw a couple of things I wanted to go back to. You used the generator so you could iron? What about doing the washing?

**AM:** You used the generator, too. The iron would have to be special or one of those you put on top of the stove.

**MA:** It had to be direct current?

**AM:** Yeah.

**MA:** So which did you use?

**AM:** I think I used the sad irons from the stove.

**MA:** That's the kind that heats up on the wood stove? They're heavy.

**AM:** Yeah they are heavy. [Laughter]

**MA:** You must have been in good shape.

**AM:** Oh, yeah. I didn't weigh as much then as I do now. Then I always cut my own hair. I still do. Like I said, I always cut Bob's hair. That's when I started cutting hair.

**MA:** Yeah, I guess you'd have to.

**AM:** Yeah, you do.

**MA:** So did you have telephone contact with the outside world?

**AM:** Oh yeah. When it wasn't down.

**MA:** Just with Mammoth or with the rest?

**AM:** Yeah. And those were the good ole days when you had telephone operators. You could call in and say, "Keep trying to get my folks, who are in Gardiner." And then if you were going to be gone, you could tell them, like we're going to be gone such and such a time so if my folks call, tell them we'll be back such and such.

**MA:** Oh, really.

**AM:** Then I remember when we lived in Mammoth, you could call the operator and say, "We're going to be at such and such house, and if we get a call, put it over there." That was fun. They were great telephone operators. Weren't they, Bob?

[Inaudible]

Some of our telephone operators at that time, you'd tell them where you were going to be, and they'd catch up with you. And I'd call my folks. My folks came in, too, and the snowmobilers down in Jackson helped bring them in, and we took our snowplane down--Bob did.

**MA:** So they drove all the way around and went over Teton Pass. How long did they stay?

**AM:** Oh, about a week.

**MA:** What did they think of your lifestyle?

**AM:** Oh. Was Dad deputy sheriff at that time, Bob? Well anyhow, they had to get back for some reason. Anyhow they came in. They visited about every place we've been, except Washington, D.C., and they weren't about to fly. [Laughter]

**MA:** You mentioned that now they have TV. I know that now we live in the park, people have certain expectations of us. Like they don't think we ought to have hot tubs and VCRs because living in the park should be enough to make us happy. I just wondered if there were expectations of you at that time, if people expected you to be or wanted you to be a certain kind of person.

**AM:** Oh, I don't think so. Do you have a hot tub?

**MA:** There is one for the employees.

**AM:** Well, what used to make me mad was people thought we lived up there rent-free. We did not. In fact, rent is pretty high, I think, in those places. Now they have the places out in the park are furnished. At that time, we had to move every stick we had from one place to the other. Like from Mammoth to Lake or the South Entrance and then back in again. We wore our furniture out moving it around in the horse truck.

**MA:** And you moved...

**AM:** Twice a year.

**MA:** Boy, that would get old.

**AM:** Who was it? Buckles said I was the best packer. He said even the match box was put right where I knew where to find it. You know the stick matches.

**MA:** Who was it said that?

**AM:** Buckles. He used to move us all the time. Ernest Winning.

**BM:** Winning. W-i-n-n-i-n-g.

**AM:** Everybody called him Buckles. He moved us every time, didn't he, Bob?

**MA:** He was Park Service?

**AM:** Yeah.

**MA:** So the Park Service would move you every time?

**AM:** Yeah, in the horse truck. [Laughs] We'd have to clean the horse manure out every time.

**MA:** Did you ever feel like the Park Service was getting two people for the price of one?

**AM:** Oh, well, I didn't because I enjoyed...If I had to run the radio, I did that. Like going on the trails, they furnished me a horse, that's all I asked so I could go along and do the fishing and cooking and be out in the air with him. Well, I suppose that they did get two for the price of one once in a while, but what the heck, I enjoyed it.

**MA:** What other things did you end up doing to help out? You'd be the only one at the station sometimes when Bob would be gone for several days.

**AM:** Yeah, you'd have to answer the phone and give the public whatever they wanted to know.

**MA:** Did you ever have to deal with emergencies yourself?

**AM:** No, not by myself. That one time at Lake, this couple knocked on the door, and the little girl had glass all over her. Was that in Bob's story?

**MA:** No.

**AM:** We said, "Oh, my gosh. What happened?" He said, "You'll never believe it, and neither will my insurance company." He said, "We were driving along (this was in the spring), and a buffalo came off the snow bank and lit on their car and broke the windshield, and that little kid..."

**BM:** It was up by Mud Volcano.

**AM:** So I combed her hair, and tried to get all the glass out that we could. We took her to the hospital in Mammoth, didn't we, Bob, in the patrol car?

**MA:** Was she cut?

**AM:** A little.

**MA:** But not too badly?

**AM:** Well, the glass was embedded.

**MA:** Oh, dear.

**AM:** But he said, "Who's going to believe us--a buffalo fell on the car." [Laughter] Out of the sky, fell onto the car.

**MA:** That would be a tough one to believe. So did you have other times when you were awakened in the middle of the night?

**AM:** Like I said, at Lake there was always fights over at the hotel.

**MA:** The fights would involve employees?

**AM:** Yeah, employees. The salad makers and...Who else would get in the fights at the hotel, Bob?

**BM:** Oh, they'd have Saturday night fisticuffs. About every two weeks somebody would get laid low.

**MA:** So it would be the concession employees?

**BM:** Yeah. Unfortunately, that year the Yellowstone Park Company had hired...They used to hire mostly people from Minneapolis-St. Paul and Chicago. That year they hired a bunch of clowns out of Los Angeles. Those from Minneapolis and St. Paul and that were mostly college kids and pretty respected kids. Those from L.A. were lots of rough characters.

**MA:** One thing I was curious about was whether you thought there was any kind of a difference between rangers and maintenance people. I know now during the summer, the rangers and maintenance people don't mix too much.

**AM:** Yeah, you find that in every place we've been. We always catered to the maintenance rather than the rangers. [Laughs] I loved the little ranger up at Theodore Roosevelt [National Memorial Park]; he'd get so mad at us up at the North Unit because we'd stay with the maintenance when we went up rather than staying with the rangers, and Bob was chief ranger. We tried to treat everybody the same. We liked everybody, you know. Then when we first went to Glacier...Well, at Yellowstone at that time, the naturalists and the rangers really didn't get along, did they, Bob? When we went to Glacier, here we were trying to unpack into a little, tiny house. Here came the chief naturalist, and he said, "Oh, forget about everything. We're going out to dinner, and we're going to the movies." We said, "What do you do?" He said, "I'm the chief naturalist." We said, "Well! Things are going to be different here." I remember that. That was George Robinson.

**MA:** Oh, it was?

**BM:** His father.

**AM:** Uh-huh.

**MA:** And what was George Robinson's father's name?

**BM:** Harry. Harry and Milly. There were great entertainers.

**AM:** You could always depend on them to liven up everything.

**MA:** That's a good story. Now didn't you say that you didn't have much notice when you got the job in Glacier Park that you were going to be moving?

**AM:** Oh, yeah. Bob had put in for it. Did he tell you about this?

**MA:** I think we talked about it, but it wasn't on the tape.

**AM:** Yeah, well he wasn't on the promotion list, and he called the chief ranger. Maybe this shouldn't be on the tape...

**BM:** Oh, it doesn't matter. I called the chief ranger...

**MA:** I don't think we can get your voice too well from over there unless you come over here.

**BM:** Well, to make a long story short, Otto Brown was chief ranger [1952-1959], and he didn't want a lot of us to leave Yellowstone. We were pretty content. And then we had a change of administration and Garrison came in [Lemuel Garrison, superintendent, 1956-1964], and he told us that if we wanted to be promoted, we would have to transfer. So I knew there was this opening at Glacier for the west side district ranger, so I called the chief ranger, Elmer Fladmark. He said, "Gawd, Bob, I just got a register, let me talk to the superintendent." Well, Jack Emmert was assistant superintendent at Yellowstone [1934-1943] and went to Glacier as superintendent. So he called me back and said, "Jack says I can send the register back." So when it got to Omaha, they called back and asked for my name and said I wasn't on the promotion list. Harold Snegosky was personnel officer in Omaha, and he was visiting us at the Buffalo Ranch so he called Omaha and put me on the register, and it went back. So where we got our notice that we were going to Glacier, unofficial notice, was the fellow that moved Bud Estey from Glacier (vacating that job) to chief ranger at Theodore Roosevelt--Mayflower driver--called me and wanted to know...

**AM:** You were on a ski trip. He called me.

**BM:** Yeah. He wanted to know if he could pick our goods up on his way back from North Dakota to take us to Glacier.

**MA:** And you didn't know that you had got the job.

**BM:** No, no official notice.

**AM:** And Bob was on a ski trip, so when he got back from the ski trip, I had everything almost packed and ready to go.

**MA:** But you were an old hand at it by then.

**AM:** Yeah, moving twice a year.

**MA:** But this time you got to go by Mayflower instead of my horse truck.

**AM:** Right. That was for sure.

**MA:** A step upward! So then after you came back from Snake River, were you still working at Mammoth during the winter?

**AM:** Let's see. We went to Lake or the Buffalo Ranch, hadn't we?

**MA:** But you basically worked in Mammoth every winter the whole time that Bob was working in Yellowstone Park? Did you work after you left Yellowstone?

**AM:** In Glacier, they put me on when they had the big fires up there. I worked in the fire cache. I transcribed whatever came in on the radio.

**MA:** Oh, I see.

**AM:** So I usually worked during the fire season. Transcribing. Then when we went to Washington, D.C... Well, at Devil's Tower, he just had an administrative assistant, a lady. She had more work than she knew what to do with so I went in and typed monthly reports and set up the picture file, for nothing. Because you couldn't work if your husband was the big cheese--superintendent. So, just for something to do and to help out, I'd go. I worked in Washington, D.C., in training. Then I worked in management analysis. The four years that we were there, I worked from a four to a seven [Government Service or GS 4 to GS 7]. Everybody wanted me because I had been to all the parks. Being a superintendent's wife, I had been in almost all the parks while most of the gals back there hadn't been west of the Mississippi. So I could have had any Job I wanted back there. When the director's secretary was on leave or something, they'd call me to go up and work.

**MA:** So to wrap up the Yellowstone years, were you glad that Bob was a ranger? Or would you have just as soon he was a cowboy and would have stayed in one place?

**AM:** No, I always enjoyed moving around. It's fun to see what other parks are like and what people are like [in the different areas.]  
[End of interview]



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**MARJANE AMBLER INTERIOR PARK EMPLOYEES ORAL  
HISTORIES**

**HENRY AUGUST “HANK” RAHN  
GARBAGEMAN & BEAR FEEDER**

INTERVIEWED BY  
MARJANE AMBLER,  
AUTHOR

AUGUST 17, 1989  
IN LAKE VILLAGE, WYOMING

Yellowstone National Park Archives  
P O Box 168  
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190-0168

Catalog Number: YELL 188046-OH9

**NARRATOR:**

Henry August Rahn was born August 13, 1911 in a rural property near Livingston, Montana, the son of German immigrants Robert F. Rahn and Minnie Voelke. Rahn began working in Yellowstone in 1936 as a garbage truck driver at Fishing Bridge campground. In 1938 Rahn transferred to Canyon, where he hauled kitchen garbage to the Otter Creek dumpsite, a public feeding site for grizzly bears and the largest of several similar sites in the Park. Rahn continued this work until 1942, when NPS discontinued the practice of public bear feeding.

Very few details of Rahn's life are known beyond the scope of this interview. After his time in Yellowstone, he worked as an oiler for the Anaconda Aluminum Company's Columbia Falls Plant near Kalispell, Montana. He married twice, first to Mildred Howard in 1941, then to Esther Berg in 1988. Rahn died July 7, 1999, in Kalispell.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Born May 19, 1948, in Colorado, Marjane Ambler began a career in journalism in 1968. Ambler worked in various positions including as editor of the "High Country News," an environmental publication, from 1974 to 1980.

In 1984, Ambler's husband Terry Wehrman accepted a position as a snow groomer in Lake Village, Yellowstone National Park. The couple spent the next nine years living year-round in the interior of Yellowstone. Ambler worked as a volunteer during the early years and as an interpretive ranger during the summers of 1990-1993.

During her time at Lake Village, Ambler began to collect the recollections of the other park employees and family members within her small social circle, as well former park employees who experienced living and working in the park interior in past decades or whose careers were otherwise notable. These activities culminated in Ambler's 2013 book "Yellowstone Has Teeth," which narrated the recollections of Ambler's interviewees interwoven with her own experiences.

Ambler and Wehrman left Lake Village in 1993, after which Ambler served as editor of the "Tribal College Journal" from 1995 to 2006. Ambler is also the author of "Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development" published by University Press of Kansas in 1990. Ambler and Wehrman split time between homes in Atlantic City, Wyoming, and Lake Havasu, Arizona.

**SUMMARY:**

This interview covers Rahn's experiences as a bear feeder at the Otter Creek dump site between 1938 and 1942. Rahn discusses details of the bear feeding program, bear behavior, defending himself and his truck, close calls while feeding bears, and encounters with bears outside of his regular job.

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**Restrictions:** None

**Format:** One cassette tape, 40 minutes total recording time. Digitized using TEAC player/recorder on June 24, 2019.

**Transcript:** Transcribed by Marjane Ambler, August 1989? Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Barrett Codieck, Yellowstone National Park Archives Intern, July 2019. Transcript 9 pages.

**Technical Note:** The interview ends with few seconds of isolated audio that matches the end of the interview transcript.

**Henry Rahn interviewed by Marjane Ambler  
in Lake Village, Wyoming, August 17, 1989  
with comments by Terry Wehrman, Joe Figg, and Cora Figg**

**Narrator:** Henry Rahn (HR)

**Interviewer:** Marjane Ambler (MA)

**Also present:** Terry Wehrman (TW), Joe Figg (JF), Cora Figg (CF)

**MA:** This is Aug. 17, and we're at Lake, Wyo., in Yellowstone National Park. I'm Marjane Ambler, and we're talking with Henry Rahn. Henry, would you tell us a few words about yourself--when you were born and when you started working in Yellowstone National Park?

**HR:** I was born Aug. 13, 1911, and I started working for the Park Service in 1936. I worked at Fishing Bridge for two years, and I was here during the big tornado at Fishing Bridge when the entire campground went down with timber. Nobody got hurt. There was one boy killed in where they had the tent cabins. He was the only person hurt. There was trees that went down, three feet through cars. There was no trailers here at the time; it was tents. It was really a mess.

**MA:** Then you went from Fishing Bridge to...?

**HR:** That was '37, then in '38 I went to Canyon, and I took the job of feeding the grizzlies. During that time President Ford was here, '38 and '39. He was a ranger. He rode the truck with me, and we fed the grizzlies.

**MA:** When you say that you fed the grizzlies, would you explain?

**HR:** Well, they had a big place where they kept tourists in a pen, and we fed grizzlies out in the open. We fed a ton to two tons of garbage a day, just clean, kitchen garbage from the Canyon Hotel, which is not there anymore.

**MA:** When you say clean, kitchen garbage, what does that mean?

**HR:** They didn't have no cans in the garbage or anything, it was just pure garbage, just food. Once in a while there was a plate in there or a cup, but there was no cans or anything.

**MA:** So then you worked there in '38 to?

**HR:** To '42.

**MA:** At Canyon.

**HR:** Yeah.

**MA:** Then did you leave the Park Service at that time?

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**HR:** We quit feeding in spring of '42, and then I left the Park Service in the summer of '42.

**MA:** When you say they weren't feeding any more, was that because there wasn't enough garbage?

**HR:** There was no tourists, so there was no garbage to feed the bear.

**MA:** That was because of the war?

**HR:** Right because the World War was on, and there were no tourists coming in. Very few. Not enough to make enough feed.

**MA:** So when you were working at Fishing Bridge, you had a different job there, right?

**HR:** I was running the garbage truck. The same type of a job only I wasn't feeding bears.

**MA:** I see, you were just collecting garbage. Were they feeding bears at Fishing Bridge at that time?

**HR:** No, no. The only place they fed was Old Faithful and Canyon.

**MA:** And where exactly was it that you worked at Canyon, where they fed the bears?

**HR:** Otter Creek. Do you know where that is?

**MA:** Uh, huh.

**HR:** It's right up Otter Creek, there's a feeding ground. It's still there. They use it for mixing road oil.

[Pause]

**MA:** OK, now we're watching the slide show.

**HR:** There's the feeding grounds at Otter Creek. You can see the logs up there where the tourists sat and the platform ground where the truck is where the grizzlies were fed. This is probably about 1938. That truck there is a 1928 Chevy. There is some of the grizzlies. They just come out of hibernation, as thin as a rail. The birds there are seagulls. That's me standing out there. You can tell I'm not afraid of grizzlies. The dark colored ones are the males. The light colored ones are the females. [This was a Yellowstone folk tale. Grizzlies of both sexes can be several different colors] There's a black bear out there with them. He was all scarred up, but he stayed right in there and ate with them.

[Pause]

**HR:** That's seagulls. They're still around here, I suppose. Grizzlies way up on the side hill.

**MA:** You say you used no side boards.

**HR:** No, when I started, I took the job from another fellow. They had these factory-made racks, about three feet tall. They had them all the way around the truck. They had one in the back made with a chute out of it. Well, you had the whole truckload of garbage cans of food. And you had to walk around the outer edge of the truck. Many times they'd reach through and just about grab my leg. I got scared of that, and I asked the boss, "Could I take the racks off and just leave the ten inch board around?" He said, "That's your job. You do what you want." So I did that. Then if a bear got too anxious before I started dumping, well maybe they'd reach up and get a can and knock it off. Then there wouldn't be no more problem after there was food on the ground. But many times they would start up on that truck, and I'd knock them off the truck with a pick handle. Dave Condon, the ranger, he'd stand up there and he'd watch ole Hank knock the bear off with a pick handle, and they'd lay there for a bit, and then they'd walk off. I educated them. They never bothered me. Knocked a lot of them down. There's that black, right in the middle. We had problems now and then. More or less our fault.

**JF:** Was there much fighting between the bears?

**HR:** Lot of fighting. We'd take a bone or something and throw it at one, and he'd fight with the next one. Once in a while they'd fight underneath the truck, and you'd think it was going to tip over.

**MA:** What else do you mean when you say you had trouble?

**HR:** Well, one time I was getting off on the ground. A female was off there about 30 feet or so. I had to get off the truck and move the truck ahead and back it back up. I had to make three piles of garbage on that platform. That meant three times I got off the truck and back on to dump garbage. Well this time I had the old '28 Chevy, and I stepped down on the ground. Just as I stepped on the ground, my helper threw a bone at a sow grizzly and she was right at me. Right now. I had the window open on the truck, but I could not open the door or I'd be bumping into her. She was only about two feet from me, standing there with her paws up and her mouth wide open. But that's as close as she got. I was afraid to crawl through the window so I just give one big jump, and I landed on my belly on top of the cab. I don't know how I done it, but I did. [Laughter] I didn't bawl him out or say much.

The next year--I'm not for sure if President Ford was on the truck or not--but somebody was taking movies. I think there was two men taking movies of grizzlies. My helper, he was going to show off. He stood on the bumper, and he was watching the action on the truck, the movies, and not watching the bears. There was a sow with two cubs off, I'd say, a couple hundred feet away. She must have been kind of new to the place. She made a big circle and come within about fifty feet of him and went back to the cubs. She made one more circle and come within fifty feet of the truck and she went back to the cubs. I never said a word. The next thing, she come right straight for the truck, and I hollered. Just about the minute he left that bumper, she hit the bumper, and boy, she hit it hard. He landed on his feet on the cab--a '39 Chevy. I don't know how

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he could do that, but he did. The ranger who was on the truck was just snow white, scared to death. I've had them charge. I've seen a lot of grizzlies charge. But if you stand still, and they don't know what you are for sure, they're not going to take you. But if you run, they'll take you right now. Them dark ones are the males. The light colored ones are females. That's the ones you want to watch for.

**MA:** What do you mean? The females are more dangerous?

**HR:** The males are not dangerous at all really. It's the females. There's a mother with three cubs. [Sows with young have caused most injuries to hikers, however, many injuries are also caused by old bears and by fed bears, both males and females]

**MA:** What do you mean the males were dark and the females were light?

**HR:** The females got a kind of grayish color to them, like them cubs. They are yearling cubs. There's a couple of them fighting.

**JF:** It does look like you took them off the back of the truck.

**HR:** Yeah. Most of them I took off of the truck. There's one there I'll show you a little later. I only have a few pictures. Now this picture here, Mel Rudder had that in the paper, the news reporter in the town I live. He worked in the Haynes Picture Shop, so they just made extra pictures, and he got one.

**MA:** But it was your picture.

**HR:** Yes, he said he took it off of the truck. Well, he might have been on the truck, but you can't get two identical pictures.

[Pause]

**MA:** So how did the bears act when they were away from the garbage? Were they aggressive?

**HR:** Not during the time that they was fed. Once in a while, a strange one would come in, and you could tell it right away, the way they would act. It took a while for them to come in close. These were fed at Canyon, and it's fifty air miles straight across, something like that, to Old Faithful. They were fed at Old Faithful. I would take a paintbrush, and I would paint a stripe on a back of a bear, and the next day, that same bear would be at Old Faithful at the feeding grounds. Or Ted Burdahl fed the bear at Old Faithful the same time I fed, and he would paint a different type of color. One day I would have one of his bears at my feeding grounds.

**MA:** Where did they feed at Old Faithful?

**HR:** Right back of the hotel there. I couldn't tell you where it is now. Since they put that new parking lot in, they've taken out a lot of stuff that used to be there. You see that is forty-eight years ago, fifty years ago.

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[Inaudible]

**MA:** That's a lot of bears.

**HR:** You bet. I lost my first wife a few years back. She used to go out with me on the truck. One time we counted eighty-six grizzlies right out there at one time. That's a lot of grizzlies.

**TW:** Didn't you have a story about a fellow that was down fishing when the bears came in?

**HR:** How's that?

**MA:** He was asking about the story you told about the man that was fishing near the feeding grounds when all the bears came running?

**HR:** Nope.

**MA:** No? It must have been someone else.

**HR:** That's a husky bear there.

**JF:** This must be later in the season after they've been eating pretty good.

**HR:** Yeah. Them males would get up to a thousand pounds. Boy, there's a lot of feed out there for them. They'd clean up a ton, two ton of garbage a day. The last year we fed them, there was so many tourists there wasn't room enough in the parking lot to fit in all the cars. So all I done in the last year was work in the afternoon and fed the grizzlies. I had to feed them twice a day.

**JF:** What year was that?

**HR:** That was '41, the last year they was fed.

**MA:** Was it '41 or '42?

**HR:** '41. World War II come on, and there was no tourists. There was no garbage for the bears to eat. They took the clean kitchen garbage from the Canyon Hotel, which isn't there anymore. The only thing was, in that garbage, you might find a can once in a while. The hashers or dishwashers would accidentally let a plate slip into the garbage can, and they wouldn't fish it out. Well, that was on the feeding grounds the next morning. Or knives, forks, something like that. Otherwise it was plain food. If there was a box of grapefruit or cantaloupe or something like that, and they had one spoiled one in it, we dumped the whole box on the truck. There was always that black, right by the truck, and he was a big one.

**MA:** Did he have a name?

**HR:** No, no. Although I practically knew every bear there. I never had them named, but I knew one from the other. Now there is my shadow. I was standing on the ground. Look at the bears standing up and looking. They knew I was there. I had a pick handle with me though. That was before they let the tourists in. They let me dump the garbage before they turned the tourists in. And I suppose that is probably Dave Condon standing there. That's a lot of grizzlies.

**TW:** Is that that strange one's picture?

**HR:** Yeah.

**MA:** What do you mean they let you feed the bears before they let the people in? You mean just an hour before?

**HR:** Just before they let them out of their cars. That was a little narrow trail through the woods. Every once in a while, a grizzly would get ahead of the truck, and they would not turn back, and they'd get right in the parking lot amongst the cars. Me and the helpers would walk right out there amongst the bears and chase them back. Once in a while you'd meet face to face with one coming around the car. The main thing is you don't want to be afraid of them. That's the last one I've got.

**MA:** You were telling a story about a wounded bear that got into the mess hall?

**HR:** Yeah, in the employees' camp, we lived in the employees' camp in Canyon. There was a wounded bear come in in the middle of the night at the Canyon mess hall. The lady there cooking was there all by herself, and she fought that bear off with a broom while he broke the windows. He even pulled the frame right out with the window. Then the bear finally come to a window where the telephone was, and she was fighting him off with a broom and calling the rangers at the same time. Leon Evans was the ranger. He passed away a few years ago. He come up, but before he got there, the bear came to our trailer camp. He got to one trailer and the guy fought him off with a flashlight. He got to another trailer, he fought him off with a butcher knife. He broke out windows. There was room for two cars between my trailer and this other trailer. We had a dog in the trailer, a little small dog. The ranger let us keep it because the bears were bad. The dog woke me up, and I could hear this awful noise like a bunch of cattle in a boxcar running. A bear had his foot in the little window in the door, big enough for his foot. He was shaking that to beat heck, and the guy was yelling, "Henry, help! Henry, help!" I told my wife, "I'm going to put my shoes on before I go out there anyway." I pulled on my overalls and my shoes. I went out and back of the trailer, there was a small ax. I don't know what I was going to do with it, but I was going to get that bear. When I got to the door of my trailer, here come the bear after me. I slammed the door on him. Right backing out of the door he went. I thought, "Shucks, I'll run for the truck." He's heading right for that trailer, and I'll get the big ax. I changed my mind, and I started the truck up and went at the bear and just about got to him and slammed on the brakes, and away he went. He left. He went to a BPR [Bureau of Public Roads] camp and got into a mess hall there, and they run him out of there. Then he went up the road, and by that time, the ranger was coming. He shot at him, but he never seen if he got him or not. The bear disappeared in the timber. But the bear never showed up again so he must have wounded him enough that he killed him probably.

Henry Rahn, August 17, 1989 YELL 188046-OH9)

**MA:** How was the bear wounded in the first place?

**HR:** Well, the ranger shot him with a shotgun, and he had one front leg wounded. Which he was not supposed to use, a shotgun on a bear, but he did.

**MA:** Why had he shot him in the first place?

**HR:** He was into something. He had got into something, but I don't remember what.

**MA:** So did people often call you when they had trouble with bears?

**HR:** Oh, yes. Well, during '42, the spring of '42, there was a lot of fires. Nothing like there was last year, but there was a lot of fires that year. There was a big fire on the plateau, up by the buffalo ranch. In that country. So they took all the people out of the camp except me and my helper. I was running the water pumps for Canyon. They wanted me to stay and pick up all the spot fires around, which was a lot of them. Lightning caused snags to burn, and we kept them down, just the two of us. The ranger had his wife as a fire guard back in the woods out of Canyon. You probably know where the fire station is. At night, he'd ride up to get her so she wouldn't have to come back in the dark by herself. She had her horse up there tied up. Well in the meantime when he walked up the mountain to get her, he come back and a bear had run his horse away. She got on a horse and started back. She came into camp, and she got me and my helper, which was her son, and two other guys went with me. We went to the ranger station, and we got rifles. We started walking up there, and in the meantime--the grizzly had him treed--but in the meantime, he left, and he was walking down. So we didn't have to shoot the grizzly.

**MA:** What was the name of the ranger and the ranger's wife?

**HR:** His name was Leon Evans. His son was Billy Evans, but I couldn't tell you the name of his wife. She's still living, but I couldn't tell you her name. They were real good friends of mine.

**MA:** Were there other times they called upon you as being a bear expert?

**HR:** Yeah. One time at Old Faithful there was a bad grizzly that was right in the campground. They had to get rid of it. They took me and another fellow. We packed two rifles. The ranger was the only one that was allowed to shoot. I can't remember his last name. His first name was Ray, a big tall ranger. The grizzly was coming right down the meadow between the...

[End of side]

**MA:** Right down the middle of the road, with tourists on both sides?

**HR:** Yes, with tourists camped on both sides. Right in the middle of the Old Faithful campground. He shot and the bear went down and got right back up on his feet. He shot next time, and it went down and right back on his feet and after us. We stood perfect still. No use to

run. He shot six times, which emptied the first rifle. He was about ten feet from us, and he stayed down. It doesn't do you no good to run. You can't outrun them.

**JF:** That's right.

**HR:** That's what a bear wants you to do. Any wild animal wants you to run, and then they get you from the back. If you don't run, they won't attack. Have you got nerve enough to stand there, though? [Laughter]

**MA:** You worked at Old Faithful during what years?

**HR:** I was at Old Faithful every once in a while just for a few days.

**MA:** I see.

**JF:** Back when you worked, you covered the whole park. You weren't just assigned to one location.

**HR:** Yeah, well during the summer months I was at Canyon all the time. Or I was two years here at Fishing Bridge, and then I went to Canyon. I was always wanting to work at the Buffalo Ranch, but I never made it. When they used to feed the buffalo there in the wintertime and slaughter them.

**JF:** Did you ever work for road crew?

**HR:** No, I never did. I worked for plumbing and sanitation all the time.

**MA:** Did you feel that you learned a lot about the bears from your work, more than other people did?

**HR:** I think I have, a lot more. I never was afraid of them, and that means a lot. I don't think tranquilizing a bear does any good. I really don't. That bear is still wide awake only he can't move, and he's going to get you after a while. I believe they shouldn't tranquilize them. We used to work with the grizzlies. We used to load them in cages. We never had any problems. We'd trap them in those culvert traps. Then we'd load them into cages, and they'd be shipped to zoos and stuff. The rangers would take an iron rod and poke them. I got kind of mad at it and said I don't like that anymore. Take poles. The grizzlies would bite that iron rod, and their teeth would just fly out. Well, that's not right. We would take poles, and that worked fine. They would put him in a cage just wide enough for him to be in, just crowded in tight, a cage made out of two inch planks. The front end was steel and bars so he couldn't turn around and he couldn't eat the cage out because the front end was steel to about a foot in back. They shipped out a lot of grizzlies years ago to different zoos when we would catch them.

**JF:** When they caught them and shipped them out, how did they ship them? By train?

**HR:** Boy... They hauled them with trucks most of the time. Oh, I imagine if they went very far, they went by train.

**CF:** Who was the ranger you were talking about? [Inaudible]

**HR:** [Leon Evans] I don't know how long he worked here. They was still here when I left. I think they moved to Bozeman when he got cancer. He died suddenly. I didn't know that until they had this big reunion about four or five years ago. His wife was here, and I wondered what happened to him. She said he passed away. His son was named Billy, and he's somewhere in, I don't know, Virginia or somewhere as a Forest Service ranger.

**MA:** I wanted to ask you one last question. Do you remember your last day working for Yellowstone?

**HR:** I suppose I do. I left here with the idea of going to a defense plant or something. Instead of that I went to Great Falls, and I was going to work at the air base when they built the air base. Instead of that I went to work for the Anaconda zinc plant.

**MA:** So you remember how you felt on your last day here?

**HR:** Well, I just didn't like the idea of not feeding the grizzlies. It took everything I had built up away from me.

**MA:** All the knowledge that you had built up?

**HR:** I was hoping they would feed the grizzlies again after that. I probably would have been back.

**MA:** Well thank you. I appreciate it.

[Tape resumes in mid-sentence]

**HR:** ...with a pick handle. They filled it full of lead. Well you hit one over the nose and you split that pick handle. So I went to Livingston, and I forged a heavy wagon tire around the edge of it. Boy I could sure knock them down with that.

[Inaudible]

**HR:** Like I have always said, you can educate the bear, but you can't educate the tourist because there is always going to be another one. That's a big problem. They think they're caged...they're not.

[End of interview]