The following transcript was provided to Archives and Special Collections by the Upper Swan Valley Historical Society with its associated audio recording.

SE: This is Samantha Epstein it is October 22nd 2001. I am at the Beck Homestead in Condon, Montana. I plan to interview Dixie Meyer at her home in Salmon Prairie today at around nine a.m.

SE: I guess the first thing I’ll ask is, how long have you lived in Salmon Prairie?

DM: Oh, I guess I've lived here all my life my folks came up here, I can't remember if it was thirty-seven or thirty eight and they, my dad and his brother bought a half a section and they split it, and, and my sister Karen and Dale Connely, they have what was my dad's half and then my uncle's half was sold a time or two and anyway and then we wound up gettin' it and then, we've added some land on to that so I didn't, I've never moved very far.

SE: So do you and Neil still live on your family's property?

DM: Yeah the, yeah actually, we, the old house was on the proper, old original property and then this is another 160, or 240 or somethin' that we bought in addition to it but it, it's all the same ownership now.

SE: Did you go to school in Salmon Prairie?

DM: Yeah I went all eight grades there, and then our own three kids went there, and then our, three of our grandkids went there. It was the little old log school when I went there and then they built the white one, frame one now.

SE: How old is the white one?

DM: Oh, let's see, I think they built that in the fifties, I can't remember. See, I graduated from high-school in fifty-six so they must have opened it maybe in fifty-two, or somewhere in fifty-three.

SE: And then you went to highschool in Missoula?

DM: Yeah, I boarded out when I was a freshman and worked for my board and room and then when I was a sophomore I rented a little cabin out at
east Missoula which belonged to my sister's husband's brother and rode the bus, and then I, when I was a junior, Florence Strum and I, which she always lived down here, we rented an apartment and then when I was a senior my sister Karen and I rented an apartment. And we'd catch a ride home on weekends if we could find a ride home.

SE: Back to Salmon Prairie?

DM: Yeah (Laughs)

SE: Was it hard living away from home?

DM: No, it didn't seem, I suppose it was, it didn't seem to bother, probably bothered our folks more than it did us, we thought we were pretty big. I was alot older than my kids would a been. I would of hated to have to send my kids down there, but there wasn't much choice then so, my oldest sister went to highschool in Polson 'cause that's where mom's folks lived, so she stayed out there with them and, but she didn't get home very often, she got home Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter's about all. Was kinda mean old roads to get in and out then.

SE: By car?

DM: Yeah, yeah, we had an old model A pick-up, and they didn't, the roads, it was just the dirt winding road clear through the valley then. I think they got the, well, they completed the highway in sections and I think, in, I don't know, fifty, I think they finished the last section maybe in fifty-five, or fifty-six, or somewhere around there down north. That's why all these, you go down the highway and you don't see many people, but the old winding road, people lived on it, so, there's, there's alot more people around than it looks like anyway.

SE: Like the, there is a highway that run's behind Beck's I think, that, that's the old Highway?

DM: Yeah, part of it, mmm-hmm.

SE: Do you remember stories of why your parents moved here?

DM: Oh, 'course my dad, he liked to, trap and he liked to be out in the
woods all the time and so he, we didn't, they didn't homestead, but he thought it'd be great to be out here and have his own land, so that's, they came up.

SE: Where are they from originally?

DM: Well, my dad was raised around Lakeside and then 'round the Polson area, and up north of Kalispell there aways. Mom, originally came from Circle, Montana and then they moved over there around Polson when she was in highschool. They, he convinced her this was a good place to be I guess. They'd be, women were pretty, pretty tough in those days. 'Course, 'course 'bout all there was to do for work then was trappin', so he'd be, winter time he'd be gone couple nights in a row, go have, have to go up on the mountain and camp and snowshoed around, so, 'course us kids, we would, got big enough so we milked the cows and did the chores and monkeyed around you know. I guess then later the (Phinbies sp?) had a sawmill down here and Uno Staum, the locals, worked, worked at that, during the, when they had time. Didn't have a whole lotta time to work 'cause we had to, course we did anyway, we had a few cows and horses so you had to scrounge around to find hay to get put up for them for the winter and, so it was a pretty meager life, for the women anyway. 'Cause over there at Polson, Mom was used to growin', they had friut trees and everything, and you could grow everything, so she was used to havin' a garden and, it didn't grow very well up here. Root, just the root crops mostly, spuds and carrots you could grow, but, so we didn't, we had, we milked the cow and had chickens, and generally raised a pig, so we, venison, we lived on biscuits and gravy and venison I guess.

SE: Did you guys ever hunt and trap with your dad?

DM: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah we, I hunted all the time. When we were little we'd go on the trapline with him, the close ones around here. I remember the one time he was on snowshoes, so he told us to you know, we had to pick up our feet when he picked up his or we'd fall down. We did it a few steps and then we didn't, so then we, we all went end over end in the snow (laughs). But most of the time he'd have his trail packed so we could walk in the snowshoe tracks and there was, if he went off, across the trail why that's when we were supposed to be standing on his snowshoes and walk with him, and, it was kinda hard.
SE: Snow was pretty deep?

DM: Yeah. Yeah, we used to get lots of snow, we don't, don't anymore, but yeah, we always used to have, oh I don't know, a foot or so by Halloween, and then a, that's not very far off. Then it'd last quite a while, clear into April, well it still does in April kinda sometimes. Yeah, I didn't get around too much in snow, and the old road we just, one neighbor down here, he had an old cat, an' when it got to so nobody could get anywhere why he'd generally plow a trail, an' the county they didn't come up very often, maybe, 'couple times a year and it might snow right behind 'em so it probably didn't do any good anyways.

SE: So when it snowed you guys were pretty much stuck back here?

DM: Yeah, well we'd, yeah I mean you just figured on it. You'd go out in the fall and get your staples, like kerosene, you had to have kerosene and flour and stuff like that. There was a little local store up here, I think it's been up there most of the time, I don't know, the Straum's store up there where the Swan Center is now. 'Course that was ten miles from here so you didn't go up there very often either, and you had your meat and milk and eggs so you didn't have to go everyday.

SE: Flour maybe, you'd have to buy lots of flour?

DM: Well, they'd buy 'couple hundred pounds of flour in the fall and then it'd last. I don't know what else they'd buy, I know they'd, kerosene and flour was the main things. We did have a, used to have an old cellar, that you could store spuds and stuff in, you know. Most everybody had a root cellar they call it, and, and we did alot of, Mom canned meat and did some canning whenever she could find. We'd pick berries, huckleberries, I guess that was about the only kind of berry really around that amounted to much. We'd pick wild strawberries, those little bitty buggers for a treat, for a strawberry shortcake. We did, when we were small I can remember Mom raising strawberries, but I don't think they ever did very good. You know, it frosts pretty late in the spring and pretty early in the fall so, not too many things survive that anyway.

SE: Do you, did your Mom have a green-house?

DM: No, I don't, no, plastic was kinda unheard of then, and, yeah I don't
think anybody that I can remember did, then anyway. Later they probably
did, but.

SE: What are some of the best memories you have of growing up here?

DM: Of growing up? Oh, I guess we just went out and played with whatever
there was around to play. Well, my sister, she, Leita was seven years
older than us so she was, wasn’t around alot, I mean, we were just little
and going to school when she was in highschool, but Karen and I are, about
two years apart so we were together. We were tomboys, so wherever
Daddy we, we went. We’d, ‘course we’d help hay, or did the chores and
stuff, but we always had a horse or somethin’ we could ride that was our,
what we played with, I guess was, horseback ridin’ I guess when we had
company come, or. Summertime we, there was a creek out in front of our
place, we’d go out there and catch minnows, all afternoon, build little
fences with rocks, and, go the next day to see if they were out and they
were always gone but anyway, we could catch alot of them just with our
hands, gather ‘em in. And, oh, I don’t know, we had an old bicycle, and
when we were, got to school age, I guess we rode that, and we went, we
always had to go, the cows just, milk cows run out loose so we’d go, find
them at night, and when, in the summertime we’d leave ‘em in the corral
over night, so we didn’t, we’d get them in the morning. And then we’d,
Daddy let the calfs suck some so, if we wanted to be gone out to Grandpa
and Grandma’s why, we could turn the cows out then and go find them. I
don’t know, they were just, we were always busy, we didn’t have a whole
lot of toys, we just made up our own toys. When we were pretty small,
and we liked these little double A flashlight batteries, were our baby
calves and then the, the bigger ones were the cows and what we used for
the bull, or we’d used different sized cans and big pork and bean cans, they
were our, the bull, and then the fruit cans were cows, and the little soup
cans were our calves so we played with them all tha time. I can
remember one time when, ‘course we were a little bigger then, but Georgie
Beck was born, he was, my cousin lived up there at Beck’s and, so we went
up to visit them and, and his mother had these little baby food cans and
geeze we thought they were so neat, we wanted Mom to buy a bunch of
those so we could have those for calves, they were little (laughs). We
used, did the same thing with marbles, the bigger ones were the big horses
and the little ones were the colts and stuff. So we just played with stuff
like that.
SE: It's probably better than all the, the plastic stuff today.

DM: Oh yeah, you got you could use your imagination then make, do whatever you wanted to. Now kids, if the don't know how to push a button and something moves, they, don't know how to play with anything. It's kinda bad, kinda sad really.

SE: Did you guys ever go on any wilderness trips, hiking, camping?

DM: We didn't do very much camping, 'cause we were, most people thought that's all we did was camp, when, when we lived here, was camp. I can remember, one, I guess it was when, oh my cousin Nancy came on, I guess it was Labor Day one weekend, my dad and, my sister was married then, and her husband borrowed some horses and we went up to Cedar Lake for the weekend. We thought that was the neatest thing to go up there and camp. Played on the rocks and Daddy and Bobby fished and I guess we fished a little too but we was mostly, had fun, played around. We didn't do very much hiking 'cause that's what my dad did all the time was hike and fished and hunt, so he, he wasn't too interested in going out. And my mother had polio so she didn't, wasn't a walker, had had polio. So, we didn't do much. Like I said, we'd never been to any of these lakes. We've lived all my life and, been up to Piper and Cedar later, and then when, went up to Crystal Lake one time. We didn't do that type of stuff for some reason, I don't know.

SE: Do you do it now?

DM: We don't do much hiking. Pam, my daughter and I, when, when the grandkids were little we rode horses all the time and we rode, when the grandkids were small, I think Trinity wasn't in school yet, we, after we get done haying there was an annual trip to go for a week in the Bob Marshall, so we, we've done that all the time. Of course now the grandkids are all gone so it was, last couple years it's just been Pam and I. Neil doesn't like to ride horses very well. 'Course he was gone all the time workin' until he retired but he, still doesn't do much horseback ridin', or none I guess.

SE: You guys still have horses?

DM: Oh yeah, oh yeah we got, I think we got eight horses and eight cows
so, cows and calves, we keep a few cows and horses, well we like horses but we keep the cows around just for, keep you busy, you gotta put up hay and then in the winter time you gotta get outside and go feed 'em, otherwise it'd be kinda nice to be set in the house I guess, so, keeps us gettin' around anyway, fixin' fence, you never get done fixin' fence that's for sure. We have many too miles of fence to fix.

SE: They're alot of work!

DM: Yeah, seems like you gotta have a cow or horse to get up and look out and see if they're out in the morning, so. It gives you an excuse to use the horses then when you gotta go find the cows or something, so. One thing helps the other I guess.

SE: Why have you guys decided to stay in Salmon Prairie on this piece of land?

DM: Why? Oh I don't know, I don't think they could corral us anywhere else. Neil doesn't like town and I, I've never lived in town and just, you can go out the door and do whatever you want to, ride the four wheeler or go hikin' or go fishin' or horseback ridin' or, you can just do whatever you want to so. I told our grandkids they better appreciate that 'cause I don't think they're, they're going to ever be in a position where they're kids are going to be able to do something like that, and that's the way of them the can put they're skis on, go out the door and ski to school, or ride they're bikes, they ride they're bikes to school all the time. 'Course when I went to school I just, we had to go home for lunch and everything, we just lived across the river so. We'd always think that was a big treat if Mom and Daddy were going to be gone and we had to take our lunch. But, oh it's just a free way to be I guess. So I don't, they'll probably not carry us out of here unless it's in a pine box or somethin'.

SE: So you love it here?

DM: Oh yeah, yeah I couldn't imagine living anywhere else really. Our family's all right around here. Daughter Pam just lives on the south end up here and then, our other daughter Gerri works at Seeley Lake, so they're right around here and Neil's folks are closer to big fork and that's where his brother lives and his sister lives at Seeley Lake, so just, you know everybody's around here so if you moved anywhere you'd be, movin' away
from family, so. Everybody says, oh you better go south now, you're retired, but, Neil likes to work in his old machinery and build old stuff so, he said he would if he could take it all along.

SE: It'd be alot of big suitcases!

DM: Yeah, trailerloads.

SE: And all the horses.

DM: Yeah.

SE: And the cows.

DM: Yeah.

SE: What are the, I guess some of the biggest changes you've seen since you've lived here.

DM: Oh, I guess probably the biggest one was the highway and electricity. Yeah, when, when we were growing up you went down the old road and you know we had, everybody had the old mudholes named and the big hills where you'd have trouble gettin' up, they all were names, and golley, nit took prit' near a day to get to Polson by the. 'Course they were workin' on the east shore highway when we were just small, so they got that in, but, but then electricity. I think, we got married in fifty-six and I guess most of them had electricity like, I don't know, fifty-four or fifty-five. 'Course it took a while to get the splinters put in so we didn't get electricity 'til we were, I don't know, fifty-seven or fifty-eight (years), couple years after we were married anyway. 'Course nobody, it's kinda funny, nobody had, didn't have any electrical appliances so the big thing was gettin' 'em built for a plug in so you could have a light. So, then as everybody got appliances why, you didn't have any plug-ins to choose from anyway. So, I mean every had to kinda keep re-wiring they're house for gettin' all this other stuff. Yeah, we always just used a gas lantern or kerosene lantern. 'Course we burnt wood, that was one of the, a fall project, always had to get wood in, and, and that was another little job you could bid on was gettin' wood for the school. Daddy did that two or three times. Wasn't much money, but you didn't need much money up here either. Mom did all of her sewing. She, had an old tredle sewing machine, so she made our, all of
our clothes and what couldn't be made I guess she'd use the Sears and Roebuck catalog and would order shoes and stuff. Generally got one pair of shoes a year I guess, sometimes the soles would get pretty bad, so you'd put cardboard in the sole for a while 'til it was time to get another pair. Lots of hand me downs. Mom, she baked and cooked, and stuff all the time, she did alot of bakin'. So we lived pretty good, we didn't even know we were poor, or anything.

SE: You had fun.

DM: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah, they used to go around like once a month for different birthdays and have parties like once a month. Play cards or something, then if the weather got too bad to go home, why everybody'd get a blanket and layed down on the floor or sleep out every once in a while. 'Course the biggest thing in the whole year was the Christmas program. Everybody'd come to the Christmas program. Lotsa, most of, lotsa time they'd have to use the team and wagon, well team and sled I mean. They, everybody had an old car of some kind. But you didn't use it a whole lot 'cause it was kinda hard to get gas. You'd have to go ten miles up there to get gas, so.

SE: So the highway brought in alot of people?

DM: Oh yeah, yeah, 'course as time goes on there's way more and more people coming in but, it took a while for more people to move in. 'Course made more jobs, 'course the Forest Service and the State, I don't know. Anyway they combined and built the highway and then the, that's when the logging got, there was always a little bit of logging, but not too much. Of course after they got the highway in then it increased alot. So that helped everybody. It didn't really bring too many people in then, they had a, they built several logging camps where the, they'd have, hire a cook and then have some shacks for the guys to live in so. Gradually more people bought places I guess. There was lots of old homesteads up in here. But there was alot of them that didn't get proven up it was so hard to do, we didn't homestead, but they, well I think they had to prove on ours, I think it was twenty acres. Well how many acres anyway, I think it was within five years, so the men would come and work their heads off during the summer, 'course they had to do all their, get their buildings to live in and their barn and stuff and then they' go out to the, most of them went out to the Summer's sawmill out there, the men and worked out there all winter, and
the women would stay up here in the winter time. That was years, that was real early years then. By the time we came in why, Daddy just stayed up here and trapped, and he'd sell the furs once a year, spring or somethin'.

SE: Did you guys log, log this place?

DM: Neil, Neil and I, Neil did yeah. Yeah, this was all, well that down there was a, pretty much a natural meadow from the fence on, right down from the, right down from the deck here over to as far as you can see the fence. That was all timber and stuff, and then out south was all lodgepole and, yeah we logged it all. We wanted pasture and hay for the cows and the money so. Neil likes big pines so we left most, alot of the big pines, so we got alot of big pine trees. But it's grown back up, like out there in the river bottom we used to, kids, we'd go out there and we always called that the Sahara, there wasn't any, just some pine going out there and now you can't, can't see anywhere out there the brush is too thick. So it, really grew back anyway.

SE: Is that how you guys made most of your living, was through logging?

DM: Mmm-hmm. Neil logged all of his life. 'Course he had his own crew and in sevety-one I guess he went to work for Pyramid so then, up until then he was just around here in the valley, kind of but. Then he was down by Ovando, well he was all over as years went by. So he was away from home quite alittle then. Well from sevety-one on he was away from home quite alot. Sometimes around close to drive. So Pam and I stuck around here and did what needed to be done, 'cause she's, well her husband's a logger too, and so he worked in the woods too. He worked for Neil alot of the time so they were both gone quite a bit.

SE: What was your role in the logging business?

DM: Mine? Oh, (laughs) running after parts mostly. Oh I did a limited amount of bookwork, not very much and if they needed something I'd run, run to get it. Generally you'd wind up having to come down to where he was staying once a week, so 'couple days a week I'd be down there and. He lived in the camper quite alot of the time. Sometimes they'd get a motel or something for the crew, so. But I mostly just stayed around here, fixed fence. Kept track of the cows I guess, oh I didn't, I never did work in the woods. Gerri, our daughter, she worked in the woods, seven or nine years
or something. She skidded logs and Dan and Pam, they moved over to Plentywood, I think it was eighty and eighty-one when the oil wells did well and the timber industry really dried up and there wasn't very much work so they moved over there and then after Gerri got out of highschool, why she went over there and got a job. She stayed over there for three or four years I think. Pam and Dan came back in, I think it was eighty-one or eighty-two and Gerri came back in a couple more years and then Neil put her to work logging. She liked to be outside, so she liked logging.

SE: Tough work.

DM: Well, she drove a skidder, so she wasn't doing physical labor, but that's hard on your anatomy because you gotta, you're always watching behind, so it kinda got to her back so he thought she should get something else. The opportunity to become a custodian down at the highschool came along so she did that, well she started, he was training her to be a truck driver, log hauler, but then this other job came up, she wouldn't have been gone from home like she would have been if she'd logged.

(Flip tape to side B)

DM: Let's see, nine years younger than Gerri, so he's quite a bit younger. He's a school teacher, well he went on to college at Billings, then he went over to St. Cloud for some more schooling and working on his masters degree, now he's a teacher and football coach at Fairfield. So he's quite a bit younger than the girls. By the time he was interested or old enough to be horseback riding and stuff why they were, Gerri was married, or Pam was married, well maybe, yeah Pam was married and busy, so he never really did get into horseback riding or anything. Well it was sports all the time. What he liked to do. So we run around after him with sports. He started wrestling before he was in grade school, and so we wrestled, and then when he got in what was in the third or fourth grade he played football, and then when he was in third grade he could play basketball, and so all the way through. And he's still playing football and working on football now.

SE: What does he teach?

DM: English. Highschool english. So we run around over there every weekend I guess. We got two little kids we got to go see all the time too.
SE: How many grandkids do you have in all?

DM: Five. Pam's oldest, Travis, he works with his Dad in the logging, and Trista, she's been married for three years. She's going to school in Billings. She'll graduate in the spring, and Trinity's, fourth year I guess in Bozeman. So they're all growin' up, except Les's two. That's why you have to go keep track of them.

SE: Maybe you'll have great-grandkids.

DM: Yeah maybe (laughs). These guys think they're too busy and gotta get a nest egg before they can afford kids. They, they don't realize stuff takes care of itself, but.

SE: What would be some advice you have for young loggers or young people living out here today?

DM: Oh gosh, I guess if your going to live out here you're gonna, better have an expectation that you're not going to be rich, and a, it's going to be a lot different than, like when you live in town and stuff you figure the city's gonna take care of all your roads and all your house needs or something, but out here you'd, you'd better be self sufficient I guess. That's not the way it works, generally people move out here and, and then pretty quick, they want to do this like we did back where we came from and so pretty quick stuff's getting changed, I don't know, it probably mostly isn't for the better or for the land. But anyway I guess that's just peoples' nature to want to do like you did before, but they forget they moved out here to be in the wide open space and have stuff like nature had it. Pretty quick they're changing it.

SE: So people used to live off of the land alot more than they do today.

DM: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm. Yeah, you had to. There's people raise gardens and stuff now, and they have green houses but you didn't used to so. Yeah we didn't, well we'd raise a pig and eat that most of the time but, or our own chickens, we were raised on Venison most of the time. Fish, Daddy fished alot. Now you're not supposed to, supposed to throw the fish back I guess, most of the places so we don't keep them. And then they talk about how something's happening. Used to be you could go catch fish
anytime, used to be there wasn't anybody up here to fish, now they, now everybody comes and fishes and they take the rafts down the river and fish, so there's bound to be less fish you know.

SE: And then it's all for recreation.

DM: Yeah. I don't think the hunting has increased too much. There's alot of hunters, but there always was quite a few hunters too, and I think there's lots of game. 'Course deer, they're, they just, I don't know what's the word I want to use, but they domesticated pretty well. They just live right on your doorstep if you let 'em. But we've, the bear, they're around all the time, we've never had any trouble with bear. For years and years down at the old house at one time we had a refrigerator up on the back porch and had it turned up for like a freezer and we were gone and, well the bear had been around two or three times. We always had a dog and anyway, the bear came on the back porch and tipped the refrigerator over, but he tipped it over on the door and then he pulled all the wires awith that amonia and stuff on the back. It rusted everything and within a half a mile. And I think he told everybody from there on and generations down to never go around there, it's not a good place.

SE: The bear told everybody?

DM: Must have beacuse we've never had, never had any trouble with, you know, we've had grain and stuff in the barn and they've never bothered anything. It's kinda funny anyway. And just the other day there was a great big bear track had gone down the, where the green gate is there, just a huge, he'd gone all the way down the road and out across there. And, up south here a little ways, it probably was the same bear, there was a huge bear track up there, and you see sign and stuff. But you don't see them very often. One time after we moved up here to the house a little one come up the hill and the dog treed it our here in one of these trees out there. We got some pictures of it and, they, they just don't bother, I don't know. Some, I guess when they get started then they're kind of a nuisance but, I'd alot rather have a bear around than mountain lions, I know that. I don't like mountain lions very well, but they're around, all the time. We feed the cows down there and the horses and the ravens'll be a screechin' and a hollerin' so you go down there and look and there's a deer kill down there, so they're, they're around. Wel, up where our daughter lives there the, this spring I think she was hanging clothes there on her
clothes line heard a terrible commotion, and lion came around the corner
and got a house cat there. Then we had a, she had her colt in the corral,
she just going to wean it off the mother, I think it was the second night
she had it in there. Anyway the next morning it was out and cat had got
ahold of both cheeks and just didn't quite get a good enough hold and just
scratched it on the rump, both sides of its rump, but it got its head
through the gate, which ordinarily would have broke its neck, but for some
reason or other it got it through there and picked the gate up off the
hinges so it got outta there. So they're, well a deer, a lion killed a deer
ther by the hayshed too there a couple years ago. Between the hayshed and
their house, so they're around. And right down here at the school right
here, I think that was for or five years ago, right in the schoolyard one
lion killed a deer, so. They're around, well we've seen them around. One
time there was three of them walked through the old carport down here
and just tootled along up through that way. Then I, up until the last six,
seven years, I'd never seen a lion, you know they were around, but just
never seen 'em, but they just the last sevearl years. And I don't know if
there's that many more of them, or what the deal is. Well they actually
killed three calves that one summer, young calves. Well one killed, Neil
was down there at the old garage, fixin' stuff and heard a terrible
commotion over in the old house yard and here deers, jumped on a does
back right there in the old house yard. That's way out in the, you know it's
open all the way around so I don't know if it was in the tree right there by
the house or what. 'Cause Pam and I had been down there all afternoon
fixin' on the Hestin (?) , we just had left and then Neil started fixin' on the
bailer.

SE: You never know what to expect.

DM: No, no they're so sneaky, but.

SE: Do you see elk much?

DM: Oh yeah, yeah. They don't come down on this hayfield much but up
where Pam's are, they're up there all the time, and then in the spring of
the year they about wreck that hayfield, they, ten or twelve of them or
there's kind of a group, or seven, or sometimes they're up to fourteen or
fifteen of them. There's quite a few that come. They don't really stay too
much, depending on the winter they, I don't know, they kinda make a loop
around through maybe once a week or once every couple of weeks or
something. They all, day after hunting season you can pretty much guarantee you're gong to see elk down there, you know. Funny.

SE: Who do you think has had the biggest influence on your life?

DM: Oh I suppose my husband, Neil, probably. Yeah we, because of him we've traveled around a lottle bit otherwise I never did do any traveling. We've traveled off and on quite a little. Yeah, probably him.

SE: How long have you guys been married?

DM: Oh, pretty near forty-five years, be in December.

SE: And you guys built this house?

DM: Yeah, actually a neighbor did the log work and then we kind of, yeah, the varnish and the finishing up. We, Neil built the sunroom out there a couple of years ago.

SE: Wow that's pretty!

DM: Yeah, it's pretty.

SE: It's big!

DM: Yeah, we never use it very often, but good place to put plants anyway. And then we built, we built everything else around here. All the carports and the museum and stuff. We got a sawmill down there and so in the spring of the year when he was laid off we'd try to gather up the dead or the blowdowns and stuff. 'Course they're not very merchantible, or if they're not merchantible then we'd saw them into boards so then you'd have to use the boards up to build another roof. That one year we shoveled thirteen roofs, some of them twice. So much snow it wouldn't, they're all tin roofs but it wouldn't slide off of them. What was it, ninety-six or ninety-seven I think.

SE: Do you guys manage your land in any way?

DM: Oh yeah, we um, well like I said he always tries to pick up the dead and dying and blow down, and if there's quite a bit of blowdown well then
he gathers it up to send it to the mill. We haven't really planted any young trees around here but trees around the Swan they grow really well so there's young stuff growin' all the time. We try to, we work on the weeds all the time that's a never ending project. We don't have a whole lotta knapweed around here, we work on it pretty hard and we kinda let the daisy population slide so I don't know if we're ever going to handle on the daisies, but, but other than those two we don't have very many bad weeds. I guess most of, well we hay and farm what's already open, the rest of it we just kind of well, kind of let it go outside of salvaging what's deteriorating.

SE: Where, where's the students on the land project?

DM: There a, that's a separate fifty acres that's over there across on the east side of the highway over by Pony Creek before you get to the Salmon Prairie road. And we've never done anything over there outside of salvage logging until the last two years I guess since we've been workin' with the kids and the foresters, why the foresters think the lodgepole should be all taken out, which it should be, because when they do a little logging or any time they bored it, it's, about half of it's rotten, you know, it's way past its prime, and so, and the kids have planted some young trees and stuff over there so.

SE: Have you seen any fires come through here at all?

DM: No, we haven't seen any but well that's, I think it was nineteen-ten or something, whole, most of the valley burnt and that's, that's the age that alot of the timber, civil, lot of it in the civil war. So it's let's see, management, seems like he said nineteen-twenty-nine, nineteen-ten, that wouldn't make, anyway all this timber's about a-hundred and thirty years old, this lodgepole that's around here.

SE: Right now?

DM: Yeah, pretty near anything they bore, most of it's right there. 'Course tha larch and the pine are older, they survived the fires. We haven't had any right through here, on the south end of the valley there's been more recent fires.

SE: Is it wetter down here?
DM: Well normally, but it hasn't been this year. There's kind of a five, six mile stretch from the county line to the top of the Salmon Prairie hill that, generally there's a little band of moisture that goes through here. This year they'd get a little bit the other way and they'd get a little bit that way and we never got a drop so. I don't know what, what the deal is there. Generally this is kind of a little snow built through here and we get a little rain but, hard to figure it out sometimes.

SE: I think there's supposed to be a storm coming through tonight.

DM: Yeah, yeah. I heard that Kalispell say it'll be increasing to eighty percent showers by this evening, so that's, probably going to rain. And snowshowers they say, so.

SE: What's your favorite part about the valley, like the mountains or the trees, or the wildlife?

DM: Oh I guess it's all, one goes into the other, so like, I mean gotta have, just gotta have it all, so. Well, we like the wildlife and of course we like the mountains and the trees, just like it all. It's just all home.

SE: Have you seen much flooding?

DM: In the valley here? Oh not devastating flooding. The river'll run out of its banks some springs way worse than others but, not, I don't think I can think of off hand anywhere that's flooded and damaged any of the homes, or it'll wash a road out once and a while or something, years ago it, the old Salmon Prairie bridge down here, washed around each end of that and we couldn't get around it. Yeah, so then we'd have to go out the back road. And sometimes in springs it runs across our road down here at the shop, and that's really kind of a low. I don't think you could get permits to build down that way anymore now 'cause it's pretty low. And then one year, flooded all out across there but it didn't, you know, didn't damage anything. But the, 'couple times it raised heck with the Salmon Prairie bridge but, I don't know, ten, twelve years ago they put that big cement one in, so shouldn't have any trouble now. And I guess that year in ninety-six, ninety-seven it did wash the road out there at the bottom of the hill after come off of the highway there. Kind of pretty near fixed that so we couldn't get in, but nothing major, you know.
SE: Didn't cause any real trouble.

DM: No, no, I just can't think of any, no whether a house or anything's been flooded, actually flooded. 'Course, everybody lived, built close to the water but not that close I guess. Sure isn't dams or anything to back stuff up you know, so if it can't go here it runs around and goes over there.

SE: What are some of the hardest things you've had to do for a living here?

DM: Oh I don't know, once in a while you'd get snowed in, but beings he was a logger we generally had some kind of equipment we could plow our own road out with. I remember one time when we were kids, I think it had been, gosh it was like a month or so we couldn't get any mail or didn't get any mail, so I guess maybe the county. 'Course we, the neighbors around kinda take turns. This one would have some kind of a plow and the other one would have some kind of thing you could break. The roads weren't always plowed but you could get a track through 'em. We're a long ways, we're twenty miles from Swan Lake so there's a big long stretch where nobody was livin' in there, and years ago it was hard to get through that stretch. And then going south down towards Missoula, why there's more people live that way and more traffic so you could generally get out that way. I know one time when my grandmother was sick out of Polson, why, we got called out there, and it was during the winter time, and we got out there alright. I think we got stuck and had to stay the neighbors down by Swan Lake one night, before we got on, and we couldn't, and the road wasn't open to come back around by Bigfork and Swan Lake so we had to go clear around by Missoula to get back in. So that was kind of a long trip (laughs). 'Course we were kids, it didn't bother us all that much, but I imagine it was quite trying for parents. 'Cause we had cows and horses so we had to have the neighbors feed them. I remember one time we ran out of hay in the winter time so Daddy had to go up the neighbors up south, which anyway you go up that ways it's eight or ten miles. So we had to take the team and wagon, 'course by the time he got a road broke, trail broke into their haystack and got it loaded why it was way late at night so they had him stay all night so he didn't get home 'til the next day with a load of hay. Haying was kind of tough because we didn't really have any plowed ground much, there was quite a few wild meadows out, you, that's what you hayed on. And of course by the time you got, spent the day mowing and raking and gettin' it and just pitched it on why, you generally
made your haystack where the hayfield was 'cause you couldn't haul it, you know, up the road, two or three miles, by the time you'd load it and haul it home and got it pitched off or unloaded you wouldn't get back, you wouldn't get much hauled so you wouldn't get much haying done, so they would stack the hay there. And it didn't. 'course it was rip gutter, old wild hay so, elk and stuff didn't bother it too much then. 'Course that was an all winter's project then keeping the road broke to go get it to go haul it back home, so, it was busy times. I guess everybody's busy now too so, didn't think much about it. When we were kids that was our job to tramp the hay, and then when we got a little bit bigger why we, I could help pitch it on and Karen would have to tramp. She didn't think that was very equal, but anyway that's the way it was. Later on years I drove a hay team for the, there was some old bachelors around, foxes that hayed different places so I helped them hay a couple different summers.

SE: For work?

DM: Yeah, yeah I drove the team, mowed the hay and raked.

SE: Did you have relatives living around when you were growing up?

DM: Not up here, when daddy's brother and family lived up here, but he died, let's see Nancy and I were the same age and she was eight when he died. So then they moved out and her mom married Ed Beck then for a while, that's where George come from. But other than that we didn't have relatives living in here, no folks, Daddy's folks died. I don't even remember them, but Mom's folks were out at Polson so we went out there. And Daddy had brothers and stuff living at Lakeside. Kinda make a loop at Polson around by Lakeside and see 'em. And of course his brothers and stuff were up here pretty often. His, he was twenty years younger than his oldest brother so his, his brother's, oldest brother's boys and Daddy grew up together so they'd, you know they were up here all the time, quite a bit. And then his one, he had one brother that wasn't married and he was our favorite uncle so we were real thrilled, and he was up here quite a bit he helped Daddy with the sawmill and stuff. He stayed, lived down here in the old homestead cabin quite a while. Actually this adjoining place here, my, Daddy's sister and husband bought it from a guy, and so they owned it for quite a while and we bought it from them. And I was just raised, you know where I was raised, just down the road there a little ways.
SE: How big was the house you were raised in?

DM: Not very big. The original cabin, oh gosh, I don't know, I suppose it was like, I don't know if it was eighteen by eighteen, it wasn't very big. Mom and Daddy had one corner, no that was in the old house, the addition. It was just a heatin' stove and a cook stove and then we had kind of partitioned off a bedroom for all of us and then we, he built on the kitchen part. I remember that was before I started school, I remember helping him build that. I can remember climbing up, of course he didn't have many tools either, it wasn't very many carpenter tools, but he would sight down, see if the purlings and stuff was level so I can remember getting up there and sightin' down, I don't know what I was lookin' at but. I can remember doing that, hammering, smashing my thumb. I remember when they were building the barn, it's gone now but, Valgene and Leita, which, they were the older ones, cousins, they were walking across the river, they were across the river going over the hill to the sunday school one morning, I don't know, I wasn't very big I guess. So anyway, I shinnied up somehow on that barn, I was up on the ridge pole and there wasn't any floor in there, it was two stories. So I was up there telling them, 'Bye, bye'. So they had to running back so then Daddy had to figure out some way to get me down off of there. I was kind of, I was a little different from the other two. I ran away quite a little and so I had to wear a bright red hat. I got quite a few spankings for running over to the neighbors, because it was a creek running between us and them and it was pretty high in spring time and Mom would get pretty mad at me. One time I was standing out by the back door, she was hollerin' to check see where I was. I had my little hammer, and I was hammerin' in a saw. She was hollering where I was and I says, 'I'm right here, I'm right here,' and she hollered and hollered I just says, 'I'm right here.' So when she finally found me I got a spankin' 'cause I didn't answer, so she kinda worried. 'Cause she, Daddy was gone and she was not bad crippled but she didn't get around too good so she wasn't able to run around after me. And then our cousins just lived down across, right straight down in the house across the river so we'd walk back and forth across there all the time. I remember walkin' down there one time and then, going over to their place and there was a bear'd crossed there in front of me. It didn't bother me any so I went back, or when I went back I told 'em I saw a bear and Daddy didn't think I knew what I was talkin' about. I said, 'yeah it was all black it had a white patch under its chin', so we went down there and looked and looked and he finally found a track. So I wasn't fibbin' anyway. He didn't think I knew what I was talkin' about.
SE: You were kind of the adventurous one.

DM: Yeah, I guess I must of been the adventurous one. But we'd play outside, shoot we'd play out 'til ten o'clock at night, it'd be pitch dark and we could play out there and you never even would think about bears or lions or anything, you know, you just, we never had any trouble. I don't know if I'd let the kids out ther now, beins they've been around here so darn close. In the winter time we always had sleddin' parties on the schoolhouse hill there, so everybody'd meet over there once a month for a potluck and bring whatever you had to slide on. Cardboard boxes or a scoop shovel or deerhides worked pretty good.