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Interviewees: Irvin “Shorty” Shope and Boyd Van Horn
Interviewer: Unidentified Speaker
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Interviewer’s first name may be John or Joel.

Unidentified Speaker: So here we are in Fort Benton, on December 17 with Boyd Van Horn and Shorty Shope. Now don’t talk into the mic, pretend the mic’s not there. Okay? I’d give you about 30 or 40 bucks for that roll top desk, Boyd.

Boyd Van Horn: Well it’s Bob’s. He wouldn’t part with it. I don’t know where he got it. Those used to be so plentiful and now you can hardly find them. You wonder where all those things go to. Like cabs, those old horse driven taxi cabs you might say. Those old horse drawn, when I first went to Helena after I had polio in 1909, the doctor had a friend that was a cab driver and he used to lift me up onto that driver’s seat beside [the driver in] those old horse drawn cabs and we used to pass up those early electric cars, those old ponies would just trot right past it. Just a little slope up the hill there from the depot to Helena proper. Those old horses would trot up there faster, we even passed the street car once. My mother and dad lived in Helena. They were married in about ’88 or ’89. They lived in Helena for four or five years.

Irvin Shope: Before they went to the ranch?

BVH: Oh yes, he was—

IS: He was a surveyor or something.

BVH: Yes, he came out with the Northern Pacific when they built the line through in [18] ’83 and he worked with them until they met, where is it Gold Creek where the two lines met?

IS: Yes.

BVH: He cruised timber for them. They had every other section you see, and he cruised timber up the Blackfoot for about a year up there or two. You remember Pat Hayes?

IS: Yes.

BVH: The Blackfoot guy. I heard from him the other day.

IS: Did you?
BVH: We stopped there. I used to go out there and see him (unintelligible), his dad, when I was introduced to him, he said, “Van Horn, Van Horn.” He said, “There used to be a Van Horn up here in the ‘80s, he was a great fellow with a four horse whip.”

IS: With a four horse whip?

BVH: He used to take and throw a dollar out or something, and then they would all see who could come the closest to whipping that with a four horse whip, stand off about 30 or 40 feet. I never heard of that before.

IS: I never did either. Get a little bit farther along, you knew Bill Strong the year you went to university?

BVH: Yes, he was taking forestry there.

IS: Then he was on this survey crew north of Jordan there when I was a draftsman for Steels (?). When you came along. This old ranch, where Boyd’s father leased for the winter, belong to a man named Sensavie (?).

BVH: Well Sensavie’s brother. There were four brothers.

IS: Yes, and they had.

BVH: Al was the only one left there. Well Doc worked there in, he tended bar or something there in Jordan, Doc Sensavie. Little fellow.

IS: It was in this bunk house of this ranch where Boyd took up headquarters. When you first came up there you remember you had Chase Treywheat (?) from Texas.

BVH: Yes, he came up there with me.

US: When was that?

IS: This was fall of ‘22 they moved the cattle up there. There’d been a hell of a drought on the Yellowstone and they moved quite a few hundred head of cattle up to the country north of Jordan on Snow Creek ’til wintertime. The grass was good up there, or fairly good.

BVH: Yes, we had beautiful grass.

IS: There were a few homesteaders in the area that raised corn. Boyd bought corn from them to help feed the cattle that got weak or needed it. He kept most of the cattle out on, all steers, as long as possible out on the bare ridges, weren’t they? The little rolling hills out there.
We used to ride around to see if there were any weak ones. I remember one time we found an old cow down in a hole, it was a pocket in the end of a coulee or something like this. You got down and raised her up on one end, but raised up her hind end and then when you go around to her front end, her hind end would fall over. He was trying to get her on her feet and get her out of there. This is one of the things those cowboys did that nobody ever reads about in movies: to save a cow. So finally I fell off the edge and braced her hind end while Boyd went around to raise up her front end. Once she got on all her four legs she turned around and run at Boyd and he climbed up the hill and then she turned around and looked at me and I froze. I remember this so damn well. You were cursing that cow and the cow turned around and started to make a run at me and she stopped about four feet from me. Just because I was...you might say I was slightly under shock, and I just stood there. Later on an old cowboy said, “That’s the way to do it. If you just stand and don’t move, an old cow or wild steer will run up to you and stop dead right in front of you and turn around and run away.” But I never tried it again. It wasn’t far from the camp.

BVH: No, there’s kind of a water camp there. Then we had two of them, you remember, there were some cabins there on Hell Creek? You know those old cabins there on Hell Creek or Snow Creek?

IS: Well, Big Spring was close.

BVH: Yes, but that was out east, south and east of our place in the open there, in that pasture there.

IS: Oh, that little pasture there.

BVH: We kept two of them, we got them down to this old cabin and I carried corn over to them every day until spring. They’ll tell you then, the last day we went over, spring came and the snow was gone for the first time. At night and we were going to quit feeding. Shorty was there, and who was the other fellow that stayed with us? There were two of them there.

IS: There was a short guy that came from Iowa on account of his health and he was getting better all the time, kind of a short, heavy guy. Him and another fellow named Hetty (?).

BVH: The guy that had a homestead out—

IS: That was the shorter guy and they hauled feed for the cattle that Boyd and I bring in. When we keep riding out, I remember when my job ended, they started north. You had about 40 cows with you and they were supposed to be dry and they had about 20 calves when you got up there, and then you leave Shiveley’s(?) place. That was one homestead across there and kept the calves there and we used to go there every day and pull water out of this well by hand, didn’t have any windlass or any darn thing. We used to pull the water out in a couple of big, tall sacks
BVH: Oats, I think. We brought oats.

US: What were you saying about this last day of spring or last day of—

BVH: Oh the last day of camp, why we were going to break up quite quickly and we had had two cows about five or six miles from there. They were down in the breaks, big deep canyon, on Snow Creek, and there were no calving there. I would ride over there with Dan and give them three or four ears of corn. Then they’d get out and (unintelligible) and then they’d get out and (unintelligible) pretty good. This was the last day we were going to do any feeding and I left Shorty there and I guess these two boys were there yet. Anyhow, I left them there and when I came back they’d gotten a hold of some moonshine or something. I remember Shorty had started in to cook and had gone out to the woodpile to get some wood or something, and here he was with his head on the woodpile sound asleep.

IS: Oh, that was that short guy, that wasn’t me. He got drunk.

BVH: All three of them were drunk and laying around there on the ground when I got back.

IS: That was a terrible winter. Do you remember when we get up in the morning and the sun was about 45 degrees out from the horizon and there’d be sundogs on each side of it? Did you ever see a sundog?

US: No.

IS: They’re little extra suns. I don’t know what this is. Do you remember that?

BVH: Yes, sundogs.

IS: I remember riding over to...What’s the name of that place where we used to go to play cards with?

BVH: I can’t recall. He and his wife, Henry?

IS: Henry, Hank, Topper?

BVH: Trumble? Trumble isn’t it. Trucker.

IS: Tucker.

BVH: He was a bachelor down below there.
US: Shorty tells me that you did pretty well sleeping on a horse coming back from an all night party, is that a fact?

BVH: Well I used to (unintelligible) fell asleep on a horse. We’d been up all night. Where’d we go?

IS: Now this is something. We went on this special occasion. We went to a dance on the Missouri River, that some eastern guy had built a big nice log house on an island, if you can imagine, in the middle of the Missouri River—it’s probably all flooded now from the Fort Peck Dam—and we rode across the river on the ice. The ice on the river, lots of times, has big air holes in it. Then the water will get a little high and they’ll freeze over and it will snow on top of that and you can’t see where these things are, but the ice under them wouldn’t hold up a horse. By god, we rode across there at night and the horses would stop and listen and then go out. I know old Boyd told me to let the horse alone because I was trying to bring it up on this sort of stuff myself. The horse would go around those air holes, absolutely it was level snow. We got to this place and they had an all night party there, a dance.

BVH: We had breakfast there before we—

IS: We stayed there and danced all night and had breakfast and then we started home in the morning. I remember leaving a (unintelligible) there. You were riding Dromedary, and you let me ride Midge, the big, grey horse. We started out from there. I’d tie Ned up and we’d ride with a big blanket and put it over the horse after we got there, all over the saddle and the horse and pin, a big safety pin in front. Because the horses, that long in the snow, would get kind of worn, so we took the bridles off and tied them up with rope. I remember I tied mine up with lariat rope. When I got out and started home you guys were a little bit ahead of me and got a start. I jumped on the horse with the lariat in my hand and started coiling it up, and it got off there about three or four jumps and old Ned stumbled on something and went down in the snow. I was yelling at you guys to wait a minute for something, and I remember I fell right into the snow and got a mouth full of it. I didn’t even have time to shut my mouth before I hit the snow.

Then when we got back across the river and were going to camp, we had had another party before that or some us (unintelligible) come over and play poker with us the night before. Anyhow we’d been up a couple. This was in the middle of winter you know, and these homesteaders didn’t have much to do so they’d come over, especially the good old cowboy kind, and play poker.

BVH: They’d play poker all night.

IS: So we were really sleepy by that time, after being up two nights. I remember Boyd jogging along behind me and I’d look back and your head would begin to nod and nod and nod. Then all the sudden his thumb was caught and he’d wake up a little bit. But that’s something that—
US: So you guys spent what, a year together then?

BVH: We trailed cattle from south of Miles City to the south side of the Yellowstone. We were about 30 (unintelligible) our ranch. I’ll show you a picture of the old ranch. Have you ever seen it?

US: No.

BVH: Shorty, have you seen these pictures of the old ranch?

IS: Of your old ranch? The one south of the—

[Break in audio]

BVH: The reason for that was that meal cost 100 dollars a keg at that time and had to be brought down by ox team from Salt Lake City.

US: From here, from Fort Benton.

BVH: You see this was the head of navigation for many years.

IS: The Atlantic City hadn’t gone through yet.

BVH: There wasn’t anything.

IS: Except by wagon clear across from Saint Louis or Independence, Missouri, there wasn’t any other communication. It was shorter from Fort Benton to Salt Lake than it was from Independence, Missouri to Salt Lake. That’s why they kept on using oxen after the railroad come in, they were still using oxen to haul trade out to—

BVH: When the railroad come through here of course the bulls quit running.

IS: The bulls quit running, but Fort Benton still was the center of the—

BVH: I’ll show you some good picture of Fort Benton.

[Break in audio]

IS: Bill Strong that was on the survey crew that was reclassifying Garfield County for tax purposes. Boyd came along with his cattle and Bill Strong was in town back then. Bill Strong brought Boyd over to the little building where we were working and introduced us. Then Boyd
asked me if I wanted to come up and stay awhile at this place. Well, it ended up with me being there all winter, whether I was a help or not I can’t remember, but anyhow—

BVH: You were too quick a bottle washer to be a help. (laughs)

IS: You cooked too.

US: Was he a good cook?

BVH: Darn right, Shorty was a good cook. He was the only who could make pastries. The rest of us could boil potatoes and fry beef steak.

IS: Boyd could make sour dough biscuits like everything, and sour dough hotcakes, that was his specialty.

BVH: I’ll make them for you.

IS: We had beef. We used to kill a beef, and get some of the neighbors a section of it because you know or a quarter of it or so. Then when they’d kill a beef, they’d send us over a quarter of beef. That winter there was no problem keeping meat. Doggone stuff froze hard. Boyd had to chop it with an axe.

BVH: We’d chop steaks off with a double blade. I couldn’t believe I had to leave it outside.

IS: Like I was telling you, about this doggone sundogs. They only happen when it’s 20 below or more. I seen one in Helena, just one dog on one side, one of those awful cold winters. I asked my boy, we were in Arizona the winter that the snow, two years ago when the snow got so awful and it stayed below zero for about six weeks. I asked him if he seen a sun dog during that period. I bet there were some during that period.

BVH: Remember we hadn’t been in camp but a few weeks, a week or two. You came in one night and somebody had butchered and hung up a hind quarter of beef on our dash boards so come to find out it was little Alec McDonald down the creek from us.

IS: Little Alec and big Alec.

BVH: This was little Alec, and he and big Alec Rowdy. Little Alec McDonald had worked for my uncle over south of Miles City, they were ran quite a (unintelligible) land and cattle company over there.

IS: I remember you telling me about that.
BVH: They had both worked for him the last, about three or four years. I can remember these two birds picking me up and carrying me around on their shoulders. He heard I was in there and he sent us over a quarter of beef. We hadn’t been there for a week or two. We butchered and took him back one.

IS: We used to always have beef and talk about cooking. I remember one time in the spring when we were down in cattle and getting ready to trail and stop, Boyd sent me in to camp to cook dinner late in the afternoon. From the herd we were all gathering up cattle and Boyd sent me to cook dinner, we had a nice little sheet metal stove. Was that out of the?

BVH: It was out of the camp wagon.

IS: Out of the camp wagon.

BVH: We had taken a sheep wagon and made it into a camp wagon. You have a bunk in there and a stove and everything to do all your cooking, in the wagon.

IS: That was for when they were bringing the cattle up from south.

BVH: Then we took the top off and used it for hauling grain and stuff in the (unintelligible). Then I have to put the canvas and the blankets and everything back on again before we went in.

IS: South of there.

BVH: Yes we trailed up the Big Dry; we crossed the cattle at Miles City and trailed up the Big Dry with Lee Chandler.

IS: Oh, Chandler, I met him.

BVH: This is Chandler that ran the cafe there. Then he wintered in there on the Big Dry and we left him there and took our cattle over on—

IS: Snow Creek

BVH: Yes, headed to Snow Creek.

US: Was there hay to feed them?

BVH: They had a lot of hay there, and we bought hay all around there.

IS: And some corn. I remember going up there in that old, big old wreck of a barn and chopping up corn with you.
BVH: Who was the old fellow we bought hay from? He and his wife lived in east [of Fort] Ellis seven or eight miles and he made moonshine.

IS: Oh, he was the deputy sheriff too.

BVH: Well, he might have been. But anyhow he made moonshine and if anybody came around there at night after supper, rapped on the door, he’d go to the door, “Can’t come in, ma’s taking a bath.” (Laughs)

IS: He was distilling or something, that’s what he was doing.

BVH: We bought moonshine from him; we bought a bunch of hay from him, too.

IS: Now that wasn’t the deputy sheriff. The deputy sheriff was a big, heavy set guy, Bull or something.

BVH: We bought this hay I remember, and it was sweet hay, it was awful nice hay, and the jack rabbits that year were in there by the thousands. They had eaten in at the base of the stack, back in to this hay stake a couple of feet all around the stack.

US: So just from day to day you just get up and go out and feed the cattle and make sure that—

IS: Well, after a while when the winter got so bad, you got this two other fellows that we can’t exactly remember their names of, 50 years ago, one was heavy I remember his nickname was Heavy. They hauled the hay and Boyd did most of the riding. I did some and went over and watered those calves and came back and cooked. I’d paint a picture every once in a while in between times.

US: Could he draw then, Boyd?

BVH: Pardon?

US: Could he draw and paint in those days? Do you remember?

BVH: Oh yes, you were painting around.

[Unintelligible discussion]

IS: Painted pictures down at your mother’s house, too.

BVH: Big Dick Brent was the (unintelligible), just to the west of us.

IS: Oh yes! They were west of us.
BVH: Yes, right across, a half a mile or something. She baked all her bread. We took her over 100 pounds of flour or something like that, do you remember? She was baking bread for us all the time.

IS: Then Mrs. Tepper used to wash our clothes. If I came over, they had a hand run washing machine, I’d run the washing machine for her and she’d wash our clothes. That’s the way we got some of our things done out there that winter. The rest of it was mostly just hauling; Boyd hauled some stuff for the cattle and these other guys did too. Boyd kept riding all winter looking for stock that would get down or weak. I was with him part of the time, and part of the time I wasn’t. It was cold that winter, 20 below was nothing. Then we got out of, there was the three homesteaders closest to us, and we got out of tobacco and coffee and some other—

BVH: We ran out of everything in Jordan that winter. For six weeks, or longer than that, no one got over the road between Jordan and Miles City that was 90 miles. Jordan was the County Seat of Garfield County, and nobody got to it.

IS: Do you remember you sent me in? Bill Strong had visited us for a little while and then you lent him Beauty, that pretty little (unintelligible). He went to Jordan, rode into Jordan on that, and then a little later you sent me in for coffee and tobacco and a few necessities and pick up the horse and bring it back. That was 20 below zero. When I rode into town that was 20 below zero and I remember. I got the mail and a whole lot of tobacco and coffee and everything for our little community out there and came back with it. I remember you were flabbergasted because I packed all this stuff on the extra horse and tied it down as good as I could with a short rope and the saddle string. Then I stuck the mail into a, you lent Bill Strong an old fur overcoat, and I threw that over the whole thing, tied down good, put the mail in one of the pockets of it. He was going with his wife then and she was in Helena. (unintelligible) he was corresponding that winter with his wife and very anxious to get mail from her.

He met me at this homesteaders where the calves were, the Shivelys (?), and by god it was a good thing too, because I was so stiff and cold. I don’t think, he lent me one of these big horses to ride, and I don’t know if I could have gotten off that horse and opened Shively’s gate or not and gotten back on old Gregory. Boyd met me there at the gate and said, “Where’s the mail?”

I looked back at the coat pocket and backed up a little bit and felt in the pocket, and it was gone. I looked at Boyd and he looked flabbergasted, and I said, “God, where’s the mail?” Boyd started right off down the road. It was getting evening too. He was going to get that mail. He hadn’t gone 50 yards and there the mail was lying right beside the trail—the whole bundle of it with a rubber band or something around it. I’d sure got hell if I hadn’t of had that mail.

BVH: My wife is, she’s Eleanor Dietrich from Helena. Her father was superintendent of schools there for many years. I told her I would try and get up there for the holidays. Well, I’d written her a letter but there was no mail going back and forth, but they did have someone there in
Miles City was a wireless operator and they had a wireless operator there in Jordan. They would send messages back and forth. I sent a letter in that I couldn’t come and she wired back. This wire came to Miles City and then came by wireless into Jordan. The contents of the letter was, if you think more of the cows than you do of me, then you can stay with your cows. You don’t have to come home for Christmas. (laughs) I thought you’d get a kick out of that.

US: How far was it from where you were wintering to Jordan?

IS: Twenty miles, 22 miles exactly.

BVH: That was about 100 miles about from Jordan to Miles City.

IS: Yes, and I rode, 20 below zero, I rode in there and got this extra horse and all this stuff and rode back.

US: Did it take you one day to ride in there?

IS: Yes, and I stayed overnight. Boy, I was so darn cold I got in there I fell off the horse. Old Hospring (?) was running a livery stable, and his wife was running a little rooming house there next to it.

BVH: Chandler, Lee Chandler.

IS: Well, whoever it was.

BVH: I think old Pete Osborne was running the livery stable.

IS: Anyway, I stayed overnight and then came back the next day. Boy, was it ever cold.

BVH: The first time I went to Jordan I rode in and nobody around the livery stable, so I put my horse away. They have a little room above that they keep grain and stuff in and I put him away and came in and got him some grain. Alongside the grain bin was a five gallon jug of moonshine with a cup on it. You could take care of your horse and give him grain and then you could take some moonshine. (laughs)

IS: Other things we did that winter—

BVH: Shoot me Shorty, do you remember, Craywick (?) was the boy’s name that came out.

IS: Oh yes! He was about 22, wasn’t he?

BVH: And Chase. Do you remember one time Al had a horse there that, he was a beautiful grey, that (unintelligible) he was such a bucker. He was a rodeo horse and nobody, they said, had
ever been able to ride him. I was coming back to camp one time and I jumped a bunch of horses and here was this grey in there, prettiest thing you ever saw, oh he was a beautiful thing.

IS: Well built, strong.

BVH: Yes, I had him into the corral and finally went out, and went in and got something to eat, along about noon. Just for the fun of it, I cut all the horses out and left him in the corral. Everybody was gone, I was there alone. Oh yes, I didn’t have any idea to ride him. I was never too much of a rider. Anyhow, I was around there so I put my saddle up on him and left him trailing around the lines there in the corral. So I had something to eat and came back after dinner, and I thought well, I’ll see what he does, if he’s going to buck if you step up in the saddle and step off. I stand up there in the saddle and petted him and then gave him the line and he trotted around the corral, as nice as any gentle saddle horse that you ever saw. So I had to show off a little. I opened the gate, rode up to the gate, opened that and rode over to...What was his name lived over there eight or ten miles from us, running cattle up on the hill, they had ranch there?

IS: Which way?

BVH: West, across the creek.

IS: And on to the other side of that old homesteader. I can’t think of his name.

BVH: I rode over there and he looked at this and said, “My lord,” he said, “Van are you riding that horse.” He said, “That horse will kill you. Nobody can ride him.” He’d never done a thing, he rode along. I was going to keep him, but he bucked so much that he stiffened this front legs up and he just felt like he’d stumble every time. He couldn’t lift anybody.

IS: He was stiff in front.

BVH: Yes. Anyhow, I rode him back. When I got there Craywick was in there—that had come over with me—and he was quite a bronco fighter. He was in there and Al was in there, and he and Al were going into Jordan the next day. We asked Al if he couldn’t ride this horse into Jordan with him. So Al said, “Go ahead.” He treated the horse a little too rough and he threw him off, I think Al told me, three or four times before he got into Jordan. In fact, that he lost his six shooter. He had a six shooter, and he lost that and never did find it.

IS: I remember the next morning, old Craywick got up and he had another horse—we run in a whole lot of those horses I remember some I rode were spookier than hell to get on.

BVH: But they were good saddlers.
IS: They were good saddlers, yes, you bet. I don’t know whether Al wanted Chase to gentle down another one of these horses. Boy, oh Chase come out of there and he give me a long line. He says, “You can’t ride these horses in my saddle really well.” He says, “That’s roping saddle, it hasn’t gotten any swell fork on it.” He said, “If I had a swell fork here I could sure ride him.” He rode the other horse but it didn’t do anything.

US: Swell fork, what’s that?

IS: That’s a wide, the fork is the front of the saddle that goes down over the bars of the tree that sit along the horses back. Then in front is your fork with the horn on it. Behind you is your cattle, the rounded part that you sit against. The old forks used to be narrow, and then they got to making these roping saddles with a narrow fork, well there’s nothing to grip your knees against when the horse plunges ahead and comes down stiff legged.

BVH: Shorty, I still got my saddle.

IS: You still got your saddle. I still got my (unintelligible). I had two saddles after I got to Harlem. I still got the last one.

BVH: I got an order at Miles City Cavalry when I was about 19, 20 or something like that, 18, 19, 20. Riding back out of service.

IS: I remember you riding that grey horse one more time, later on. You said every time you wanted him to move quick-like penning cattle, we were always doing something with cattle, and every time you wanted him to move quick, and you hooked him with your spurs he would pump up and want to buck. All we had, I know old Fuzzy Buckington come over there and we both led a horse out of the corral we had to rope them. You couldn’t walk up to any horses, if you made an overhand pass.

BVH: Fuzzy stopped in here one time.

IS: Yes, he come down to see me too.

BVH: Yes, then later I met his wife in Miles City. I asked her where Fuzzy was, and she said, “Well, I don’t know, we split the blanket.”

IS: We split the blanket. That’s an old, old western saying, when they got a divorce they split the blanket. They took half, and you took half on your way. Plus, it was this man that I was telling you about that was running cattle on the shares down in the bricks (?)

US: That’s how you got started in those days.
IS: Yes he was, small fellows operating, the days of the big ranches were practically past, except in some areas where—

BVH: I’ll tell you how one sheep man got started, this was from my father. He came in to Miles City and went up to the assessor’s office and assessed two thousand head of sheep on the tax role. Then maybe a month after that or something he went up to the bank and wanted to borrow money enough to buy another band of sheep. So they went and checked him, went down to see if he was paying taxes on a couple thousand head of sheep down there someplace. In those days if you paid taxes on 2,000 you had to have at least four and probably five or six so you won’t be turned in. Anyhow, he came up short so they lent him the money and he bought a band of sheep. He didn’t have a sheep or he didn’t have a dollar and he later became one of the big sheep men of the community. (laughs)

US: These calves that you wintered that year, they were your father’s calves?

BVH: Yes, my father and I were in together then.

US: Then in the spring, where did you bring them?

BVH: Well, we trailed up, I don’t know if I have a map to show you, but we trailed up the Big Dry into Jordan

IS: We went by Smokey Butte.

BVH: Yes, west of there was Smokey Butte.

IS: We were down there on Fourth of July, remember.

BVH: Who was the boy that I hired to go back with us, you and I, Shorty? What was his name, he was an old—

IS: He worked well, rode all those horses.

BVH: Knew that whole country. Anyhow, we came back by Antelope Springs, that’s across the Big Dry, over to the Antelope Springs and then trailed back down the North Porcupine.

IS: We ran into a dry stretch there. I remember one night, we used to take turns bedding the cattle down, I was out riding around the cattle last and it was dark when I came in.

BVH: It wasn’t dark when we were getting ready to cross the bridge to that road.

IS: No, this is back there on the little divide between the Missouri and the Yellowstone. Not a noticeable divide.
BVH: The divide between the Big Dry and the North Porcupine?

IS: Yes, it was dry in there and you move cattle so slow you wouldn’t cover very much territory. We ran out of water and nobody had any water. I come in late from bedding down cattle, and Boyd had been out with the wagon and found some water out someplace and scooped it up. I don’t know whether you remember this or not, but I remember because I had been all day without a drink. Boyd had been scouting for water with the wagon, he came in with a barrel full of water and it settled by morning and was good water, but that night from the jostling of the wagon and everything it never got a chance to settle. Boyd took out a tomato can we used to drink out of and scooped up a big tomato can full of water and said, “Here Shorty, drink heavy.” I took it and gulped down. It was just like drinking sand, it was just full of dirt. I’ll never forget that. I was just so thirsty that night I would have drunk anything.

US: How did that taste?

BVH: When you had to make a long drive, you’d water your cattle in the morning. Then you could trail them all day and they could make a dry camp and trail them into water the next day. They could go 24 hours without water if you had to make a long drive.

IS: You know what was a good town for water? You remember several times we hit water about 11 o’clock. We’d be up at four o’clock in the morning when the cattle got up and start pointing in the direction they were supposed to travel. Then it was a dry camp and then Boyd would go ahead, this other fellow and I would keep the cattle, all we did was just keep them moving straight, going in the direction most of the time. We’d make water at noon and camp there and have lunch or dinner or whatever you want to call it and then we’d lay around for a while until about four o’clock, and we’d have a drink and lay down and chew the cud. Then we’d get them going again and trail them up on another little divide and make a dry camp at night. We did that several times, too.

US: How many cattle were you driving on that?

IS: Oh, 500 head.

BVH: Four or five hundred head, yes.

US: You took them from your winter camp to Miles City?

BVH: Yes, we took them south of Miles City.

IS: South of an old town named Hathaway.

BVH: There was a bridge at Miles City, and we crossed them on the bridge going over.
IS: With rosebud.

BVH: Well, coming back.

(inaudible exchange)

IS: I wasn’t with you then.

BVH: Yes, you were there when we crossed the river.

IS: Coming back.

BVH: We went up with Chandler. Chandler and ourselves drove up there.

US: Was it about 100 miles?

BVH: It was about 100 miles from Miles City to Jordan.

US: How long did it take you to get there?

IS: It was 22 miles.

BVH: We could go about ten miles a day.

IS: The whole trip was about 150. His ranch was about 20 or 30 miles south of Miles City. We were camped about 20 miles north of Miles City. So add that and the 100 miles to Miles City.

BVH: I think we made two camps after we crossed at Rosebud coming back before we got into the ranch. (unintelligible) up in the pasture five or six miles away from the home ranch.

US: Well, that must have been pretty hard work.

BVH: Well, there wasn’t any hard work to it in particular; you’re just riding all day.

IS: Cattle lined out in the direction and not pushing them too hard but keeping them moving.

BVH: After your cattle have trailed together for a long time they will not mix with other cattle. They become accustomed to each other and if any stray cattle come into the bunch they won’t go into another bunch of cattle. We never lost one coming or going and we were coming through cattle all the time.
IS: Was it on Sunday Creek where that big horse round up was going on? We stopped there and watched them for a little while. Then we run into some bank in Miles City that shipped up about 2,000 head of southern steers and they were all over. I remember all the sudden we looked up, we had the cattle going along a little draw, and there up on the ridge was a whole row of these doggone old southern steers with their heads up looking at us, great big horns, not as long as longhorns but darn good horns. They used to ship them up there and fatten them and then send them to Chicago. Those steers come charging down into the line or march, so to speak, and some of them run in among the cattle and mess around. Boyd...What’s his name, the rider?

BVH: What was his name, Shorty? He worked for Sensavie (?) for years; he’d been raised over there.

IS: I’ll try to think of it.

BVH: I can’t recall his name.

IS: He was a good hand.

BVH: He knew the whole country. He’d been raised all through there, from Miles City north to Missouri; he knew it all by heart.

IS: You got most of them. There were a few that got into the herd but it was easy to separate them because they would run around wilder than hell. Our cows would just lope along and weren’t quite interested in them.

BVH: They wouldn’t pay any attention to them.

US: This was in the spring now. Was this before calving?

BVH: No, we didn’t leave there until the Fourth of July. It was the Fourth of July when we pull away from Sensavie place.

IS: I thought we had a camp near Jordan. Well, I can’t remember exactly. We had our first camp on Fourth of July, after we left (unintelligible).

BVH: It took about a month before we got into land. Remember we pulled into, what’s his name, Lee Chandler’s place, and turned them into the pasture for a day or two or something.

IS: We did, I remember having—

BVH: While we were camped there, one of the boys from over there on Snow Creek or Hell Creek, in there, came in with a three or four year old heifer that we had missed. He picked her up and trailed us and caught our herd so we could bring her back and didn’t leave her in there.
Which is unusual, most of them would leave a stray there and then brand their calves and stuff. I think Hubbard, Dale Hubbard, wasn’t it?

IS: One of those old guys. He was an old cow puncher too. A lot of cowpunchers homesteaded up in that area.

BVH: They told a story on Dale Hubbard that winter we were wintering there. He lived there and run his cattle there, but he gone the winter without much feed and his cattle were getting awful weak. He went out one morning and they tailed them up, they’d get them by the tail and help lift up by their hindquarters and then they could get up on their feet. He got four or five of them up on their feet and turned around and looked and the first one or two they got up and laid back down again. He ran over to the wood pile and grabbed an axe and he knocked those two in the head. There were two or three others standing there as if they were ready to fall down again and he knocked them in the head. He killed five or six of them that morning. He said he was going to save his hay for the good ones. (laughs)

[End of Side A]
BVH: You get 875, 100 issues at a time. He piled them all up and then he would read the one three months old first and never look at the new ones until he got all caught up and got the next batch. He’d been quite an athlete. He had a whole room full of trophies he won at school.

IS: All kinds of things. He was quite a guy, he became a bachelor and he never did marry and he was a very confirmed bachelor in his ways. If you tried to help him while he was cooking or anything and set something down, I remember he always come over and put it back exactly where he had it in the first place. He was very—

US: So in the winter time you’d visit back and forth with people in the community?

BVH: Yes. Remember one time they had us out to, we just had some one room cabin it was some 20 feet square and they had invited us over to play cards and eat dinner. So we put on a dinner for the three or four families that were close there. We played cards and had breakfast later on in the morning, four o’clock in the morning. Then we hung up tarps cross ways across the cabin so each family had a compartment to themselves. They all had to sleep, and then they slept ‘til long about four or five o’clock the next afternoon. We ended up the party.

IS: We danced too. I remember dancing with that old girl that lived the closest to us to the west, Madeline.

[Unintelligible discussion]

IS: She was quite an old girl.

BVH: She was the one that we would take her 100 pounds of flour and—

IS: And she would bake bread.

BVH: —kept us in baked bread all year. Remember the cat that we had. I picked up a young barn cat in Miles City and took him with me when I went out. (unintelligible). I would shoot cottontails and bring them in to him when I came back in, during the day if I saw one. He’d come out to meet you, and he’d jump up and (unintelligible) and then ride in with you.

IS: He’d see us coming and come out a quarter of a mile from the cabin to meet us.

BVH: One night on toward spring it was warm and we had a sweating window next to the stove. This place we were in (unintelligible) side of the hill and on the south side that we had the (unintelligible) in the hill ran up to just about the eaves on the north side, so it was quite warm.

IS: It was a (unintelligible) window, wasn’t it?
BVH: Right by the stove, yes. That window was right by the stove, and we would open this darn thing in there when it got warm. This cat would go out and in there, he had a cat hole anyhow. One night we heard a hell of a noise. I woke up and this cat came up to the window and gave one jump and landed half way across the room and then up on to the bunk. Into the window slid a bobcat and he put his brakes all on when he came to the window. He stood there and I caught a glimpse of him in the moonlight with his head and shoulders hanging inside the window. I tried to get the Winchester but he got away before I could get it.

IS: I remember that. I remember that old cat, holy hell, he jumped 20 feet into the middle of the room for 15 feet, and then gave another big jump and jumped on Boyd’s bed.

BVH: Another time Brent and his wife were over there and they had a darn dog that was always barking. This dog kept sticking his nose in the cat hole that the cat went back and forth in, and barking and yapping. Finally this big old cat got up and stretched and walked over along the wall to the cat hole. The dog stuck his nose in there, and he just reached out with one paw and he grabbed him right by the nose and hung on. The dog yapped. You might not have been there. He sure was yapping when the cat turned him loose, but that dog wasn’t sticking his nose in that cat hole anymore. (laughs) He was pretty smart.

We lost him over on the Porcupine coming back, the cat. We kept him and I’d taken him down to Miles City to town. One afternoon it was awful hot and we made a dry camp and then before evening we trailed out. I got ready to leave and he’d always come when you called him, but I suppose it was hot and he laid down there some place and wouldn’t come. So we went down and made camp. Then I rode back, but I couldn’t find him. So we lost him.

IS: I remember crossing the river there at the Rosebud at the bridge. The river was up pretty good and cows were shy by the bridge. These cattle weren’t exactly wild, but they were shy of these modern conveniences, you might say, such as a bridge. You could ford them; you could get them into water probably easier than you could get them across the bridge. I remember you roped your calf.

BVH: I roped a milk cow.

IS: I thought it was a calf and the cow followed.

BVH: No, don’t you remember the cow that we had there, she would lead. I roped her and led her up on to the bridge. That’s how, and then the other cows started to follow.

IS: Then we’d push them.

BVH: I planned to hold them back but those bridges start to shake. I had this old bow-legged Dromedary there. I got about halfway and they started to stampede and run across the bridge. I
thought the bridge would swing off of its abutments. I know it was swinging back and forth, it was a steel bridge. I threw the rope away and let Dromedary go and give him his head. I just knew the bridge would never hold up when we got on the other side, but it did.

IS: Yep, it did. I remember that. Yes, that was the last bit of excitement I think on that trip, was getting them across.

BVH: We were home practically, when we got across that bridge.

US: What did you do then after you got to the home ranch?

IS: We put the cattle in the pasture and then we. One of the things we did after we got home, there was gather up a bunch of horses and castrate some of them and—

US: Did you work there another month or something?

IS: Yes.

US: What did you get paid in those days, for something like that?

IS: Oh, 30 or 40 bucks a month depending on how you were, that’s what they paid me. Boyd gave me a good horse as part of my pay. This was in the tough times right after World War I. Boy, a lot of places went broke and that sort of thing, it was tough for everybody. I think in a way, for a short period there, it was tougher than the big Depression in the ’30s. There were three banks in Helena that went broke. There were banks all over the country that went broke. Homesteaders went broke, cattlemen went broke.

US: That’s when all the pond jumpers had a lot of trouble didn’t they?

IS: Yes, they were moving out of the country, they would hear about Oregon and other places and (unintelligible). The land companies boosted this land north of Miles City there, and they brought in sleds of people to homestead there that never had any farming experience whatsoever. They homesteaded around there. The poor things, a lot of them didn’t have enough money more than to fence their homestead and plant some grain and build a granary. Granaries are divided into bins, kind of. They’d live in one of these bins. They weren’t much bigger than this room even.

I remember later in the spring, before we went south with the cattle, Boyd did get a vacation, in order to come up here to Helena to see his girl. Then he left me to ride herd on the cattle. We gathered them all and we knew right about where they grazed, and there were cattle grazing in little bunches. In those days usually it be an off-color marker in each bunch, like a buck skin cow or a black and white spotted one or something like this. You’d ride a certain area and look for these bunches, and you’d remember each little bunch by this marker cow or steer.
I used to ride. I stayed at Tupper’s, and I’d ride. I’d ride different horses each day just because they were there and ride a big circle around. Out west one day and then I’d ride a big circle out east the next day. See where all those bunches of cattle were and keep them in good order. Then when Boyd came back, your father came up with you. Your father came up with you to see how the cattle—

BVH: Did you ever come up there while we were there?

IS: After you had been up to Helena you came back. Your father came up.

BVH: Maybe he brought me back.

IS: From Miles City?

BVH: From Jordan he drove me back down.

US: Did you have a car then?

BVH: Dad did. We didn’t have a car then.

IS: No, we didn’t have all winter. You couldn’t get a car in and out of there.

BVH: You couldn’t drive cattle with a car.

IS: You couldn’t get in and out of there in the winter. Most of the winter we couldn’t use a car, and then in spring it was too muddy to use a car, actual deep mud.

I remember taking him around and showing him off. I just remember as well the first day there at Tupper’s, and I had on an old drab orange shirt that I’d worn all winter. You and your father pulled the sleeves off of it for me. I had it on and it was ripped up the sleeves; it was getting pretty rotten. I remember your father dragging me by one arm and you grabbing my by the other and pulling my shirt. Say another funny business, you remember the outside was once, and we went down there and had a meal at bachelor guy, where we wintered the calves. Shively or something like that.

BVH: Yes, I can’t remember his name.

IS: Then we went out in the yard, and you had your Winchester with you.

BVH: Six shooter.

IS: No, this was your carbine.
BVH: I kept a six shooter on the saddle.

IS: Yes, I know, but you had your carbine with you that day. You were shooting a mark to some extent. Then all the sudden you said, “Shorty, if you throw your hat up in the air, I’ll shoot it.”

BVH: They were throwing hats up in the air and then shooting at the hats.

IS: I threw my hat up in the air. Boyd waited until it lit on the ground, and then he fired a couple of holes through it. He said, “Well, I didn’t say that I would shoot it up in the air.” I remember that. It had bullet holes in it till I quit wearing it.

BVH: Yep, a long time ago. Fifty years ago. Dad wanted me to stay out there, run the country ranch. We had about half the cattle out there, 400 or 500 head, the rest them, 800 over on the south side of Miles City, and nice cattle county. Sensavie used to run a couple thousand head in there. But at that time it took, if you trailed your beef into the railroad to ship, it took a month. You go down there and ship. I thought about, my lord, trailing beef down in there a month or more, to get them on to a bunch of box cars and cattle cars. I wrote him back, as far as I was concerned, I didn’t want to go back to that place there.

IS: That was the end of it.

BVH: Wanted to do a little more (unintelligible). Now it would be fine, you know; you truck them in now in four or five hours.

US: But then it was a month.

BVH: Oh, it’d take a month to trail them in there.

IS: It was just like it took a month to get them down to the ranch. It took over a month, I think, to get them down to the ranch.

BVH: Yes, it would have. Miles City of course would be this side of where the ranch was.

IS: North of where the ranch was.

BVH: I came up through Jordan when I came back to Montague (?) that summer. I didn’t go back into where the road divides when you go into Jordan and the other one goes west. Why there was a little coffee house there.

IS: Any new buildings?

BVH: It didn’t look quite different from when we were there.
US: Jordan?

BVH: Yes.

IS: I still got a photograph, that druggist—

BVH: Glaswell.

IS: Glaswell, took of me in front of this place and over behind it was little old board building with Peerless Café and Bakery on it. I got that as a remembrance. I got a picture of you standing in the door of the Sensavie cabin.

BVH: Oh, do you?

IS: Yes. You got me to take it for you, and you said that...Went up to Eleanor down here in Helena. Well, that’s all I can think of Joel, right off hand. Did you get all that? You can elaborate on it a little bit and make one second.

US: Yes, I think so. It’s very interesting. Did you go back there in the falls and winters, or was it just the one winter there?

BVH: Just the one winter.

IS: He had the chance to get more grass south of Miles City and in there. Ranching sections were almost devoid of grass and then you had grasshoppers that year too.

BVH: That year though, we had a lot of rain and good grass.

US: So you didn’t have to winter them.

BVH: No. Then Shorty stayed with my uncle. I told you saw (?) when I was down there.

IS: I worked with him and with another ranch, two brothers ran, Buster and Walter Summer.

BVH: Buster died.

IS: In May, last May. He always sent me Christmas cards, and the last Christmas card he said he wasn’t feeling good and hoped that I was doing fine.

BVH: Fossbee (?) is (unintelligible) wife’s name now. She’s remarried.

IS: Alyce.
BVH: Fossbee, Alyce.

IS: Alyce Fossbee.

BVH: Fossbee, and he had a cattle ranch up on the Dry or Sheep something like that.

US: How long did you ranch then Boyd?

IS: You went to work after, about the same time, I went to work for Morris Howard.

BVH: Yes, I was raised on the ranch there until I was married in ‘23, I think. Then the times got tough again and there wasn’t enough work for all of us, Dad and I both and then my kid brother there. I went into Miles City and went to work. I worked in a flour mill. I worked in the flour mill and then later they had a fire in the grain elevator. I worked the flour business and the grain elevator business. One of the boys came up and he bought some elevators at a nice a little place called Sumatra, that’s between Forsyth and Lewistown. So I went up there for a year, and I was working there.

Then along (unintelligible) they were going to close the elevator up, wasn’t any crops there that year. One of the boys came by and told me that I could get an elevator here at Fort Benton, so I came up to Fort Benton. They had a lot of grain here until the ‘30s. Then this little station over here across the street, they closed that up. Continental bought up the lease on it. They have a bulk bin up there at the elevator, so I got a partner and we ran the service station down here. Then I bought grain for two or three years up there and ran the bulk plant, if you sold a lot of gasoline and fuel and stuff up there, then the barrels, the farmers would come in and get their wheat and take home a half a dozen barrels of gas and stuff.

US: Oh I see.

BVH: Then I sold that until, or I stayed there until this place came up for sale, and we bought this place.

US: The Ford garage.

BVH: It wasn’t Ford garage then, they had a Double A Agency. We had, what was that car that they quit making, Terraplane.

US: Terraplane.

IS: All I remember, they called the guy (unintelligible).
BVH: We had that for a few years. Then before the agency down here, down the street where the Chevrolet is now, they closed up and Lee and I got the Ford agency. So I run the place over there and he runs the one across the street, so we started to work up a pretty fair business. Then we let that place go over there and he came over here. We were here in partnership for several years; he had a heart attack or something, and I bought him out.

IS: You got the ring lined up along the bench about, in the early ‘40s didn’t you?

BVH: The later ‘30s, yes, or early ‘40s.

IS: You were slamming good in the ‘40s. In those wet years, you remember the early ‘40s were wetter than heck and everything grew.

BVH: The reason we started farming up there, Shorty, was a fellow came in, I was playing cards with him today over there, Frank Elliot. Frank bought a new car and he had a half section of land up in here. I think there was yet a trade in on the car, I remember. He trade in and I traded him for half a section of land and his old car. So then we had a half section of land and we started farming.

IS: I remember you got it just about the right time because—

BVH: It was a nice year.

IS: You went into the war with grain prices high, World War II, and got good crops all through the first five years.

BVH: Then there was quite a lot of little land around there that we rented. We had some of our own and then we rented some and kept buying more all the time.

IS: Got good grain acreage. That was money in those days. Boy, that money—

BVH: Well, it worked out very nicely. Have you seen our other place over here?

US: No.

BVH: Have you, Shorty, our other business over here?

IS: No.

BVH: Let’s walk over there, it’s right across the street. It’s the (unintelligible) police.

[End of Interview]