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Oral History Number: 422-006, 007
Interviewees: Reuben Kauffman and Sadie Miller Kauffman
Interviewer: Suzanne Vernon
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Note: Discussion on tape begins about Condon Forest Service ranger Clarence Stilwell. Transcriptionist added information in brackets for clarification.

Reuben Kauffman: I never even learned to really know him then. We were just here from the middle of August and then that winter. I had no reason to do anything at the Forest Service at that time. He was transferred out the next spring. [1946-1947]

Suzanne Vernon: So he was just here that first winter.

RK: I don't know how long he was here before that. He may have been several years here. Although it couldn't have been only a couple of years, when her sister-in-law and her husband moved here in '39. We moved in '47. They came in May of '39. Joe and Mabel [Miller]. Henry Pfau (?) was ranger part of that time. I'm not sure how much of Stilwell's time they had known. 'Cause Mrs. Stilwell was a native of here [Mabel Lundberg]. She had lost her first husband... [Jens Monrad]

SV: I think she has submitted some of that stuff.

RK: Her first husband was Monrad. She was a Lundberg, sister to Warner. [homestead family]

SV: How did you guys get to come down here, what was the attraction?

RK: Well, you see, you go back to war time. I was drafted in spring of '44. I was sent to, see I was a C.O., [Conscientious Objector - Mennonite], and I was sent to Civilian Public Service camp in Southern Idaho, down in Idaho. I was married and had a family, two children. From our group up there, the Mennonite group, I was one of the first two sent. My brother and I. And we went to Downy, Idaho, south of Pocatello about 25 or 40 miles, something like that. I was there then for seven months. April to November. Then I transferred from that camp to one at Terry, Montana. There was a camp there. We, at the church up there, I was one of the first two that was sent. They didn't send anybody until '44. But see they already had the camp at Delton (?). See that was Civilian Public Service, then, too. For the Park. They, the Draft Board, I knew two of them pretty well, they didn't agree with our stand. But rather than have us in a place like that, they didn't approve of what was going on, that is, the work, well there wasn't much work, but the Park needed help in the summertime. So there was a camp of 200 men up there that during the winter, all they done was cut wood. But summertime they were busy. There were lookout men, trail crews I don't know what all. But two of the draft board -- we were in the sawmill
business at the time, or had been. We burned out in February of '44. The sawmill burned. They
didn't agree with our stand as far as that goes. But they thought we done more good being at
home than being in that kind of a camp. So they did not send any of us, 'cause there was I don't
know how many boys on the register. Ten or twelve. They just didn't send anybody until the
public. Other people, boys were going and then not coming home. This put the pressure on the
Draft Board for not sending us. That's one of the main reasons for not sending us.

But anyhow, see I spent then, a year, in Terry, at a camp there. The other two boys, it was three
of my brothers then. But Norm and Dave, went, when I went to Terry in November '44. Then in
early spring, I'm not just sure, March? April? another one of the boys had been sent. There was
four of us. But Dave and Norm went with the smokejumping. They were in the smokejumper
unit for a year.

I got out of camp, course we had no sawmill then. Dad and the boys had this sawmill, and t was
burnt. Machinery to replace the sawmill was out of reason, unless you had a pocket full of
money. Some of us, in the fall, went hauling logs. We kept up a little of the fuel business. We
were furnishing sawdust and cordwood into Kalispell for a number of outfits. So then after I
come back from camp, we had no sawmill, some of the boys wanted to do something else. And
still, three of them were still in CPS, hadn't come home, so I worked up there, I done a little
carpenter work. I worked in the sawmill there.

But this place here was homesteaded by one of our neighbors in the Flathead. Old man Hull.
Had homesteaded this. We had the sawmill and he had been after us for several years to buy
this. 'cause we had a sawmill you know. But in them days a sawmill was Pretty near worthless.
Not exactly worthless in this country. No outlet. No road. No road to get stuff out much. And of
course the market wasn't like it had boomed then after the war. After the war when things
really got going again. But I worked up there this and that and the other thing, we still had
some fuel. But we had the house up there. That house there on Dad's place. But I worked, well
day labor, this and that, and then that spring, I worked for a little sawmill there right by the
home, but I quit that job then the middle of August and moved down here. The old fella had
been after us to buy this place. Course my bother-in-law, Joe Miller, they lived on here to start
with.

We just rented it. At that time it was just rented. We paid the taxes for the rent. The taxes, the
first year that I paid taxes, I think -- twenty bucks. There was no buildings to amount to
anything. The buildings that were here when I moved here are all gone but the barn. See, the
big log barn down there. When my brother-in-law moved here, that didn't even have a top on
it. But the old fella paid us for the materials and stuff and we come down and helped Joe put
that top on.

Joe had been here, well let's see. Joe lived here for, one, two, three...three years. The old fella
thought he had a buyer for the place. Joe moved out, and they moved over where Blanks are
now. They moved on that place. They just went over and lived there, didn't even rent it or

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anything, 'cause couldn't get ahold of...we were interested in buying it but couldn't get ahold of the gal that owned it. They lived there then, one winter, two winter, two winters.

And then the Sorenson place, but Joe had this...the Sorenson place is where the llama farm is [a dentist bought it and created a llama farm there in the late 1990s] and the Meskie place, probably better know as the old Meskie place [spelling?]. This section here, the one that I've got, and the one quarter section north of me, and the one east of me, were homestead by three fellas from the Flathead that were neighbors up there. Se those three were neighbors up there. In fact, Smiths and Sorenson, were brothers-in-law. But Sorenson's wife was already dead before they moved down here. Had no family. But Smiths had some family. I don't know how much. But...they were just let go and taxes eventually caught up with some of it. But Joe in the meantime thought he'd like to have the Hoogbruin [spelling? It's a homesteader name] place. And it could be bought. So Dad told the old fella that homesteaded this, old Hull, "You buy that quarter section and then we'll buy both of them, we'll buy the two of them in one." So that's how...I took this one over here. Joe eventually paid off that one. The one where [Falls Creek Ranch is now]...two places cornered. After old Sorenson died, well Meskie bought that off of, I don't know who, there was no family. He had friends, somebody that got it. I don't know who. I don't know who Meskie bought it from even. But this place, then, when we moved here, Normando was living here, and whether he had it rented or what, I don't know, 'cause we never could get ahold of the gal. But when Blaine got it the spring before we moved here, that place was sold for taxes. He bought it for taxes. $475. Got a whole quarter section.

SV: When you moved down here in '47 did you come with a sawmill then?

RK: No. I come with a team of colts, two three-year-olds, half broke. I think about that a lot of times. Makin' hay. That team of horses, a four-foot mower. I borrowed the neighbor's eight-foot rake. Pitch fork and a hay wagon. That was it.

Sadie Kauffman: Did you say Normandos had lived up here?

RK: They didn't when we came. They were living here yet when we come, that first winter. Then they moved out. He had stomach problems. There was no, you really couldn't come and expect to pick up a job 'cause there was no industry. There was nothing.

There was just two little sawmills that I know of. Haasches had one, I believe. And Vic Wise had one. A little one, back of the ranger station, back of where Ashes live now. When we moved in here, during the war, Vicks [a family by the last name of Vick] had been out of here and then when they moved back he bought Oscar Southern's homestead, and they lived in the cabin that Oscar had built there. Now who's got that cabin now, I don't know. I did know, when Vicks had it. They lived in that a little while, and then he built another house and sold that...'cause it was one of those homesteads that was a quarter of a mile wide and a mile long, see. And 'cause Vick, they were living in that log house when we moved there. Oscar had sold it. He had bought, I think off of railroad, right west of Strom's there [Strom's store, possibly, now the Swan Valley
Centre. [The railroad -- i.e. Northern Pacific -- was granted every other section of land in the Swan Valley by the federal government. It is also referred to as Plum Creek timber land, or Burlington Northern timber land in other interviews.] Where Strom had the mill later on. Where Uno had the mill, was where Oscar was living when he moved in here.

SV: How did you make a living that first winter, how did you get by?

RK: We milked cows. Three or four, whatever.

SK: At one time we had six.

RK: Joe had fixed up, Joe had milked twelve or fourteen here for awhile. When he had the barn fixed, had a place to put the cows in. So we milked the cows and separated the milk. Shipped the cream. Creamery in Missoula paid the freight. We took it out to the mail, the milk hauler got it to Missoula for us. It never cost us anything to ship it. The creamery paid the shipping costs. Of course then, I picked up...that first winter, that fall, at the same time that we moved in here, Conkling had bought that forty acres over there and was clearing out to build the first set of buildings. [Mission Mountains Mercantile today]

170. And it never materialized what he had in mind then. I went over there and I went to work. We put in that big basement. Of course now most of the people don't ever know there was a basement there, a full basement. Between the store and the other buildings, there was a basement. It was, I think it was 30 feet wide and 50 long. It was figured to be a lodge. That's what was started, but it never turned out. But I worked over there at that till we had that basement poured. Then we, Matt Harmon was working over there, too. Then we built the house, which is part of the building now, it's just a part of it, it was 16 by 24 building.

SV: Where did you get the lumber?

RK: He got the lumber from, well I don't know. He may have hauled some of it in. Finish lumber. But the little mills like Vic Wise had and the Haasches had. And I don't really know where Russ got all of his lumber, either. But that's what we, or I, did that first winter.

SV: Was there electricity here yet? Did you wire it for power?

RK: No, no. You see, in fact, into here to this house, we had no road here. There was no road here. No. We came in, and I like to show people nowadays, where the road used to be out here. Beside the highway. From out here where just south of where we come onto the highway, where Ted Graf lives [south of Kauffman Road at Highway 83]. You came in that long stretch, then right there by Ted's you went over into the timber and down until you got down off of the hill. You can still see the hill. Then it went out in the timber again and didn't come out to the road until right there by Conklin's—right there by the store. It was over in there, this where they all logged, that's where the road was then. Well, we got the county to build this road.
When I was down here in the spring of '47 Joe and I got a petition up, going around, and we had taxpayers at this end of the district. We petitioned the county for a road. At that time, where the road goes around by from out there by Ted's the road that goes east, it goes east there, that's where the county was maintaining that. WPA had cleaned a lot of this right-of-way, but there was never a road made. But it was cut with WPA labor.

So Missoula County took advantage of some of that. Where it was close by, they would include the road. Missoula County, when we first moved in here, that was a better way out. Going north was nothing but that trail through the brush. But we came in here, we used to come up the highway there by Ted, we went right on east just a little bit and then turned and come in through the timber. Come right in, the road then came right in past our buildings here and down, down past the barn over to the Smith place. To get over to there you went through where our barnyard is here now. And out over past where Nathan lives now. That was the way to these two places. The Hoogbruin place you could get from one to the other and that was about it.

The old homestead road came in from over by the ranger station and come in through by Smith Creek and where over in past where the schoolhouse is, and went around and came in through over here, on the east side, come across the corner of the Hoogbruin place and then on down through the timber. It didn't come back out to where the road is now until clear out there by Strom's. Pretty near down to the store. It went way different. On this side here, they went that old road that goes in there by where Freyholitz lives and goes south and through past where the old ranger station. Come out down there, the two of them come out down there where the road is now. And I never remember using that one, or this one, either one. The county had did this up here. The old road by Ted's, it went down past the homesteads that were, well the Drury place, which is where all the subdivision is now [Charles Road]. And the Crone place was where the [Photographer's] Formulary is now. But you see them places have been split up. That was a square corner. The highway cut off a corner like this. I guess the old fella still owns that three cornered patch. Hollopeters had bought off of the railroad where the post yard and all that stuff is. John Hollopeter had bought a quarter section off railroad at that time.

Up until, the last piece of land that was bought off the railroad was the forty acres where the store is now. Conkling somehow managed to buy that. But up until the early thirties the railroad would sell this land in here. They had a price set on it, too. You could buy it. But a lot of the, the old Anderson place down there, Hollopeters over here, and there was some people bought whole sections. 'cause down by where Fenbys had the mill, Vernofsky [spelling?] had bought a whole section there. It had been burnt. Them guys could buy a quarter section for...I think they paid four dollars an acre for that. And they give them, I forget how many years, to pay that amount.

SV: Was most of it timbered?
RK: Well, it had been fire, years before, down by, across from, well it wouldn’t be Goat Creek, it’s this side of Goat Creek. Fire on the west side. Killed a lot of the timber.

SV: Was this place [where you live] timbered?

RK: Yeah, this place had quite a lot of timber on it. Course it had a lot of meadows, that’s why it could be homesteaded. Could be improved.

SV: Were these natural meadows?

RK: Yes. I don’t know how much of this place...See, when I moved in here this right by the house here was all willows out here. Now it’s about gone. Course I logged the place, too.

SV: When?

RK: We logged in the fall of ’50. I let Jocelyn [spelling?] move a mill in here. We had a the sawmill here two or three years. In the meantime, when we moved down in ’47 we got after the county. The Wineglass had just started, and of course they were looking for timber. Joe and Ricketts had this place then.

They had cut a few logs for them. But they had no way out of here. You couldn't haul. We kept after the county and the Wineglass, the mill kept after the county and everybody. That fall, ’47, late, well not real late. They sent the County Surveyor up here ‘cause we offered to cut...well I had that winter, I had been down that spring trapping beaver, I had cut it from here out where I thought the line was. Out to the railroad land. I had cut that out.

County Commissioners, there was turmoil in the county offices at that time. They sent the surveyor up here. County Surveyor said, go up and show them guys where to put the road but don't buy any right-of-way. But show them where to go. So, we did. I took them here and showed them where I had cut out here. And went out across the meadows, and stuff. I hiked out through the timber. When I hit them, you can see since I logged it, you can see them two little hills there. I had just missed one, and the other one's right in front. So I told the surveyor, "The right-of-way cut off that's already cut has got to be right here close." So then I went right straight out. Well, then that winter, the surveyor took and said you guys put in a petition. They'll have to do something because you have a petition. So lo and behold long about February, something like that, here the county road crew come and they come in through the timber on our road part way and then through the timber where there was an old hay road to where we had this. They made a fill right at this north end of the straight stretch out here. Where it comes from the highway. They put a little fill in there, you can tell if you look. Then they come on around the hill, pushed the brush off, and put that fill that’s right across the meadow there. If you look close you can tell that there’s a barrow pit right on that side. Then they walked the shovel and stuff right over here. I had this cleaned out of course. They walked clear in here and made this big barrow here and made this fill clear across over to the other
end. That's where if you know what's going to happen later on, we'd have never got this road stopped here. We'd a made them maintain it clear on over there. County road just to here. But the surveyor told me, "I bet I know what they told you. They told you we spend more money up there now than you guys pay taxes." And yeah, they did. But he said, "If the county builds a road, it's not just for you. It's a county road. It's for everybody." The commissioners at that time, he said, "They'll spend a thousand bucks down here and—

[End of Tape 1, Side A]
RK: [discussion of problems at the county level, county money used for personal gain]
Eventually one of them county commissioners spent time in Deer Lodge over stuff. I know stuff that happened later on, they bought stuff and used it themselves. Well, then the Wineglass wanted to get these few logs out of here.

SV: What kind of trees?

RK: Pine. Used to be that hill right over here, had a bunch. I don’t know how much Joe cut over there. They didn’t cut very many ‘cause there was no way out. But they made this fill. The Wineglass furnished the plank for the bridge across the creek. I furnished the stringers and stuff, let them cut them off my place here. That’s how we got the bridge across. That was the bridge until the bridge began to give out, then the county put in that big culvert. They should have put in a bigger one.

SV: When they logged here then, did they have chainsaws, heavy equipment?

RK: Chainsaws were just clear new. I bought the first one-man chainsaw in Missoula, I think. But I dealt with him, and he had the lumber sold. All of my pine. All of the yellow pine went to White Pine Sash. And, as lumber. The fir and larch went to, I think it was called Elkhorn Lumber. Where Southgate Mall is now. Same Location.

SV: So you didn't sell to the Wineglass at that time?

RK: No. We didn't sell [them] any at all. They didn't want to pay us enough for it. They offered us three dollars a thousand. that is, for stumpage. Three dollars for fir and larch and five for the pine. Well, I made a deal with Jocelyn. I done the logging and put the logs on the deck.

I got twenty and thirty for my logs. I had to buy a little Cat [caterpillar, heavy equipment, machinery]. I bought a little Cat off of Jocelyn. So then he made arrangements that the place where the lumber went to paid me instead of going through Jocelyn. I don’t know what they were getting for the lumber. The mill was here that winter of '50 and '51, '51 and '52. I guess it was sometime in '53, early '53 that they moved the mill out. But like I say about the road, after the county had made all these fills, but there was still no road to it. Tom and I slashed the right-of-way where there was timber. Then the Wineglass sent a bulldozer up here and bulldozed through and made some cuts through here. So they got their few logs out and everything. We had a tough road there. That winter of '50. They had come in a bulldozed it. The winter of '49 and '50, no. no. Yeah, '50. Dad and I worked up home for my brothers. Went home once every three weeks. Had to go home around by Missoula to get to Kalispell.

SV: Where did you get groceries and supplies?
RK: Stroms had a little store. They had started a little store down here. Then of course you always bought groceries when you were out.

SV: You had cows in here then. Did they do pretty good on this native grass?

RK: We hayed the meadows.

SV: Did you ever seed any hay anywhere:

RK: Part of it, a little of it. I put on Timothy, and canary grass. Now it’s naturally taking over, which is all right. But I’ve only ever broke up, hmmm, eight or ten acres that I really farmed. I enlarged the meadow a little bit. The rest of it is natural meadow.

SV: And the cows did okay on that grass?

RK: Oh yeah, we got by with it. Course then, later on, when we quit milking, I always milked a cow for our own milk. For quite awhile. I went to work in, hmm, there was more work to be had. But I helped over there, well, until Conkling's sold the store. I had helped build all the buildings.

SV: Were they all frame buildings?

RK: Yeah. We had just got the basement done but he never got logs to rebuild that. I don’t know [why]. The basement set there for, several years. One winter like this it got ice all around it and froze. Just had a subfloor on it. Cracked all around. But it was quite a job. That basement was only about four feet deep because of water. We had put drains under that whole basement floor.

SV: Tell me about building this house.

RK: Well at that time, I could have built of logs. You see, when I had the sawmill here, I kept...I had them saw up about 40,000 feet of lumber. Some of it of course got used up rough. Other of it I hauled to Gray's [sawmill near Lake Inez, north of Seeley Lake] and had it milled. But I hauled most of it out to Broder's at Creston and hauled it back.

But we lived in the old house. What was here when we moved here was a 14 by 18 lot cabin set right north of this house. About four feet from the fence this way. That’s what we moved into. A one-room, well it had a partition in it -- I took the partition out. and it had a little porch on. That spring when I was down here in '47, I tore that porch off and built a new one of rough stuff. The roof and stuff was bad on the other. Later on I closed in a 12 by 16 addition to the porch. We used that for washing machine and stuff was out there. The first fall when we moved in here we set up a 16 by 16 Army tent. We slept in that till it got too cold. Then we just moved into the 12 by 16. I had started, I built another 14 by 18, well, the building is out there, of rough...
stuff, beside it. And made a passageway between the two. We had that for bedrooms. I built it for a chicken house. Never had chickens in it. I started this basement, hmmm, poured it in, I guess spring of '58. We lived in that other for a long while. I often think if someone had told me it was gonna take me that long to get a different house to live in he'd a been crazy. But then you gotta make a livin' too, besides.

Well, I worked some log cabin stuff. Helped build the first log cabins over there at Conk's. I worked quite awhile for Conk's. I don't know what year Art Anderson and I built that store. The fist one. 16 by 24. But, I think it must have been in the spring of about '58. No, it would have been '57, I had Seaman dig the basement. It's an open basement. He was in here, had just moved in here. We got electricity in '56. He had done a lot of the hole digging for the poles. That's when, let's see, we had built the store, in '56 was when built that first big locker plant over there. 'cause electricity was coming so he had put in this locker plant over there.

We poured the basement here in '58, I remember. The boys were here, people all come down from up home. I had my sand and gravel and everything ready. They came down and helped me. We poured that in '58. I managed to get there, I was working at Pyramid then. But '57, about a week or two weeks before Christmas, I went to work at Pyramid as a carpenter. They were putting in the first planer. I helped set up the first planing mill up there. Then I worked there steady until September, the last of August in '58. Then I quit so I could get my basement in. I never went back to Pyramid. I got the subfloor on, covered it over with plastic that winter.

The next spring then I bought a radial arm saw. I worked for my brother up there at Creston. Put that back porch on. Then he come down and helped me frame this. Him and I we framed this thing, the two stories, a story and a half, but no roof, in two days. The two of us. I had all my lumber here. We moved into the house then to live in May of '63. Wasn't done. The kitchen was done. She wanted to move in quicker. I didn't want to be trying to work in a kitchen when we're living in it. But the living room wasn't finished, the bedroom wasn't finished. We slept upstairs for awhile. I had the roof and everything on.

SV: Did you drill a well, or dig a well?

RK: No. I had Bob [Seaman?] dig a trench from the creek in agin the hill and then made a big, cistern, water storage that way. Filtered in from the creek. The homestead papers they all give this stuff, when they proved up on this stuff, that was the source of water for all these homesteads. I don't know how long, they finally said you have to get water rights. I filed a water right. There hadn't been here. The Meskie place had a water right. Ol' Sorenson had filed. But that was the only one. This one had no water right. I got a water right that I filled out two papers, one for domestic use and one for cattle. Then when I went in they said I didn't need the one for cattle. Because cattle are just water out there anyway. I filed that one. There's an unwritten, nobody above me can shut the water clear off that I don't have domestic water. This is a thing that's always been. I can't shut anybody down the stream, and nobody get any more. I can't do that. That's noted right in some of those papers.
You see this place, my deed only shows from the government, the patent on my place here was
given in 1922, was when the homesteader got his, then it shows from Hull to Dad, and then
from Dad to me. That's the extent of our abstract. Ain't very much to it. Friends, he was a
lawyer in Kalispell for awhile, he had a deed from a place in Florida. It was about this thick.
Went back to Spanish. [discussion]

SV: I notice you have the wood cookstove, and probably have the wood stove for heating—

RK: Oh yeah. I built my own furnace.

SV: So you've used firewood all this time.

RK: I've got forced air. We had electricity by the time we moved in here. I put in forced air right
away. But the house, we kept on then, until I got it, well that first roof was tarpaper. Went one
winter with just tarpaper on. Then I managed to get shingles and stuff, and the siding, same
deal. Out of Missoula. We kept on little by little. Still a few things that ain't done. Who cares?

To finish the fireplace, I was just going to just do downstairs. Then a cousin I was working with,
they get so big and so heavy, just build it up out of blocks. So I did. By that time I had decided
I'd make a fireplace down there, too, while I'm at it. This fireplace, for years, was just up to here
on the outside. I finished it just before our 40th wedding anniversary when I finished the
chimney on the outside. That would have been in 1980.

SK: One time a duck come down the chimney.

RK: I'd run the farm and work when I could. I'd haul stones in to do that. It takes lots of stone to
pick.

SV: Did you have cows out here the whole time?

RK: Oh yeah. Nathan, between him and I we have eight head.

SV: Any trouble with predators?

RK: No. We never had had. I have always...coyotes with little calves. We've always had a lot of
coyotes around. I've been out there with little calves and coyotes and everything all out there
together. Never have lot one that we know of.

One spring, that would have been in '58, when I was working at the mill, we had a cow that had
a calf. But we never seen anything of it. Whether it was stillborn or whatever, we never could
find anything of it. That summer, then I was working at the mill. We had a couple of days off for
some reason or other. The boys were hunting cows, they were getting tired, like kids will, you

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know. Anyhow, I said, I'll go hunt cows tonight. You guys don't have to. So I went out through the pasture and got the cows. But I did see a little bear track. A black bear track. So the next night I took the rifle along. In the process of hunting cows, just when I found the cows I could smell something dead. I thought well I'll find what happened to this calf. Well, when I got up to where I could see it, the wind was coming from the west and I was coming from the opposite way. When I got where I could look down, I see a cow leg wave. I wondered what's going on. I stopped, and just stood. I was just back of a stump. I was from here out to the shop, about 75 feet, and here was a black bear, setting on his rear, eating on this cow. I didn't know I had a dead cow. I looked. I just had the .257 rifle, a small one. Should I shoot him? I waited until he turned his head. I don't think he seen me. I was standing by a stump, coming up from the way...in the wind. When he turned sideways, I shot. All that happened when I pulled the trigger, his head just went down on the cow like that. He was setting right on his rear, his front feet down beside him like a bear will set. But all that happened, his head just dropped down. I thought what in the world? He didn't move he just set there. I watched and watched and watched. Finally I went out in the timber where I could see clearer. By that time, his head had slid off the carcass and there he set with his head right on his chest like this. I finally went up and pushed him over. I was a long time doing it. When I skinned him of course I found out why. I'd hit the whole brain cavity, spinal cord and everything. But other than that, I'd see, well, that bear.

And the next spring I shot one here in the meadow. Well, that cow died. That was in May. In August, we had a cow that got out. She died off of the place. We thought maybe she'd got hit on the highway. Nothing to do about that.

In October we lost another cow right here on the place. So I told the boys, if this is something that is going from one to another or whatever, we burned her up, burned her clean. Then, the next spring, in '59, I shot the bear, I seen him go across the meadow here. I took the rifle gonna beat him out around, gonna head him off. Didn't head him off, and come back around by the hayshed and here I had another dead critter again.

So this was going about three, four months. That was a young one. The others had been old cows. But the young one, I was afraid of Black Leg. Or something like that. So then I went after the, at that time, we had two, we had a state vet stationed in Missoula and A County vet. When I went in and talked with them, they said, we don't know that you've got any. Now the Blackfoot, over at Ovando, they've got the Red Water. It's been there. Whether it's up your way or not, we don't know. But he said, the best thing to do is vaccinate for Red Water and if that don't stop it then we have to look for something else. We lost a couple since that. But you gotta vaccinate about every six months to keep ahead of it. It's something you can't get rid of, it's in the ground. All you can do is vaccinate. And a time or two, I think that time, run them in one fall, the yearlings to ship, to take them to town, we noticed one passed red water, color. The next morning she was darn near dead. But it's nothing. They don't get sick. They just fall over dead. Nothing to indicate that there is something wrong. They just die.
But far as the bear is concerned I shot them, too. The first spring we were here, I stepped out of the old cabin here, there was one down across the creek here. I shot at him and he took off across the timber and brush and who knows what. I thought well I didn't get him, didn't track him 'cause it was in May. About oh about four or five, six years later, we found a bear skull out in the pasture. I probably had hit him, but we couldn't find him. But one of the first springs that we were here, I went out to milk in the morning, it was in the spring, mud. There wasn't any snow anymore. But down by the barn the mud was a little softer. Here was a grizzly track. Seven inches across from the ball of his foot. So I tracked it back up. If I had known what to look for, here where your pickup is, why you could see the claw marks. He had come in from this way here and down through. That's all we ever seen of him.

And it was in the spring when that one killed the calf. That bear came in from this way. Well, what we had, that calf that we lost, that heavy snow that winter. We lost pretty near half of our calves because of the pine needles and stuff, the stuff that blows down and the cattle got it.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]
[Tape 2, Side A]

[Discussion about the recent grizzly that killed a bucket calf that they had raised in the basement, and the barn, and then in a pen in the yard.]

RK. Made a pen where the pickup had set [in the parking shed in front of the house, by the driveway]. I had put here [the calf] in there with lots of straw. The pen was 10 by 14 feet, whatever. If it turned cool we could build a fire out there in the shop. Then it went to, oh, the grass was green and it was nice, so we kept feeding it. Then we let it out, especially in the nighttime. It had been outside, oh, for two or three weeks. Let it out in the daytime and put it in at night. It was eating grass and stuff. It was warm and everything. Shed get out to feed and come right to the gate. First thing in the morning. Right there at the gate. [One morning] the calf didn’t come and she [Sadie] hollered. Then she happened to see it laying right out there just east of the lightpole. More you think about it that was half way dangerous because you didn’t know maybe that ol’ bear was maybe down over the hill.

SK: I thought maybe a mountain lion.

RK: She went out there and hollered back at me, "Something killed our calf." We went out there and got to looking around. It was typically a bear. It had eaten the ribs out of one side, eat all the goodies out of the inside. The stomach was laying off to the side. Off, alone. I went looking for tracks of course, and out here, this road right here, there was bear tracks. It was a grizzly. That was on Saturday morning. I called Nathan and he came over right away. Thought, well, we gotta do something. We call Fish and Game right away, Kalispell. They said, no it's Saturday there's nobody in the office. Yo gotta call the Sheriff's outfit. Well, the Sheriff for us ain't in Kalispell. He's in Missoula. Well, that was no good. So finally we didn't know who to call. So we called 911. Through that, the game warden at Seeley, well he's there yet. Young fella, [Bill Koppen] but he was new in here and I still think he was just a little bit leery because we’re not in their district. But he brought a trap up. We set it. We made one mistake, but I didn't tell them guys what to do you know. He set that trap and baited it with pork chops. I think the cats got most of them. Found them scattered around. He put a few in the trap.

The next evening we were setting here playing a game or whatever. She looked out there and said, "That bear’s out there." Right by the garage.

Sunday morning Nathan happened to think that maybe [Rod] Ash would know who to get ahold of. He’s in this kind of stuff. So he called Rod and Rod said get ahold of [Tim] Manley [with Kalispell Fish, Wildlife & Parks]. So Manley came down right away. He brought another trap. But the bear, that second night she come in, after she'd killed the calf, the next night when she come back, she picked up the calf and took it down over the hill in the timber. I quick run and got the field glasses to watch her because it was dusk already a little bit. By the time I got them, she’d come back already and picked up the stomach and took it down over. But she didn't bother the trap.
Well, Manley come then. He had a trap. The first time he come, he didn't have nobody with him. Maybe he did. They set the trap. Set some snares down where the calf was, down over the hill. Set his trap, they had baited it with deer. But where we made the mistake that first night, we should have either taken the calf clear away, so it wasn't there or put it in the trap. One of the two. If we had took it clear away, she'd have been more interested in the trap, too. But this way she wasn't. She wasn't interested in them pork chops. But Manley set his trap, he had set a couple of snares over the hill. But when Manley got here, when Nathan first talked to him, he said he didn't know anything about any bears around here. By the time he got here he knew what it was. They had brought her in here in the fall, up Lost Creek. She was a tagged bear. He knew then what was up. He was sure of that. He told us. But on Sunday night then, he set his trap and everything. We watched. Here again the next night here she come, walking in here just like before, nose up, you know. She'd walk around that trap. Whether she'd been down to the calf that evening again, 'cause I  think she came right in here. We seen her come right in through here. Anyhow, she walked around that trap about three, four times. Rose up. She went into it. The door clanged shut. I called Manley and said, we got our bears.

"Oh she can stay in the trap overnight," he said. "I'll come down in the morning. That won't hurt her."

So the next morning Nathan went to work at 6 o'clock. "Dad that bear just got out. I just seen it go up over the hill over there." So I called Manley and told him, the bear got out.

He said, "I'll be right down." Then he had Ted North with him, the government trapper from St. Ignatius. So they set more stuff but the bear never came back again. But what happened, he didn't examine his trap close enough. And the one from Seeley was more foolproof trap than the one that Manley had. That channel where the door slides in, on both sides is a heavy piece of iron that fit in this channel that you had to take out here so the door would go past. Then when the door came down, these automatically drop into that channel so they couldn't be shoved up. Manley had a newer one. Aluminum frame and stuff. It had a spring-loaded pin that was supposed to, when the door...to keep the door from going up but it was broken.

Manley felt bad. I felt bad for him. 'cause he had missed finding that flaw with the trap. They brought another trap down but she never come back. But they tracked around here and they set more snares. They prefer catching them in a snare rather than a trap. I don't know why. The way they set them snares they get their foot in and of course they just keep pulling and it keeps them tethered. Well, Koppen, it was really out of his territory. After she got out, they had her collared and they could tell nearly where she was at. They could hear her. They, when Ted come, he was working for a different part of the government. He couldn't set snares, too without getting permission from higher up. They used the telephone here to get permission from higher up. Then when they was going to shoot it. Manley had told me right away well she had been in trouble before. She'd either go to a zoo or we'd do away with her.
So then, the third day, on a Tuesday, they come again, him and Ted both. Nothing in snares, nothing in the trap, so they tracker her. So they got, flew them in a plane. Course they could track where she was at. Seen her right over here on Smith Creek, up quite a ways. But then they couldn't go right away and shoot that bear. They had to get permission from higher up. Can we shoot the bear? By the time they'd done that she'd moved another mile and a half up the hill, into timber and brush. They went up with the dogs, but she wouldn't hold with the dogs. Couldn't get close enough with the dogs.

They said they'd keep watching her. So he come back twice and tracked her. She wa way off, clear up the head of Cooney Creek. Nobody heard anything more about the bear until she appeared down by the schoolhouse that fall, see. They didn't let the kids out to play, even for a day or two. But in the meantime somebody had put an arrow into her. [discussion] After they shot the bear they found it. Don't know if it was done on purpose—

SK: Nathan lose a calf, too.

RK: Mountain lion. [discussion] We had seen lions around, two right here by the barn one day. Seen them down by the meadow. Nathan went out one day and there was one right here on the bridge. We knew they were around. He happened to see from his place, magpies flew off from under...and found this calf. But this one here, we did get paid for this one.

SV: That first spring you came up here you said you were trapping beaver. Did you see a lot of grizzly sign?

RK: No. Only that one track we ever seen. Not too sure if that was first spring or second spring. The beaver here had dammed up everything for me. Quick as I took over the place, I got a permit. We moved in August but I had come down in March already. I come down when there was snow yet. I drove the team. Hauled the team to Soup Creek and then unloaded them. The sleigh. Come on up to Goat Creek that night. Spent the night with old Billings there, the old cook shack they had there for the CCC camp. I was here, stayed with Mabel. Joe was out working, but Mable and [can't transcribe] were here. I stayed with them and trapped beaver. They had given me a permit that time for five beaver. I trapped the five beaver. And after I moved down here, the second spring, the beaver were still giving me a bad time. So I applied again. They gave me a permit for six. I caught, only had one big one. I trapped the beaver out. Haven't had any trouble since. I still got the hides downstairs. Tanned them myself.

SV: Color?

RK: They were dark. But beaver hides at that time weren't worth much. They had been, before. I think the last six, I got what, fifty dollars for. They had been getting for a beaver hide, a hundred, a hundred and fifty bucks apiece. I haven't had any trouble with them since. Course I kept blowing the dams out and stuff like that. You can't run beaver off by tearing out the dam. You tear it out today and tonight they'll build it back. They flooded it here. They had it flooded
here until they were going clear out to that point out there. Well, they had enough water they could have it all through there. The water was so shallow, it was hard to drown a beaver. A beaver you trap him, weight the trap, ‘cause he can't live without air. I grabbed the rifle and went out there [saw a beaver] had a front foot in a trap. So when I got out there, it’s that beaver. I’d gotten both front feet. So I come back in, I didn't take the big rifle. I believe it was four beaver I caught, not six.

188. But as far as the bears, I’ve often said, a lot of people worry about the bears getting the kids and stuff.

The county keeps us plowed out. We’re never more than a day or so that we can't get out. And the bears, can't see one long enough to get a shot at him! [laughs]

The one that was here on the porch, we never seen that one. She was cleaning house up at [Gulden's, on Rumble Creek Road] but you was up there cleaning house. ‘cause in '44, '45 I had started working with Ed [Underwood] when they started in building on Lindbergh [Lake]. I helped on that. [Must have meant 1954, 1955] That was in '55. I worked with Ed when there was stuff to do. For, until '66, '67? I worked a lot with Ed when he had worked. In here and Placid [Lake].

SV: Mostly frame?

RK: No. We built a number of log buildings. Even built a log garage that's down on the Rocking Chair Ranch that's down on Clearwater. Stone's. [Note: This was likely the beginning of some of the log home building industry, at least the on-site log construction]

Up here, and where did we go? There was one on Placid, and made it up at Ed's, then took it on down. [So this might have been an early off-site log home construction project] Until '67, then, the Good place, we had worked on three places up there that first winter. In '55. I took the Cat up there, worked on Goods. We worked on Goods, and Holsbersgers, and the one where Fred Kizer (?) was. Didn't have the foundation done Good place. Framed up the outside. That's the way it set for I don't know how many years. They had the big fireplace built. [discussion, misc hard to transcribe.] Worked on it the second time in about '67? Ed had done a little work in the meantime. John Stark had done a little. The Goods, he was an Army man. He got shipped overseas. The Goods, I knew from Kalispell. They were old timers from the Flathead, Henry Good. [Note: Henry Good’s daughter-in-law and three grandchildren were killed in a tragic car accident on Highway 200 near Potomac in December of 1999. The Good family was still living at Lindbergh Lake at that time but have since moved.]

SV: You put up quite a bit of hay?

RK: Yeah. For the first two years I was here I hayed Mrs. Harris’ here in back of the ranger station. Course Pink, I knew him from when I was a kid in the Flathead. In the thirties. Course I
had known the other fella that had it before Pink. He and his dad had a shoe shop in Kalispell. Can't say his name. They built that Rainbow Bar east of Kalispell. I hayed her place for ten years. I hayed Mrs. Harris'. I done the Wood place, which is now where Forder's [Dwayne Forder] living [Clinkingbeard homestead]. I hayed that for three or four years. The old man Woods owned it. I put up the hay on that. Vic Wise had hayed it on the year we moved down here. I hayed it the next four or five years.

[End of Tape 2, Side A]
RK: The first day of April 1911. [Came to Kalispell then.] So I have seen Kalispell for near ninety years. I know when the only brick buildings were on Main Street. A lot of that that's Kalispell now, Evergreen out there, was nothing. Maybe a shack or two. A little farmland. I moved to Kalispell, I can remember the east side of the valley, there were only two places to cross the river. That is, that you got across. The old steel bridge that's east of town and the big old red bridge that's up at Columbia Falls. That's the only two bridges that were on the Flathead River. South of Creston about five, six miles, there was a ferry. There was a ferry at Holt. You know where Holt is? Well, now the bridge is up the river from the Holt bridge. They call it Fisherman Bridge. They got the access down beside it. The ferries, we never crossed the one at Holt very often. I can remember a time or two crossing there. But to go to Somers and down that way, we always went over to Creston and down on the first ferry and then on down. 'cause we used to go down, before they raised the lake in '38, it was one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. You could walk out there a quarter of a mile to get in this deep [shows up to his waist]. That got warm. Big sand, and a lot of it. When they raised the lake it took all of it. It as enough to put that all under water. That was quite a popular place.

But I can remember when that ferry was foot-powered. Man-powered. The cables were strung across the river. The ferryman had a big paddle, made out of wood. Probably about this thick [shows about four inches with his hands.] With a head on it probably this wide [shows about a foot wide with his hands]. Then back here, the handle. This spare part had a loop end that fit over the cable. And to get the ferry across the river you put the loop over the cable. Pushing the ferry. They were all run that way, the cable, two cables one that crossed the river for the ferry to run on, and then the other one, close together. If the river's coming from here and you went this way, you'd let that ferry be tighter up here so it made it hit the ferry a little bit at an angle to push it across. The ferry went across the river like this. That helped the ferry with the footpower.

SV: Did your folks come from Iowa to farm?

RK: Dad came out here for his health. He was born in Kansas. 2000 feet in elevation. And Grandpa had went down there when he was a boy, 16-year-old boy. But when they left there, then, Dad was 15 years old, went back to Iowa where Grandpa had grown up. There, he run into a guy, you see they were right between the two rivers, at an elevation of about four or five hundred feet. They got married. Mom was from Nebraska, and farmed there in Iowa. 1909. September. Then they farmed that next year. I don't know exactly if they farmed together. They lived close by each other. I was back there 10, 12, 13 years ago. I think I found the place where I was born. I was born in Iowa. But the next spring 1911, Dad talked to somebody. [His health problems were getting worse.] Each winter it got a little worse and little worse. Them days they called it the grip, nowadays we call it the flu. It was something. Somebody told him why he don't come out here. I often wondered why.
The other guy had a brother-in-law living here, evidently had been here and seen this new country. So Dad came up here for his health, supposedly, summer. He was here thirty days and bought forty acres. He fell in love with the country. Course it was new. Like up there in the Flathead around Creston there, there wasn't a third of the buildings there are now.

SV: Was it open? Did it look like it could be farmed?

RK: It was all farmland, yeah. Ours, we were clear on the east side, at the end. It's good farm land. It's all cleaned up now, but we had a stump patch. I plowed lots of furrows around stumps and stuff. There was about an acre of open land when he moved there. It had been logged probably 10, 12 years before. See, where the fish hatchery is now, there was a big sawmill in there.

[Reuben has pictures, and books, about the history of the Creston area, including pictures of his family. He recommends reading "The Southeast Quarters of the Flathead" which talks about the settlement of the area around Creston to Swan River, Bigfork, and Echo Lake. The book mentions the Fox family, and other families who, like Kauffmans, had descendents who eventually moved to the Swan Valley.]

[Note: Misc. discussion ensues, and tape gets turned on and off while Reuben looks at the book and explains photos of the Creston area, sawmills, logging. Most of the logs harvested in that area went by water to the Somers mill, by boom onto the Swan River. They were logged around Whitefish, floated on the Stillwater River to the Flathead and on down. Logs would be in the river for five, six, or seven weeks, then floated by tugboat to Somers.]

SV: What do you think the biggest problems were that people had to face moving into this valley in the 1940s?

RK: In here? Well there was no employment. There was nothing for a job.

SV: Do you think that's improved over the years?

RK: Oh yeah. Yeah, now, good land, when I moved in here there wasn't no carpenters in here. A few guys that worked log houses and stuff. Like if you want to see some real fancy work, the ol' Finlanders built, over at the old Ranger Station. You ever been over there? You see how that log house is built? Dovetailed both ways?

How did they determine how much to cut out? I can see where we made, this here, I know how to do that. But how did they get them that they made those nice square corners all the way up? Dovetailed both ways. Not just dovetailed one way. They're dovetailed both ways.

[more discussion about book]
RK: I'd been in the Flathead since 1911. My dad wanted to come down here and homestead. See, this was open for homesteading then. See, most of these homesteaders, some few of them that squatted in on the ground, but it wasn't open for homesteading until 1906. Before you could prove. But there was some of these, like the Gordon Ranch up there, and some of these places, guys had squatted and they knew what they wanted. Then as quick as they could homestead, file a homestead claim, why then they were already situated. [He is talking about the Forest Homestead Act of 1906 not the Homestead Act of the 1800s.]

SV: But looking back over all that time, have you thought about things that you would have done differently?

RK: Oh yes, there's some stuff I'd a done differently, when I look back. Course I knew the sawmill business. I should have managed to get into the Wineglass and worked instead of trying to milk cows and work a little here and a little there and everything else. But then you're tied down. That, I never...couldn't see punching the clock every day. I just didn't get it. Course we had the sawmill at home. Then later on when I went to Seeley, course I knew the sawmill business, they knew that too, but I...see, when I went working at Pyramid they were just running one shift. They had had some ups and downs, fires and what not. They were just running one shift. They were just putting in the first planer when I was there, no kilns or nothing yet. At that time they run a cook shack. I never forget they were sawing. Let's see, I started in a couple of weeks before Christmas.

[Sadie comes out with pictures.]

RK: Anyway they wanted to start a second shift. A night shift. They was rounding up crew, you know, to work. Some of us. So, one evening after supper, why Fred Johnson, Roger's dad [owner, partner, at the mill] they were sitting there, the bookkeeper and some of us sitting there after supper, just visiting. He looked at me, and he said, "Do you know anything about running an edger?" [laughs] I said, "yeah, I know how to run an edger. That was my main job at home in the sawmill." He looked over at the bookkeeper. "I guess we got that problem solved." He didn't ask me whether I wanted to work or not. So I went to work night shift. I run night shift.

SV: I asked you about things you'd do different. What do you think the best thing was that you ever did?

RK: I don't know really. Part of that is what a person likes. Other people been here and they wouldn't live here for anything. That's just a difference in people. Of course we were a big family at home. We were poor but we didn't know it. By today's standard I'm still poor.

SV: Well, families are having kind of a tough time at it.
RK: Yeah, I often wonder how. Course, like up there, we were living there east of the church. That is good farm ground. We raised most of our living. Because it was good ground. [Reuben didn’t raise a garden at his home in the Swan Valley.] It’s so frosty here. We didn’t have a nice soil to work, that I was used to.

SV: So why did you stay here all these years?

RK: What else would you do? We had a home, it was ours. We struggled till we got it paid for. A lot of people look at me kind of funny now. I paid $2500 for this place. [laughs]

SV: Twenty five hundred dollars. That was a lot of money, then.

RK: Oh, it was a lot of money in them days. I borrowed two thousand dollars. Took me ten, twelve years before I got that paid. At least.

SV: Are you glad you stayed here?

RK: Oh I’m glad I stayed here. Now, it’s not quite as nice ‘cause we like to go up home, back and forth, and it ain’t quite so easy to do that. When we moved down here you didn’t think of going up and back in the same day.

[End of Interview]