The following transcript was provided to Archives and Special Collections by the Upper Swan Valley Historical Society with its associated audio recording.
Suzanne Vernon: You said you were born in the Creston.

Rodney Fox: Right.

SV: What’s the earliest memory you have of the Swan Valley?

RF: Well, probably it when I was about 2 years old. I s’pose it was when I had my first memory of the Swan. At that time we lived up across from Kasers across the field. You ever been up to where Barry Kaser lives now?

SV: Yep, yep.

RF: Right across the field there, there was an old cabin, log cabin over there and we lived over there before we homesteaded down here.

SV: Was it real close to the river there or was it on the other side?

RF: No, it was on—crossed the, crossed the meadow from Kasers' place.

SV: Uh-huh. So your folks didn’t homestead up here yet when you were still...

RF: Not at that time.

SV: Uh-huh. That would’ve been.

RF: We homesteaded down here, I think, in, uh...We moved down here I think in something like ’32. When dad homesteaded our place over here.

SV: Uh-huh. And you told me, which place was that?

RF: That was, uh...

SV: The one right across from the road here.

RF: Right, right across the road. Right across from here.

SV: Lion Creek runs through it.
RF: Right through, right through the property. And we owned all this. Dad only had 160 acres in here.

SV: Was that part of the homestead too, or was it?

RF: Right. It was all homestead at that time.

SV: Oh wow, huh.

RF: Yeah.

SV: Fun. When you were up at Kasers do you remember your dad talking about, did he farm up there at all? Or did--

RF: No. He, he just was a, he was a commercial packer. Like in, like in the Bob Marshall. And he was doing that at that time. Because his father also was a, uh, packer back in the Bob Marshall also.

SV: And what was his father’s name?

RF: I don’t know that.

SV: I’m thinking it must have been William, maybe.

RF: Yeah. Probably was. That’s probably right. I never knew him or my grandmother, either one on the Fox side.

SV: So do you think it was the outfitting or packing that brought your dad to this country?

RF: I think so.

SV: He liked that, huh?

RF: It was easy access to the Bob Marshall from here instead of going up from Spotted Bear; it was a lot further then with no roads up through that way. So it was closer from here to the Bob Marshall than it was going in it. Well, it, uh. Where would it be, Columbia Heights?

SV: Right.

RF: Or Corrum, somewhere in there.

SV: Well, there were no roads in here.
RF: There was no roads.

SV: How did he get his stock in here from Creston?

RF: Walked ‘em.

SV: Just trailed ‘em in here.

RF: Uh-huh.

SV: Came right up the river, I suppose?

RF: Oh, the old road come up here then. The old road.

SV: Did he have a lot of mules or horses?

RF: Had mainly horses. He run about 50 head. After, you know, after we homesteaded.

SV: You can remember clear back to when you were just a toddler.

RF: Yeah, when...

SV: Little bits and pieces.

RF: Just little pieces, yeah.

SV: Can you remember what the inside of the cabin looked like?

RF: No. I, I do not.

SV: That kind of thing?

RF: No.

SV: What do you remember?

RF: Well, what I really remember was like I was telling Dee and Vera the other night when my brother, he went, he was going to Salmon Prairie also and he walked to school with one of the Kaser girls. I don’t know yet did we ever figure out what her name was. Anyway, I used to see my brother’s little head coming through the hay across the meadow and that’s about all I remember. But I can remember that.
SV: What was your little brother’s name?

RF: Gene, we called him Gene. His name was Russell also.

SV: Okay.

Shirley: Big brother.

RF: Huh?

Shirley: Your big brother.

RF: Big brother. He was older than I was.

SV: Okay. His name actually turns up in stories here and there that I’ve seen.

RF: Well my dad, name Russell.

SV: Yeah, your dad. And so does Gene.

RF: Yeah, Gene showed up in some of ‘em.

SV: For sure, huh. How far did you have to walk to school than? How far is that from?

RF: Well, from Kaser’s down there, he had to walk to school maybe a mile and a half.

SV: Because you hadn’t started yet.

RF: No, I started school here in ’36.

SV: Uh-huh. So they must have homesteaded, did he build the cabin that’s still there now?

RF: No, it was a fellow by the name of Cortbine. I don’t know how the spelling of the name.

SV: I’ve seen that name. I’ve seen that name.

RF: But he’s the one that built the house. Now I don’t know whether he was, uh, homesteading also and my dad took over. I don’t know that.

SV: That happened a lot. That was pretty common. I’ve been surprised at looking at the homestead records how often that did happen. Cortbine, that name comes a lot.

RF: Yeah. He was the one that built the house.

Rodney “Rod” Fox Interview, OH 422-057, 058, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
SV: I’m wondering if he didn’t start a couple different homesteads and then turn ‘em over.

RF: Could have been. I’m not sure of that.

SV: And I don’t know where Cortbine ever went. Did you?

RF: I don’t know.

SV: Did you ever know him?

RF: No. I knew of him, yes. I remember him when I was real little, you know. That was when we moved down here I can just remember a individual. But as far as knowing, knowing him, no.

SV: Is that house a log house or...?

RF: Yes.

SV: So he must have known quite a bit about the log work.

RF: Who ever built it, done a good job building.

SV: It’s still standing?

RF: It’s still there.

SV: Is there a barn on that property still?

RF: Yes.

SV: Did your dad build that or did the?

RF: Yes, my dad built the barn.

SV: The pictures of your dad though, he had something wrong with one arm, didn’t he?

RF: Yeah, he had polio when he was, I don’t know, 2 or 3 years old.

SV: It didn’t slow him down at all.

RF: No.

SV: It doesn’t sound like from the stories I’ve heard.
RF: No, no. It didn’t slow him up. He could shoe. The only thing he couldn’t do, he couldn’t run a wheelbarrow. It’s the only thing he said, “I can’t do.”

[Laughter]

SV: Well I guess when you think about it that would be pretty tough, wouldn’t it.

RF: [Laugh] – Yeah.

SV: Oh geez. Well, it got him out of some hard labor I suppose, huh. What kind of guy was your dad? I mean, you remember his personality and was he a (?) person or (?)

RF: Oh, he was a real easy to get along with person. Small, he was only 5’ 6”, I suppose, and weigh 140 pounds. 145. But he got along with everybody. Did anything anybody needed. He was always there.

SV: How did he meet Etta?

RF: I do not know that. I guess the Andersons were up here at about the same time as my dad was and they met up here. Oh, my grandma and grandpa lived at Salmon Prairie to start with and I presume that’s where they met.

SV: So your grandparents must have been in here when your dad was a youngster?

RF: Oh yes.

SV: A young boy.

RF: Yeah. It had to been in the late teens probably.

SV: And that’s some of the stuff that Vera was talking about. The stories that Dee’s mother told about haying some of these meadows in the late teens and whatnot.

RF: We hayed every meadow we could get a stick of grass on.

[Laughter]

SV: Wild hay too.

RF: All the way from Condon and Mary Harris’ old place. Maybe you know where that was.

SV: Right, right.
RF: We put hay there and as far south down here as Simmons meadow. Down here about 3 miles to the north of here.

SV: Had to be put up with horses then.

RF: Oh yes. Everything was done with horses.

SV: Your dad must have been really good with stock though, if he could work as a packer.

RF: Oh yeah. He could shoe horses by himself. He done his own shoeing until my brother and I got big enough, then we helped out of course

SV: How old were you when you got to help out with that kind of stuff?

RF: Oh, I was about 13, I suppose.

SV: You think 13 year olds know how to do that? I suppose some of ‘em do.

RF: [chuckle] They might. [chuckle]

SV: Yeah, uh-huh. When he was packing, did he pack for the Forest Service do you know or...?

RF: No. No, he packed for himself. He got people from back east or locals, you know, to go hunting, fishing trips through the Bob Marshall.

SV: Oh, wow! I mean, this country was so raw then. That just amazes me people would have enough ambition to just come and I mean you’d have to be pretty gutsy, you know.

RF: Uh, yeah. [Chuckle]

SV: Put everything you own into trying to make a living.

RF: Everything you had. Which wasn’t much but made good use of it, I guess.

SV: What kind of an outfit did he usually have that he put together? Do you remember? I mean, how many horses?

RF: Well, like I say we running about forty, forty head. But some of those were pack stock and some were saddle horses and some were work horses. We had a few of all ‘em but the main portion was pack stock.
SV: When he would go into the South Fork then. I suppose this was a wonderful location for him right across here on the...

RF: Well, they had a trail that goes in the Bob Marshall right up Lion Creek. But it was awful steep and bad, bad trail. So he used to go in always through Holland.

SV: Okay. So he would have to trail.

RF: Yep. We’d take em to Holland Lake right up the road. And they, he rented the corrals and stuff up there from the people that owned Holland Lake Lodge and then we just worked through them.

SV: Hmm. The Lodge went through several owners about that time period in the ‘30s and the ‘40s.

RF: Right.

SV: It’d be kind of hard to remember, probably, who was in the door.

RF: White—White was his name that owned it at the time we first went there.

SV: That trail wasn’t especially great though either that first, that old one that went up that side of the canyon at Holland, was it? A lot of switchbacks?

RF: Oh yes. That was a trail that was in there for. That’s the only trail we ever used. I’ve never been over the new one.

SV: How old were you the first time you got to go in there?

RF: Probably about that high.

[Laughter]

RF: My folks would take us in and ride in front of the saddle with my mother you know. They’d take us in there when we was real, real little. That didn’t slow ‘em up any.

[Chuckle]

SV: Did you guys have dogs that went in with you too as...

RF: I don’t believe so. I don’t think we did. Dad never wanted dogs around his horses.
SV: Some people are real (?) about that. Some people really like the extra critters along and some of them don’t. I don’t know. It just depends how you were raised. When you went in there, when you were real little like that, did you have some chores that you had to do around camp?

RF: I suppose. I don’t remember.

SV: You can’t remember being...

RF: Not being that little.

[Laughter]

SV: When you started going in later then, did you help him around camp?

RF: Oh, yes. After I was...well, I started packing with him when I was 14. Yeah, I run my own string at that time.

SV: Nineteen-forty-four?

RF: Somewhere, yeah, about in there.

SV: How many horses did you have in your string?

RF: I had nine head.

SV: That just seems like a lot for 14 and that had a lot of responsibility

RF: Yeah, but you done it. You’d been around it all your life so you just got trusted to do it and you done it. And all there was to it.

SV: What kind of packs was everybody using then? Was it still like that diamond hitch on the mantes?

RF: Yeah. We didn’t use the diamond hitch. We just used the basket hitch, we called it. And Decker saddles. They used the diamond hitch mainly on the sawbucks. The regular hitch on the Decker saddles.

Shirley: Well, I think I’m gonna go.

RF: Okay.

SV: So, the Decker saddles was diamond hitch?
RF: yeah, that’s what we used, all Deckers.

SV: By the time you were 14, were you using the Deckers?

RF: Yes, we was.

SV: That was 1944? And the basket hitch, then, was earlier?

RF: No, that was the one we used. We didn’t use...I don’t know anything about a diamond hitch.

SV: Okay.

RF: That was way before my time.

SV: Okay, gotcha. I’ve got some pictures somewhere. I think it must have been in Wilhelm’s collection of pictures of the basket hitch. And you could probably look at those even and tell me the difference between some of those pictures.

RF: Yeah, all it is, is just your rope was hooked to one front end of the Decker and it went around and round through the back Decker and then went under your pack and up and tied in. It was just very simple.

SV: I see, I see.

RF: Then if you wanted to tie it down, you tied it down to the cinch. But we didn’t ever tie it down. Case you rolled a horse over, you wanted that pack to come lose. You didn’t want it to pull the horse over.

SV: Did you ever lose any horse on the trails?

RF: Not really, no.

SV: When you went in, did you go down the Gordon that way?

RF: No. We went down the Pennant.

SV: Oh. Over Pennant.

RF: Pennant. We went over Pennant and dad’s camp was down at the big slide on, uh, 18 miles in. Just about five miles from Big Salmon Lake.
SV: What did you remember about what that trail was like when you went through there? Were there places that were prettier than others or...?

RF: Well, I think the prettiest part of the trail was High Trail, coming out of Holland, over Holland Lake, around the cliffs. That was beautiful. And coming down the canyon from upper Holland. The rest of the trail end, it wasn’t really pretty. You just went over the pass and down the other side and you was usually in pretty heavy timber most the time.

SV: I picture going in there. What time of year did you go in?

RF: Oh, we’d go any time after the Fourth of July. And then we’d pack summer people in, the sightseers and the what-have-you up ‘til the end of August. And then we’d start the hunting camps and go in, we’d be in there by the fifteenth of September to start the hunting season. And then we’d try to be out of there by no later then the twentieth of October. Because then usually that after that, the snow might keep you in there.

SV: Did you ever get a lot of snow early in October?

RF: Yes, we have. I’ve had it, oh, clear up to the horse’s belly, you know, coming out of there.

SV: That wasn’t uncommon then, having to go through that snow.

RF: No, no. My dad, my dad got stuck in there one time and he couldn’t get out. And he had to go clear to around through Spotted Bear and around through Bigfork and come home that way.

SV: That took a lot of extra time. I bet everybody was worried about him?

RF: Oh, that must have taken, uh, probably about 7 or 8 days. ‘Cause our camp was about straight over west of here and he had to clear around by Kalispell and come in that way back in.

SV: Did Etta usually go in with you guys?

RF: She was the camp cook usually.

SV: What kind of things you remember her cooking?

RF: She cooked anything you wanted to cook. She had the stoves, the capabilities of making pies, bread, rolls, everything.

SV: Seems like that would’ve been the fun part of it for a young boy. You were pretty experienced by the age of 14, though?
RF: Oh yeah, definitely.

SV: How was the fishing?

RF: Wonderful. Wonderful.

SV: They say some of these people that went in the summer time...

RF: Oh, you’d catch a fish; you’d catch a fish any time you wanted to catch one. They was just all over, you know.

SV: Fly-fishing or...?

RF: Fly-fishing or spinner fishing or anything. Put a piece of string and a hook on a old willow and throw it out in the creek and you’d have a fish. You didn’t have to have any high price tackle, you know.

SV: That was mostly the cutthroat probably or...

RF: There was cutthroat, cutthroat, uh lake fish, bull trout, lots of bull trout then.

SV: They must have been a little harder to catch different times of the year? I don’t know

RF: Different times of the year, they wouldn’t bite, you know. But, if they were biting, you’d get, really hook on to some nice ones.

SV: I’ve heard stories about the biggest bull trout maybe that was ever caught back there. Somebody told me it was an Indian that caught it and he had it on his saddle horn and it stretched down to his stirrups.

RF: That very well could be.

SV: Just sounds huge.

RF: Yeah

[Chuckles]

SV: You don’t remember some of the sizes?

RF: Oh yeah I remember. We had some, my brother and I was up on Little Salmon. That’s over in, oh, it’s about 15 miles I guess from our camp and further into the Bob. And I, we had ‘em tied on to their saddle strings, on the—behind the saddle, and they was just almost touching
the ground. They was that long. Four feet at least. I s’pose they’d go 18, 16, 18 pounds. I don’t have no idea.

SV: Yeah, I don’t know that people ever weighed them.

RF: No. Didn’t have no, nothing to weigh them with.

SV: What about hunting season back there? Do you remember when you got your first elk and that kind of thing?

RF: We didn’t really hunt back in there. ‘Cause we had to pack all that stuff out of there. So we didn’t.

SV: You personally didn’t hunt back there?

RF: We’d guide other people. We’d be the guides for them. But as far as killing something, that was just more work for us getting them out of there.

[Chuckle]

SV: How did you feel about taking the hunters and finding the game for ‘em?

RF: Oh, it was kind of fun. You know. You knew where the game was usually and you didn’t always get game for ‘em. One thing we never did do is shoot it for ‘em. They shot it for themselves or they didn’t get it.

SV: Were there very many of them that were real trophy hunters, is that?

RF: Oh yeah. There was some trophy hunters, but mainly it was for meat. Most of ‘em didn’t even bring the horns out back then.

SV: Really?

RF: No.

SV: I’ll be darned.

RF: We hated to have horns on trying to pack ‘em on a horse. If they was wide horns, they was fine, they’d fit over the horse. But if they was narrow ones, you had to tie ‘em on top. Then if you had to stop and fix a pack, you had to take the horns off and redo the whole thing. [Chuckle] So, we’d tried to talk ‘em out of it, if we could, not taking ‘em.

SV: I’ll be darned. But they always wanted the meat?
RF: Oh yes. The meat they’d take. We always got that out for ‘em.

SV: I wonder when it changed? When it started being more trophy hunting? If that was the ‘40s and the ‘50s, maybe for the...

RF: I suppose in the ‘50s, Probably. Because, I see I left here and went in the service at 15.

SV: Okay.

RF: And I was gone for 20 years so, I. When I come back then, lot of changes had been happening since I’d been here, since I’d left. So I’ve got a lapse there of 20 years in the Swan when I wasn’t here.

SV: Sure. I bet it was a shock to come back though really?

RF: It was, yes. It was an awful change, you know. I was home on leave every 3 or 4 years. I’d be home for a couple weeks or so. But you could see the trend, the change in the valley, the way things were done. A new highway come through and some things like that. It just was so much different.

SV: Right. What were some of the things you really enjoyed as a kid? I mean I kind of got you off talking about packing. But was that one of the things you really enjoyed?

RF: Mainly ridin’ horses and fishing. That was about all we had to do. I mean you didn’t go to town, you didn’t go to movies because it’d take you about 4 hours to go to town, providing you had a car to get there in any way.

SV: Right.

RF: After September, you never took a car down the road any more. Until May or June the next year and you just didn’t go anywhere. Go on to school. Oh, you went and visited your neighbors but it was all done on saddle horse.

SV: What was the farthest you’d go to visit neighbors?

RF: Well, we used to go as far as Wilhelm’s at the 33 Bar.

SV: Did you go to visit or did they have some--

RF: They had dances. They’d have dances up there and of course all the kids went anyway. We’d go to sleep in the, they’d throw us in the back bedroom, go to bed while they had their party and stuff. But my dad would start out from here with his team and the sled and he’d take
this team up to my uncle’s at Salmon Prairie and he put his team on and then there we’d go to from there up to Mackie’s. I don’t know whether you know where Mackie lived back in there?

SV: I need to know what’s the name of your uncle first.

RF: Roy.

SV: Okay, and then to Mackie’s.

RF: And then to Mackie’s. And then from there, I can’t remember the next change of horses we had from there. I can’t remember that. But there had to been one more before we got to Wilhelm’s anyway. And you was going pretty good pace all the way, you know.

SV: Was that with a sleigh? Was it wintertime?

RF: With a sled, yeah. In the winter.

SV: Yep. That’d be the only time you’d have to go to dances. Summertime you were probably too busy.

RF: Working. Working the rest of the time.

SV: Oh boy. Did your dad do other things for work besides packing in the--

RF: Well, he did in the (?) during the War when they (?). He worked for the WPA down at Swan Lake along the highway down there, well, the old road we’d call it. And he run his team scraping rocks and stuff like that for the building the road and things like that. And he got $2.00 a day for the team and $1.00 for himself. And he only got to work about two days a week. So it’d take him a day to get down and a day to get back and two days down there. But he was awful glad to get that.

SV: How did Etta do at home with him gone four days a week? Well, of course.

RF: Well we, the kids, were home all the time. My brother and I were always home.

SV: Did you have sisters?

RF: No, there were just the two boys.

SV: You and your brother. And I was asking you about what you like to do and you said riding horses and fishing. When you were riding horses, was the country much different that you were riding through then it is now? More open or more closed?
RF: Oh, definitely. It was more open, really, and it hadn’t been logged. You didn’t have all this
down timber lying on the ground, you know. It was just beautiful. You could ride out through
the trees and never hit your hat on a brush, you know. That’s how nice it was. Big timber.

SV: It wasn’t just in this local area that was pretty much up and down the river bottom.

RF: Pretty much covered all the way.

SV: When I talked to Kenny Huston, he said the same thing and he said his dad had told him
stories, the same thing. And I thought, well, maybe it was just at that upper end of the
mountains

RF: No, it was that way all over. We run our horses back in here and you just turned your horses
lose. You didn’t have a pasture for ‘em. And uh, you’d go out right through the trees any place.
There were no thickets, unless you got right on the river of course. But out in the woods, it was
just beautiful.

SV: The trees must have been considerably bigger.

RF: Oh yeah, they’re big pine, you know. Big pine, big larch, didn’t have near the lodgepole like
you have now.

SV: Do you remember your dad talking about oh, areas of fire, old burn areas.

RF: Yeah, he mentioned the ‘29 fire all the time. That was one that burned up around Condon.
Elk Creek, up in there. And it also burned down in the Flathead. But that’s the main fire that I
remember he always talked about, ‘29.

SV: That must have been a kind of scary one for everybody in the valley?

RF: It was. That’s when it, I guess it burnt some over around Shay Lake, over in here, in this
area. Anything of the old burns, way back is, happened in ‘29.

SV: Well probably the packers were pretty instrumental in those fires. They’d have to be
packing water and food.

RF: Right. We had to pack in the trail camps, pack out trail camps and things such as that’ you
know. And they didn’t ask if you wanted to do it, you just done it. They’d come and tell you I
want so many mules, horses I mean, and so much help. Course they paid ya, they paid ya well.
But they didn’t ask you if you wanted to work, you just worked. [Chuckles] Which was good I
thought, because...

SV: Well, it shows the change in the community.

Rodney “Rod” Fox Interview, OH 422-057, 058, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library,
University of Montana-Missoula.
RF: It sure does.

SV: People had, knew what their responsibilities were. Here pretty clearly defined.

RF: Right.

SV: We’re gonna keep everything from burning up, that’s how we do.

RF: That’s right and that’s what we done and they, course then they had all the lookouts around, which, uh, a fire didn’t get started big usually. I mean, it was always caught while it was real small. But now, before this plane gets up over the area, it might be two days before they spot a fire that’s really going.

SV: Right, right. The country must have been open enough to see some smoke or--

RF: Oh yes, it was.

SV: From the lookouts?

RF: We had lookouts situated. Like Van was right up here, just above us and Cedar on the other side right across and you had Napa lookout, just down a ways. Then you had your other lookouts up in the Condon area. Holland Lookout, uh, Cooney Lookout and all those. So you covered the whole area. Plus Bob Marshall, they could see from Van and Napa Lookout, they could see the Bob Marshall. Far enough down in there to where their lookouts over in the Bob could pick it up. So, the fires just didn’t get started. And they had Smoke Jumpers too, you know.

SV: By World War II, sure.

RF: Yeah. They jumped in the forties.

SV: Did you know Henry Thall?

RF: Sure did. Yes’ I did. He was our ranger. He came up through here. He was the only ranger I guess I ever remember seeing come up through. And he walked through. He didn’t ride in a vehicle, he’d walk. In the wintertime, snowshoe through. And he’d go all the way up to Condon. Stay there a few days, then he’d come back. And he would stay at our place here overnight when he was coming through from Swan Lake. And the same way when he was coming back.

SV: What made me think of him, was one of his boys was killed in that Man Gulch Fire.

RF: Right. Got burned. It was, what, ‘11 or 1’3?
SV: I don’t remember exactly.

RF: I can’t remember either. But I remember the time when it happened.

SV: I’m gonna turn this tape over, because I’m getting to the end. I don’t want to, I want the Man Gulch story on the other side.

[End of Tape 1]
SV: He must have been awfully bitter about losing his son in that fire.

RF: You know I don’t remember. I don’t think I had much to do with Henry after that about that time, so I could not comment on that.

SV: You remember when it happened?

RF: I remember when it happened and knew who it was and was Henry’s son. But Henry wasn’t around up here then.

SV: That was later?

RF: Later.

SV: So about ‘44 or maybe ‘42, must have been the end of his term as ranger here?


SV: That seems to be when I remember from. He was a photographer. Do you remember him taking pictures?

RF: Yes, I do.

SV: Evidently, he did it as kind of a hobby. It wasn’t official Forest Service all the time.

RF: But he was a great person.

SV: What’d he look like? Do you remember?

RF: Well, he was kind of short, husky. I don’t know, kind of fair complexion I suppose. He was really in shape all the time. He’d walk through here on snowshoes just, he walking just as fast when he got home, as he was when he left Swan Lake. A pack on his back, you know. He was fabulous.

SV: Trying to think who the ranger was that came after him. I want to say Horace Godfrey, but that might have been who was in the South Fork. Do you remember him?

RF: I remember him, but I think he was at Condon when I remember him.

SV: Was he?
RF: Horace Godfrey. I think there’s a possibility he did come right after Henry.

SV: I think Henry would have seen that very beginning of the development of the Swan, you know when the early survey crews came in. Do you ever remember him talking about some of those early days?

RF: I don’t.

SV: He’s probably just on official Forest Service business when you saw him. [Chuckle]

RF: Well, he’d just come and visit, you know. Like I say, he’s stay over night at the home, at our house and he’d go on up to Condon then he’d come back down. As far as his conversations, I don’t remember.

SV: Sure. Wasn’t there a bunkhouse at the Condon Ranger Station?

RF: Yes. They had a, that main building is the same one that was there then.

SV: But he just wanted to get started back home?

RF: Yeah. I don’t know what the reason was for him. I guess just to check everything out through the valley and see how people were doing. If they was poaching or not or what they was doing. He really didn’t care if you were eating venison, just as long as you was eating them, he could care less. And most people were eating ‘em back then.

SV: Did you guys eat a lot of venison?

RF: Oh, we did.

SV: I think a lot of people maybe don’t eat it now because we ate it all the time growing up, huh.

[Laughter]

RF: I still like it.

SV: Might as well. Did you, when we... talking about elk, you said you guys shot elk. When you got elk, it was more like here?

RF: There wasn’t many elk here in the valley then. There wasn’t no elk. You very seldom seen an elk in the Swan Valley.

SV: I’ll be darned. Little different then today.
RF: Today. Then they seemed to have pushed ‘em out of the Bob Marshal over into the Swan. I think that’s where they had to have come from. There’s more elk I think right now in the Swan, between here and Seeley, then there is in the whole Bob Marshal.

SV: So the population has decreased back there.

RF: Oh, definitely has.

SV: I wonder. Anybody got any speculation about what happened back there?

RF: Not that I know of.

SV: Overhunting or habitat?

RF: I don’t know. I worked back there for ‘49 and ‘50 and I used to see herds of elk back in the Bob Marshal of 50 and 100 head in a bunch, you know, then. That was in 1948. And so I don’t know what happened to those elk. But like I say, a lot of ‘em migrated over this way or was pushed over into the Swan or however.

SV: Well you can see where it would happen you know, through the different canyons.

RF: Too much pressure over there and over here there wasn’t the hunting for elk. There just wasn’t any here and the habitat was probably better here.

SV: But there was plenty of deer.

RF: Oh yes. Oh, there was deer all over the place.

SV: Any mule deer?

RF: No.

SV: Mostly white tail?

RF: Whitetail.

SV: So you ate venison. You guys must have had a few chickens around?

RF: Oh yeah, we had chickens, we had cow, milk’ you know, milk cow. Than you had all your vegetables and stuff in the fall. You had a cellar you know. You had your potatoes and your carrots and all this other bit. You got that before the snow come so...
SV: So you didn’t try gardening or did you have...?

RF: Yes, my mother had a small garden, but not really. The season was too short just like it is now.

SV: Yeah, it’s tough. I guess some varieties grow but you got to work hard for them even, huh?

RF: Yep.

SV: When we...when you were mentioning about the lookouts, it made me think of, like, Van lookout. Vandeewalker. Did you ever know him?

RF: Yes, I did.

SV: What kind of fellow was he? I mean, I see the mountain is named after him.

RF: You know, I was so small, but I remember this fellow. And really, I couldn’t tell you too much about him at all. But I remember the individual just as a person. But far as knowing what he really looked like or what he... I know he didn’t dress well. {Chuckle}
He probably couldn’t, you know like, everybody else. But I do remember the individual.

SV: He was around and probably trapping or something for a living.

RF: Trapping. I think that’s what he mainly done, was trapper. Most all the older fellows that was in here was single and they were trappers.

SV: Well, your dad must have known a lot of those guys?

RF: Oh, yeah. He knew ‘em all.

SV: I wonder, did they ever help him on his packing once in a while, things like that? Do you know?

RF: I don’t know who he had work for him. I think he mainly done until my brother and I was big enough to help him. I think he more or less done it by himself. Well, I’ll take that back, my uncle, Roy, and his cousin, Bob, helped him I think quite a bit.

SV: Bob shows up on one of the homestead records.

RF: Yeah. Bob he lived up at Salmon Prairie. Up there. Right across the bridge. Well from where Clothier lived, you go across the bridge and Clothier’s turn to the left, go to Clothier’s and his place was right on the right there. I don’t know who owns any more.
SV: The one that kind of follows the river?

RF: Yeah. That property right there.

SV: Well, I’ve been trying to sleuth a little bit on Vandee Walker [sp?]. Cause not too many people knew him well. John Hulett knew him a little bit.

RF: John would probably be one of the few that’s around that probably know Vandee Walker.

SV: I’m trying to follow up the place names is what we’re trying to do. Why different places were named the way they were and that Van Mountain and Van Lake must have been named after him.

RF: I imagine they was named after him.

SV: He must have lived up closer to Goat Creek?

RF: Yes. He lived ... well, down here just this side of where the state, the state forestry is down here at Goat Creek. That road that turns to the left just this side there. Well just, he owned that land then where that road, just before you get to the bridge, he owned that land to the south. I don’t know what the acreage was, but I would say it was at least 160 acres and could have been half a section. I don’t know. But that’s where he was at.

SV: If I know where somebody lives, sometimes I follow something on their title and come up with more information about ‘em. I don’t know his first name.

RF: Vandee Walker is all I know. All I know.

SV: See that had to be his last name.

RF: Had to be.

SV: So, I don’t know, I’ve never seen...

RF: Maybe it was Van Vandee Walker. [chuckles]

SV: Maybe it was huh? [laughter] When you said about your favorite things, fun things to do, riding horses and fishing, you’re talking about fishing here in the valley right?

RF: Yeah right.

SV: Not fishing in the South Fork? Did you fish in the creeks or the river or...
RF: You fished in anything. All these creeks had fish in ‘em. Even Lion Creek, which had very few fish in it because it was too cold but it had a few little brookies in it. We used to step off the bank from the house and fish for ‘em. My mother, she was a great fisherman.

SV: Tell me a little more about her. We’ve talked about your dad more.

RF: Well, she was, uh, she was a hard worker. She worked with my dad, uh, when he was working in the mills down here. Dad worked some times in the mills for Fimby [sp?] and Wises and places like that. She’d saw with him on the landing, saw and crosscut. But mainly she stayed at home and took care of the place, unless the Bob Marshall when she was cooking and places like that. Things like that. But she was a hard worker.

SV: But she liked fishing?

RF: Oh, she loved to fish.

SV: Where did she learn about fishing? I wonder did she just come up with it?

RF: Oh, grew up with it I imagine.

SV: Did people fly-fish then or did she just use whatever?

RF: Mainly just a pole. No, not even a cane pole, an old willow. That’s the only poles we had when I was a kid.

SV: She had an old willow, what’d she have for line? Just several...[can’t hear] worms?

RF: Just a hook and a worm. That’s all.

SV: You got dinner bubbling over here.

RF: I think that’s her beans. I’m awful hard to catch up with, as you know so. I’m in and out.

SV: When she, did she teach you guys how to fish or did you kind of teach yourselves?

RF: Oh yes. No, she taught us.

SV: You said there was little, there was brook trout in Lion Creek.

RF: Yeah, little brookies.

SV: But it was too cold for the cutthroat?
RF: Well, that creek is a cold creek. And the cutthroat nothing hardly ever come up there. Was just too cold, I don’t know. The bull trout run it, they say.

SV: Yep, Yep. Maybe they run it after those brookies.

RF: Maybe. I don’t know.

SV: You guys lived right on the creek there. Did you ever have any trouble with bears? Up and down Lion Creek?

RF: No, no. We never had trouble with bears back in them days. Never had any problems.

SV: What did you do for refrigeration? The only time I’ve talked about, people have talked with bears. Were there screen boxes on their porch where they kept their meat? Things like that?

RF: Yeah, yeah. But we had a cellar.

SV: Okay.

RF: And any, uh, fresh things. Like we had milk, keep milk, we had a little spring down in the creek. On the edge of the creek a hole in there with a little screen box in it Mother kept her milk and cream in to keep it from souring. But we had a good cellar. We had everything really good. No, we never had any problems with bears at all. You hardly ever saw a bear, that was the thing.

SV: Hmm. Not even when you out riding around, you didn’t ...

RF: Oh, once in a while when you was riding you saw ‘em out. But if they you saw you first you didn’t see ‘em.

SV: Black bears mostly?

RF: Black bears.

SV: Do you remember the first time you saw a grizzly?

RF: I think the first grizzly probably I seen was in the Bob Marshall.

SV: Down Pendant?

RF: Yeah. Around our hunting camps, they used to hang around there at our meat poles and stuff like that.
SV: I s’pose.

RF: Yeah.

SV: Easy pickings maybe, huh?

RF: Well, we didn’t have a whole lot of problems with ‘em.

SV: Why the change now, do you s’pose?

RF: All this collaring, I believe, and they’re getting them too well acquainted with people. Protecting ‘em too much. They just, just the wrong way to go about training a bear I think. [Laughter]

SV: Do you ever remember, I’m thinking about that creek right on the place and kids being kids, you probably explored the creek up and down and to the river. Did your bump into very many beaver or many .... [can’t hear]

RF: There was some beaver, some mink, weasels and stuff like that.

SV: Course if there wasn’t that many fish in there, I s’pose some of those like otters and other...

RF: No, we didn’t have much for in the way of otters or matins or stuff like that. Generally just weasels or mink. No, not we didn’t have any of these fish, fish people. [Laughter]

SV: That’s a good way to describe it, huh? Where did you like to go fishin’?

RF: Oh, we always fished right down at the mouth of Lion Creek. That’s about the only place we fished. Then over at Van Lake.

SV: You could pretty much go to the river pretty easy.

RF: Yeah. Well, it’s only quarter of a mile.

SV: Did you ever notice anything like otters or beaver down there?

RF: There, beaver. But they all gone. There’s none around any more. There no beaver anywhere that I know of now.

SV: I wonder what the change is in there. Why it would be...

RF: Well, they trapped ‘em awful heavy to start with. They were trying to get rid of ‘em and I think they did.
SV: And it was the regulations were crossed a little bit too liberal.

RF: Well, I think anybody that wanted to trap beaver could trap beaver. You didn’t need permits or nothing.

SV: Some of the people that I talk to. Well, back to Kenny Huston, he loved to fish in the beaver dams that he talked about a lot. I guess Warner Lundberg talked a little bit about that too. Do you ever remember fishing behind beaver dams?

RF: Oh yes. [chuckle]

SV: Yeah? Of course. Seems like it would have been kind of an easier spot to go to.

RF: It is. But you don’t have the beaver dams any more. And you can’t fish ‘em in the wintertime. I like to winter fish so, ice fish so. It’s against the law to fish in beaver pond.

SV: I s’pose. Van Lake probably was pretty decent fishing in the winter? Though I wonder why?

RF: It has been.

SV: But they tell us now that’s a closed system. They would... it’s stocked now. Isn’t Van Lake a stocked lake now?

RF: Stock lake?

SV: Stocked with rainbow trout?

RF: Well yeah, it’s supposed to be if the Fish and Game would stock it once in a while. They don’t stock it very often.

SV: When you were a kid you fished up there. What kind of fish did you catch?

RF: Rainbow.

SV: I’ll be darned. They must have started putting some rainbows in there pretty early or they came...

RF: Oh, yeah. There was big rainbows in there then.

SV: Once in a while there’s been a winterkill at Van Lake. Do you remember that happening ever in the winter up there?
RF: Only one time. What was that, about four years ago?

SV: That’s the one I’m thinking about too. But not when you were a kid?

RF: No. I was fishing that lake that same time they say, supposedly, said that was a winterkill over there. There wasn’t a thing the matter with those fish the end of March. And as soon as the ice went out, they was dead all over.

SV: Wonder what the difference was?

RF: Hmm.

SV: Make you think...

RF: Well, we accused ‘em of poisoning ‘em. I don’t know whether they did or not. Of course they won’t admit it, but.

SV: Did you ever see anything like happen that when you growing up here?

RF: No. Never did.

SV: On any of the lakes?

RF: No.

SV: It make you wonder, wouldn’t it?

RF: [chuckle] It sure does. It wasn’t only me, it was a lot of the people around the valley.

SV: That fish up there? Did people camp up there when you growing up like they did there for a while in the 80’ and 70’s? I guess there was a lot of camping going on.

RF: No. No there’s no road in there.

SV: So how’d you get in there when you just walked up the...

RF: Walked. Walked or rode horses in.

SV: Uh-huh. Fished this end of it or by the...[can’t hear]

RF: All around it. By the rock and around there.

SV: Yep. Did it always have crawdads? I noticed people talk about crawdads in that lake.
RF: Yeah, I s’pose it did.

SV: Uh-huh. Wonder if some of those big trout feed on them.

RF: Oh, definitely do.

SV: Yep, yep. But where that lake doesn’t have a, you know, a major stream coming in or out of it.

RF: No inlet or outlet. Sometimes a little water runs out, but very little. It’s springfed, I s’pose.

SV: And yet it’s not cold.

RF: No.

SV: Like Lion Creek.

RF: No, no. No, it’s a pretty warm lake in the summertime.

SV: People don’t go up there swimming necessarily, though. [Chuckles]

RF: I don’t think so, because it’s too muddy along the shore anyway.

SV: There weren’t any homesteads around Van Lake, anybody right close living there was there?

RF: No, no. We’re about the closest homestead to Van Lake right here.

SV: Any of the other ones would have been over in on Shay.

RF: Yeah, yeah.

SV: [Can’t hear] Vandewalker [sp?] Did you ever know this Pearl Shay?

RF: Sure did. And Joe. Pearl and Joe.

SV: Pearl and Joe? I’ve seen a picture of Joe, I think in some of the pictures John Hulett [Can’t hear]

RF: Yeah, they lived, oh, a quarter of a mile right straight out through here.

SV: Okay. So most of what’s sub-divided over there now was probably their place.
RF: It was, all their place. They was only one there.

SV: Did they have any family left alive anywhere that you know of?

RF: Not that I know of.

SV: Somebody told me one time that Pearl wrote a book, a little booklet, about her years living there and she had several copies of it made and apparently gave some to the libraries and stuff. But I've never seen the book.

RF: I never knew about it.

SV: Evidently her last name was Pepper? [sp?]

RF: Pepper was her maiden name.

SV: She wrote it under that name. Maybe just gave it to some relatives or something and, you know, not have a lot of copies of it made up. But....

RF: I never met any relatives of theirs all the time we lived here.

SV: What did Joe Shay do for a living?

RF: Nothing! [Laughter]

SV: Okay.

RF: No, I never. I don’t know whether Joe had money somewhere or she had money. But Joe, he was. Well, he had scarlet fever.

SV: Oh.

RF: So he couldn’t do nothing, you know. But, uh. Yeah, pretty near lost him there one time.

SV: That must have been the same years that everybody kind of...there was a few years where scarlet fever kind of went around.

RF: I don’t remember what years they were.

SV: I’m thinking it was the early ‘40s maybe?

RF: Maybe earlier than that. I’m not sure.
SV: That would’ve weakened him I’m sure.

RF: Yeah. He was real thin. She, I don’t think. I never seen Pearl even go to the mailbox.

SV: She didn’t venture out, huh?

RF: No, not at all.

SV: Your mailboxes were out on the road then? [Can’t hear]

RF: Yeah, uh-huh.

SV: Maybe she was home writing this book. This phantom book I can’t find. [Chuckles]

RF: I don’t know. I sure didn’t know about that.

SV: I’ll keep asking about it. Roxy Hollopeter was the one that told me.

RF: Roxy, he probably be one of ’em that know it.

SV: All, everything that he told me is true as far as I can figure out. He gave us a lot of information.

RF: Yeah, Roxy was around a long time.

SV: Yep. Now he logged, Hollopeters logged down at Swan Lake and up here. He worked and had some of those logging camps. There was so many of them though, I have a hard time keeping them straight too.

RF: Everyone had a mill back then.

SV: That would explain it.


SV: Fimbys. That’s where Henry Meyer’s at now. Isn’t it?

RF: Right. He’s on a portion of Fimby’s place.

SV: Who’s on the other? I mean, it’s all private.
RF: Well, it’s all broke down now so, uh. All sub-divided or whatever you want to call it. There’s two, four, about six, eight people live at that meadow now. 160 there now.

SV: Are they all living this side of Henry?

RF: No. Well, across from Henry. I s’pose this side would be, yes. It’d be this side of Henry but some is across the meadow and then, of course, the ones you can see along the highway.

SV: I see. Fimbys didn’t homestead that though, as near as I can find out.

RF: No, no. My dad owned that.

SV: But did he homestead then?

RF: No.

SV: Okay. I wonder if that was in P land that your dad got it from the railroad. Did he ever say?

RF: No, I don’t remember that. We had 160 acres there and he sold it to Fimby.

SV: Okay. Did Fimby come here with the idea of starting a mill, do you think? Do you ever remember anybody saying?

RF: I don’t know. Fimby had a mill most all the time I knew him, I guess.

SV: Yep, that’s what I heard from everybody is they just...

RF: It was him and his brother Wilk, from Swan Lake. William.

SV: William and Wilk?

RF: William was Wilk. That was just a nickname.

SV: Okay.

RF: Him and Ray, they ran the mills as long as I can remember.

SV: So they must have bought a lot of the timber that people were cutting around here in the ‘40s. [Can’t hear]

RF: Right, they did. A lot of private land.

SV: I don’t think the Forest Service started in until the later years. ‘50s and...
RF: I don’t remember when the Forest Service started.

SV: If you left in ’50 then that is in part of that void for you. We can find that out from the Forest Service.

RF: Yeah.

SV: Did you ever have to work in one of the mills?

RF: I worked in the one at the Wineglass. Up at the 33 Bar up there

SV: Yeah, yeah.

RF: It was Kessler’s Ranch, rather. It’s Kessler’s.

SV: Yeah.

RF: I worked in the band there for a while.

SV: In the band mill?

RF: It was the only band that was ever in the valley.

SV: I’ll be darned. How old were you then? Teenager?

RF: Uh, sixteen I s’pose.

SV: What was your job?

RF: On the green chain. [chuckles]

SV: Oh god! Everybody started on the green chain.

RF: Uh, yeah.

SV: Who were some of the people that you remember working there when you were there?

RF: Oh, let me see. Ted Zippo [sp?] was one.

RF: Ted Zippo he was the pond hog, we called him. He worked out on the pond. Uh. Gee whiz. Ted Zippo. Course my uncle Tuff Anderson, Bobby Anderson, he worked there.

SV: Bob was the other uncle.

RF: Yeah.

SV: Okay. But they didn’t live there?

RF: No.

SV: They stayed in their own places?

RF: Yeah. We lived in a bunkhouse up there. They had bunkhouses.

SV: They’d come home on the weekends?

RF: Yeah.

SV: What did the housing look like up there when you were there? I’m trying to figure out, there was older shacks or bunkhouse or something during the ‘40s. But at some point Ed Underwood and maybe Rueben Kauffman went up and they built a couple more, more modern houses.

RF: You mean at the mill?

SV: At the Wineglass, yeah.

RF: Yeah. You remember the little house that Patalong [sp?] lived in up here at Condon?

SV: Right.

RF: That was the bunkhouses when I was there.

SV: So those were the ones that were there?

RF: Lots of ‘em. There was all kinds of ‘em.

SV: Okay, okay.

RF: Then they had a big cookhouse. A big cookhouse and things, but all the sleeping areas were about that size.
SV: Did they have a stove in them? They must have.

RF: Yeah. Wood stove. One of my main jobs for a while there was they had a dump truck and I’d haul the trimmer blocks around and dump ‘em at the bunkhouses for the people. And they had dependants living there too.

SV: Say that again, primmer.

RF: Trimmer, trimmer, trimmer blocks. They come out of the mill on the green chain they’d saw in pieces about so big and they went into a big hopper and I back the dump truck underneath there and then kick the door open fill the dump truck up then take it around and dump it here and there around where the people needed wood.

SV: So what was a regular day like there for you?

RF: Oh you kept busy. [Chuckles]

SV: I would say.

RF: If I wasn’t driving the dump truck, I was on the green chain. Then I drove truck out to the, uh, taking lumber out to the dry, dry kill they called it out in one of the big fields out there. I did everything. Nick ton runs to Missoula for groceries and things like that. Penny Packer, he was one of the big wheels there then.

SV: Well, he was like a bookkeeper or something too at the same time.

RF: Yeah, he was…I can’t think of the guy’s name. All I can think of is Gray.

SV: Marshall?

RF: Marshall Gray. He was the main boss.

SV: His wife lived up here then too. Ann. Ann, I think it was?

RF: Yeah. They lived right up on the, right by the mill.

SV: I’m trying to think. Did you know, was Bob Martin working there when you were working there?

RF: I don’t remember that.
SV: Yeah. See he would have, he got out of the service and went to work there. So it could have been ‘48. I don’t know what the time span was where he got. He would have been the mechanic.

RF: I know a Bob Marten, but I don’t remember whether he’s, uh, was working there or not when I was there.

SV: Who else? Let’s see there was the pond and that was Ted. We had the band saw car. Who was the cook? Remember who was cooking?

RF: No, I don’t. [Chuckles] No, I don’t know.

SV: What time did you have to get up in the morning for breakfast?

RF: Oh, you got up around six I think.

SV: Did they feed you pretty good?

RF: Oh yes. You bet! Oh, Shorty Kessler, he was good to work for.

SV: Good.

RF: He fed his people and he treated ‘em well.

SV: Did you know Bud Wolf? Was he there then?

RF: Bud Wolf?

SV: Lena. They would have, they probably weren’t at the mill; they were caretaking the ranch and, you know, or the....

RF: I knew Bud Wolf, but I can’t remember whether he was. Don’t seem, seem like a man by the name of Harold Bandy [sp?].

SV: Yeah. He was there before Bud. So that’s the time period.


SV: Yep. What was the best part of working there?

RF: Gee, I don’t know. Just a job. Made a few dollars. [Laughter] That’s about all you was trying to do.
SV: Do remember what you made for wages?

RF: Gee, I, you know, I don’t. Probably a dollar, dollar and a half a day.

SV: What’d you spend your money on?

RF: [laughter] I don’t.

SV: Did you work at the Wineglass?

RF: Oh, I only worked there I think for one winter about six months, I guess.

SV: When other people I’ve talked to about the Wineglass, it just made such a big change that there was a place to go to work like that. That was that size.

RF: Right. And it was--it employed a lot of people.

SV: Yeah. Made a difference in everybody’s income and outlook too, it sounded like.

RF: Right.

SV: Course World War II was...

RF: Well, right.

SV: That probably helped everybody’s house.

RF: That probably helped out just as much or more probably.

SV: Well, you said you started helping your dad in the outfitting. I call it outfitting. You guys all called it packing.

RF: Well it was outfitters is what they was.

SV: Did you do that every summer and fall then?

RF: Right up till, uh, ’48, then I went to work for the Forest Service packing out of Big Prairie. Oh I started here at Condon, Swan Lake and Bigfork and then, uh, Nordan [?] the ranger, I knew and he asked me if I’d come to Big Prairie and take the main line over there. That was a long string, in other words they called it the main line out of Big Prairie and so I took that. In ’48 and ’49 and part of 5’0 I packed over there.

SV: Where did you go in that when you went in or did it vary?
RF: No. We went in through Spotted Bear.

SV: What about the river crossings?

RF: That was the main problem you had. We stayed on the east side of river all the way but the small streams was what we had to worry about.

SV: Yeah.

RF: Such as White River was one. The only river that we had to worry about, really. But we’d make it. We’d swim ‘em getting ‘em across there, but we made it. Just lucky.

SV: Start out at one point and--

RF: Start out way up river and then end up way down, way down but it was fast.

SV: That would scare me. You guys, I don’t know, did that scare you?

RF: Yeah, a little bit, yeah. Scared to lose the outfit. I wasn’t afraid of getting hurt myself, but losing the whole string, you know. Plus the dependants. They had alternate ranger’s wife and the ranger’s wife and their kids and everybody else went up the same time we did.

SV: Clear into Big Prairie?

RF: Clear to Big Prairie.

SV: Who were the rangers then?

RF: Well the last one up there was Glen Marriott [sp?].

SV: I’ve heard that name but haven’t heard too much about him.

RF: And Toad Pollen [sp?], he was the alternate ranger there.

SV: Toad?

RF: Toad. Don’t ask me what his first name was because that isn’t it, but everybody knew Toad Pollen.

SV: Okay. Who were some of the lookouts in there? Did you ever have to pack up to any of those lookouts?
RF: Oh yeah. We had, Jesus we had, isn’t that something when your memory just slipped and you can’t think of nothing. We had, one, two, I was trying to think of the names of ‘em.

SV: Jumbo, Kidd...

RF: Jumbo, Kidd, Mud Lake, Garnet...

SV: Did Cardinal, that’s just [can’t hear]

RF: Cardinal. No, that’s right. That’s one of ‘em. That was one of our best lookouts, Cardinal. That was about it, I guess. Point 56 I packed up there once. Then we packed it out there that same next year. [Laughter] Tore it down and packed it out.

SV: Boy, that was a split decision, huh?

RF: Yeah.

SV: Huh. On a little different subject. Do you remember Hemlock Lookout on this side?

RF: Yes I do, but I can’t place just where it was.

SV: Of course people know where it was now. But what they can’t remember is when it was built and when it was tore down.

RF: I don’t know.

SV: When you were packing for the Forest Service back there, what was the best part of the job for you?

RF: The best part? [Laughter]

SV: Yeah. There had to be of good part of it somewhere.

RF: Flying out on a weekend. [Laughter] No, I liked the job. It was good. We’d maybe go for, well, I’d pack from Big Prairie to Spotted Bear, what’s 40 miles. Round trip would take you four days. Then I used to pack out the hay and grain in from Holland. That was a four day trip also, in and out. Then packing out the lookouts and then the fire camps and all that stuff, it kept you busy. You could only work five days a week. You couldn’t work on weekends. [Chuckle]

SV: Different from working for your dad.

RF: Yeah. [chuckles]
SV: You think?

RF: But you didn’t have nothing to do on weekends over there. You just as well have been working. I’d generally work on my saddles and if a mule lost a shoe, shoe him or something, do something.

SV: Yeah.

RF: And go fishing. We used to go fishing quite a bit.

SV: Yeah. Did you eat a lot of fish or just....

RF: Oh yeah, yeah. Ate a lot of fish.

SV: I was wondering what the food was like back there.

RF: Oh, we had good food. They flew us in produce and beef all. We had steaks every time you’d want ‘em.

SV: When you say they flew ‘em in, was that the old Ford tri-motors?

RF: Ford tri-motor, yep.

SV: There’s some pictures around of those tri-motors.

RF: Slim Phillips was our pilot, used to come in. Slim Philips.

SV: People have told me that that was quite a ride though in those planes.

RF: Yeah, it was. It’d just rattle. I only flew in one of ‘em once, but boy there was a good aircraft though. They’d only use about half of the field to take off in.

SV: Wow!

RF: Lots of power and slow. Them smokejumpers liked them so well because they could slow ‘em up to about 50 miles an hour you know. Just like stepping out off of the chair, you know. Smokejumpers loved ‘em.

SV: So when you were doing fire camps some of ‘em were smoke jumpers, I suppose?

RF: Yeah, right.
SV: Did any of the fires, when you were packing to these fires, were any of ‘em very big back in the South Fork?

RF: Not big, not big. Generally was maybe five acres. That’s what I say the lookouts, we got people on ‘em so fast that they didn’t have time to get big.

SV: Did it ever get smoky? You know, like it got smoky this year.

RF: No.

SV: Not in that time period.

RF: Not while I was there. Just had more control.

SV: I have another question. One of those winters, and I can’t remember if it was ‘48 or ‘49, there was an awful lot of snow and there was maybe a winter kill of elk back in there along the river. Do you remember seeing that or hearing anything about that?

RF: I think I seen a little bit of that, but I didn’t see the big kill like it was supposed to have been. Course I wasn’t really looking for it either, you know.

SV: Right, right.

RF: But I sure never seen just normal kill of lions or just regular winter kills of old elk and stuff like that happened all the time.

SV: Did you see elk back there pretty often at Big Prairie?

RF: Yeah. They’d run right with my stock all the time in pasture.

[Laughter]

RF: Yeah, they was all over.

SV: Was there any south of Big Prairie in the Danaher? Did you cover any of that at all?

RF: We covered the whole Danaher.

SV: Did you remember any remnants of those homesteads that were in there?
RF: Uh, yes. Just the, you know, just the buildings. Whole pieces of buildings. There wasn’t much left.

SV: I s’pose.

RF: But you could see the same down on Murphy Flats. They had a few items of machinery that was all sitting down there too.

SV: I’ll be darned. See I hadn’t heard that about Murphy Flats. Joe Murphy must have had a camp in there.

RF: Yeah, well, they was gonna start a farm in there, you know, is what they was gonna do. But then they stopped that. But they had little ol’ kind of buildings kind of started.

SV: It’s hard to say whether there was more traffic or less in there, I guess, in some of those areas. But generally there’s more traffic now on the main trail.

RF: Oh, it’s surprising. The last time I was in was, let’s see ‘50, ‘56, ‘57, somewhere in there, I went through and over Pyramid and then went out Spotted Bear. I was with Dee Morton and working packing for Lee Rost out of Bigfork.

[Background noises]

RF: The traffic. You’d meet walkers, you’d meet riders, you’d meet pack strings, little gypso outfits [sp?] any way to get in there. When I was in there I used to go for days and never see anybody. Going clear to Spotted Bear and never see another pack string.

SV: You packed by yourself?

RF: Yeah.

SV: Like you said, other people went in when you first went in but then when you were actually ...

RF: When I was working for the Forest Service then, I was by myself all time.

SV: Did you ever have any troubles that you couldn’t get out of?

RF: Oh, no. No, never no problems.

SV: What was the worst day in there? Do you remember any bad days in there?
RF: Lightning storm one time, I got into one of those. I was packing from Holland Lake to Big Prairie. Had a load of grain, I guess, I had a ton of grain on and I’d left Shaw Creek and I knew I was getting into something and I got about five miles down the trail and lightning striking all around me and it was spooking my mules, my horses, so I just got off and untied ‘em. Tied up the rope, turned ‘em all loose and took my bell mare and I started down the trail. [chuckle] I got to Big Prairie and I had all my mules and all my packs still on ‘em. [Chuckle]

SV: They just came right on down where they were supposed to be.

RF: I had the bell mare, the old mare that the mules stayed with. There was no problem. They just followed. I went out on a long trot and just kept going. They was right with me. [Chuckle] But that was the only time I nearly got worried. Cause it was hitting like out toward the highway here and hit there and then over to the side of me. I knew I couldn’t keep my mules all tied together. Had to turn ‘em loose and let ‘em have a chance anyway.

SV: Was there, there were probably winds.

RF: Oh, there was a terrible wind. And raining so hard, raining so hard you couldn’t see. [Chuckle]

SV: At Shaw Creek camp has kind of a history of the grizzlies back there that some people had told me that there was reasons for that. That there had been some dead horses left in that area more than once.

RF: It’s a possibility.

SV: Were you ever there when there was bear trouble?

RF: No. I went in the spring to stock the cabin or something and so the shutters and stuff, doors would be tore off of the cabin. But never had any problems there.

SV: Well, that’s one of those stories that circulates pretty much.

RF: Yeah. There might have been a dead horse now and then. I don’t know. Cause we never used that trail as an outfitter, we used the Pendant way. When I started working for the Forest Service, then we used that trail all the time.

SV: When your dad went to go in by Pendant—I hope I’ve got my geography right—were there salt licks, as you got down to Big Salmon Lake, were there salt licks closer to the trail where some of those other creeks came in. Like maybe at Brownie, I’m thinking Brownie comes in.

RF: Yeah at Brownie Creek there was salt licks there. That was just past our camp just to the east of us, oh, two miles, something like that.

Rodney "Rod" Fox Interview, OH 422-057, 058, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
SV: So you were at this end of Big Salmon Lake?

RF: Yeah.

SV: Some those salt licks are kind of going dead now.

RF: They wasn’t very active the last time I was in there.

SV: Do you remember goats in that area?

RF: Down at Little Salmon.

SV: Oh, at Little Salmon.

RF: Now they had a salt lick there, a goat lick. And that was still active back well, when I went in the Service in ’50, it was still active then.

SV: I’m supposed to ask people this from the Historical Society is, uh, a few questions really. What was the happiest time of your life living here and what was the saddest time a... [can’t hear] But, uh, the Historical Society is very interested in why people settle where they do and we kind of talked a little bit probably about why your dad came here. But they’re also interested in why you stayed. You know you came back here and stayed and what made it worthwhile, that’d be the happiest times here.

RF: I’d rather not even answer that.

SV: Okay. [laughter] They’re kind of interested in what motivates people, you know. Did you, when you retired out of the military, did you just, did you come back here and keep working or...?

RF: No, I went, I bought a place in Kalispell and I had that place there so I went to work in the woods.

[End of Interview]