The following transcript was provided to Archives and Special Collections by the Upper Swan Valley Historical Society with its associated audio recording.
Oral History Number: 422-207  
Interviewee: Mike Holmes and Sue Holmes  
Interviewer: Suzanne Vernon  
Date of Interview: August 27, 2009  
Project: Upper Swan Valley Oral History Project  

Note: The first three minutes of this interview has been restricted from the transcript because it contains personal identification information.

Mike Holmes: I’m related to everybody in the valley except the Holmes’ who used to live next to the Hungry Bear.

Sue Holmes: Well, he used to be related to everybody in the valley, but it has changed in the last fifty years.

MH: My Dad is Doris Haasch’s sister, so Doris is my aunt. Mame, who used to own Liquid Louies, was my aunt. Rollie and Ronnie Matthew are my cousins, through my mom.

SH: My parents graduated from high school in Polson. After the Air Force they moved back there. Mike’s mom started teaching high school in Polson when we started first grade. She had taught at Seeley Lake...

MH: You know where Rammel’s live? That used to be the school. She taught there. She also taught here at the Pine Ridge School. She taught at Woodworth. Then she taught a long time at Polson.

My folks split up when I was like two. Dad worked for the county over in Washington (State), running equipment for the county. I stayed in Polson with my mom. We were up here (in the Swan Valley) when they split up, and we (he and his older brother Tom) stayed here with my mom. Then we went to Woodworth, then Seeley, and then Polson.

I was born in Missoula but we lived up here. My grandparents homesteaded up here, on the Matthew place. (The old Halpin homestead. What were Mike’s grandparents’ names? See Marian Seaman interview and tape transcript.) My parents bought that from them. We lived there summers all the time, even up through high school.

Suzanne Vernon: What’s your earliest memory of living here?

MH: Probably sometime when I was in school and we’d come up in the summer. I worked here at the Gordon Ranch when I was in the 8th grade, haying. My grandparents (on dad’s side) managed this place for Shorty Koessler’s dad, Tony Koessler’s father/grandparents, when just the old Holland cabin was here and this cabin where we lived – or maybe this cabin wasn’t built yet. That was in 1924 or something. Doris lived here, too (she was a baby). They lived in the
Holland cabin, and uncle Bob, Doris’ brother. It’s been family here (at the Gordon Ranch) for a long time.

SV: Tell me what you remember of Shorty Koessler.

MH: We got along really well with Shorty. He was kind of a — he was the kind of guy that if he told you something, that’s the way it was. He would remember and not change his mind. My dad grew up with Shorty here, but I don’t remember any of that. I worked for Shorty when he owned the Intermountain Lumber Company. I worked down at Salmon, Idaho for the company he owned, after we were married.

SH: We were married in 1964.

MH: And then Shorty sold all the mills and he wanted us to come up here and take care of this place, and manage the timber. I was a forester. He had land over at Ovando, a couple of ranches over there with a lot of timber on them, and this place here, with a lot of timber on it. So we moved up here in 1979.

SV: You had been going back and forth?

MH: We spent a lot of weekends up here, because my mom lived up here.

SH: After she retired she lived here. She went back to school to Greeley, Colorado and got her master’s in special education in 1965. Shawn was just a baby when we went. And then she taught in Whitefish after she got her masters, for maybe six or eight years. She never remarried.

MH: She built the house where Nathan and Melissa Richardson live? Right (next to) where you turn to go into Matthew’s (Matthew Loop Road). She lived there until she died.

SV: So you started out in the 8th grade (to Mike) working here, haying and stuff. (Then to Sue) where were you working then?

SH: I was babysitting. I had one brother who was killed in a car accident when he was 20, at Polson. But I babysat for a woman who had six kids. I babysat for her, well, I started in probably third or fourth grade helping her around the house. I stayed (worked for her) with her forever, until I graduated.

MH: In high school I worked for Buff Hultman, who had the 33 Bar, and my mom cooked for him during the summers. (Note: Buff Hultman had married Eunice Wilhelm, and together they purchased the 33 Bar from Eunice’s folks, Babe and Eva Wilhelm. Babe had been a packer, among other things. Buff became an outfitter in the Bob Marshall Wilderness (South Fork of the Flathead primitive area, at that time) and operated the place as a guest ranch for the people he
took on pack trips. Some of the groups he took included the Trail Riders, and the American Forestry Association members. See Ed Foss’ tape transcript and interview summary.) She’d stay in (the wilderness) all summer. I’d go in and out. I did that all the time I was in high school. I worked for the Forest Service after I got out of high school.

SV: Did you learn to cook there?

MH: I cooked a little here and there. I worked for my aunt and uncle, who had the Black Canyon Ranch, at Kozy Korner. My grandparents started Kozy Korner, my grandparents on my dad’s side, Holmes. My aunt owned a pretty big place there, on both sides of the road, as you go from Kozy Korner towards Ovando. I worked there, summers, when I was younger, not even eight years old. And then they sold it all. That’s where my parents met, I think. Doris [Haasch] might know.

SH: You better hurry, there’s only one person you could ask.

MH: No, my brother would know. He remembers all that stuff. He’s three years older. We’ll ask him. He lives in Tidewater, Oregon. It’s the same town, basically, that Howard and Loris Uhl live in. He lives just up the river from them. We went out there crabbing a few years ago, Roger and Jerry Watson, and Sue and I, and we had Howard and Loris over for dinner. (Howard and Loris used to own the Holland Lake Lodge, in the late 1970s and early 1980s.) We are going down again this fall, October.

SV: So why did you decide to be a forester?

MH: Sue went to nursing school in Missoula. We were staying with my Grandmother Matthew in Missoula. There was a forestry technician school that came open through the State (of Montana), where I actually got paid to go to school. I’d worked for the Forest Service before, up here.

SH: And Fred (Matzner – the District Ranger at Condon) was the one that kind of talked you into going to that school.

MH: Fred Matzner used to be the ranger here. Wild man. He was really crazy.

SV: Tell me a story about Fred!

MH: Herb Styler can tell you lots of stories about Fred. Anyway, he talked me into going to this school. When she first started nursing training, I smokejumped. Then, it was easy to get in, because I had a couple of years working for the Forest Service. I worked on trails, fire, timber – just about anything. That fall, when I was done smokejumping, I went to the forestry technology school.
After that, I came back up here and went to work for the Forest Service. Fred Matzner, who had been the ranger then, had quit, and went to work for a private timber company. He wanted me to go to work for him, which I did, and we lived in Lincoln, for two or three years.

SV: (to Sue) How did that play out with your nursing school.

SH: I had quit by then. I had worked in the OR at St. Pat’s.

MH: You were going to O.R. school when I was smokejumping. She was in nursing school when we got married, and at that time, if you got married, you couldn’t finish school.

SH: It was that three year program and they wouldn’t let you finish if you got married.

MH: When I married her she was at Warm Springs!

SH: You had to spend three months at Warm Springs, and I had just finished that when we got married.

SV: Did you ever regret not finishing?

SH: No. I loved working in the operating room at St. Pat’s, and I worked for quite a while when we were in Helena. I never did regret. Up here, what good would it have done me up here?

SV: So you moved to Lincoln . . . when were the kids born?

MH: The boys were both born when we lived up here. I was working for the Forest Service then.

SH: We moved to Lincoln when Paul was born, in 1968. Then Shawn started first grade when we moved to Helena. Or did he start kindergarten there? So we were only in Lincoln for two or three years and then we moved to Helena.

MH: I was working for the company called Montana Lumber Sales. Where the mall is in Missoula, Southgate Mall, they used to have a mill there, they had a mill in Lincoln, and they had a mill in Browning, and a mill in Helena. I went to work for Fred over there, and then he quit. So then I took over his job. He went to California. Then Champion, that owned the Bonner plant, they bought them out over at Lincoln, Browning, and Helena. So I worked for them for a few years. Then I went to work for Shorty Koessler in Salmon, Idaho in 1971. We moved over there.

SV: Did you like the work? What was a typical day like?

MH: Well, I was in charge of getting all the logs to the mill, keeping the mill in logs. So I would spend time with the loggers and the Forest Service, buying timber sales, hiring people to do the
work, building the roads, going to meetings and that kind of stuff. It was really fun, then, because you didn’t have all of this environmental concerns. They were still concerns, but you didn’t spend all of your time doing that. I got along REALLY well with the Forest Service, in Helena and Salmon both. But that was my job, to buy the timber sale and hire somebody to log it, and get it to the mill.

We were in Salmon until 1979. I went to work for Intermountain down there, and then after about three years, they sold out to Champion. So I was back working for Champion again. Champion sold everything, or they were going to . . .

SH: They shut the mill down, didn’t they? And then we left?

MH: Well, we left and I had the choice . . . my boss wanted me to go to Flagstaff, Arizona, to go to work for Southwest Forests, and Shorty wanted me to come up here. Champion – when they had that big office in Bonner where the truck stop is now – I didn’t want to spend my time in that office, so we opted to come up here. We’ve been here ever since.

SV: That was at Shorty’s invitation.

MH: We managed this, and the Ovando ranches, too. We got along really well with Shorty. He took good care of us. So, we’ve been here ever since.

SV: We’ve talked a bit about the environmental situation . . . what was the climate then?

MH: It was just starting, but you didn’t spend all of your time. Now, if you have a timber sale, it takes forever to get anything done with it, because there is so much red tape involved with it. Basically, the Forest Service, I think anyway, was doing a good job. We didn’t have the bug problems that we have now.

SV: What was the forest like on the ranch?

MH: They had just clearcut this section back here (he waves toward the Swan Range and Owl Creek) the year before we got here. Basically I’ve gone through and just thinned some of it out for forest health. Everything was the same, except it was thicker, heavier timber. That had all been cut and replanted, that section which goes clear up to Owl Creek.

SV: Was some of that what was logged when Clarence Stilwell tried to save the trees on the highway.

MH: No, that was logged in 1977 or 1978. The lower end of this meadow (he waves toward the highway) used to be a spruce bog, clear to the highway. When Bud Wolff was managing the ranch (late 1940s, early 1950s) they logged that. They pushed up all the brush into big windrows, because it’s all peat underneath there, so they didn’t burn it. When we got here, I
took the cat and pushed all of it clear onto the gravel north of the meadow and we burned it there, so we could have more hay ground down there. It had been there for a long time. A lot of it was all rotten.

SV: So you came in 1979, what buildings were here then?

MH: The old Holland house had been burned.

SH: The cabins were all built in the 1940s. That one (pointing to the first one out the window of the residence, north of the lodge) was called the Power House, because they had the generators in there before they had power. The next one is the Shower House, and then next one is the Warehouse, where they kept all the food and supplies for the guest ranch. And, of course, they’ve (recently) torn the Lodge down and rebuilt that. This house was here (actually, the house that was there in 1979 burned down in 1990, and was rebuilt on the same site). We haven’t built anything else.

MH: There’s a shop down there (points toward the barn) that used to be over in that first meadow south of the Lindbergh Lake Road, that was an old barn. I had Matthews take it apart and bring it up here for a shop.

SV: At what point did you change from just coming to manage timber and managing the whole ranch.

MH: We were doing it all at the same time. I guess we were still doing it up until Shorty died (in 1987).

SH: He didn’t have any cows at the time. Shorty had sold all of his cows before we came here. Then we started buying cows.

MH: When Shorty died, the boys (Tony and Jim) sold everything in Ovando. Then we just managed the ranch. Basically, we had just logged this (the Gordon Ranch) ourselves, and we had hired people to log over at Ovando. Until the winter of 1996-97 when Sue said the snow is too damn deep, so we bought the Hungry Bear!

SV: A couple more questions before we get to that! Was your management driven more by economics or sustainability?

MH: Sustainability. Shorty had inherited a lot of money. He wanted things to look nice, which is Tony’s same philosophy. He just wants me to do a good job on the logging, and he wants it to look nice, he doesn’t care if he gets any money out of it or not. Both of them, basically, are the same that way.

SV: Tell me about the bug problems now.
MH: I just finished logging twenty acres over there, between the meadow that I was talking about that had the barn in it, and to the south. It was just full of bugs. I just finished taking all the bug trees out of that.

SV: Do you ever remember a time when the bugs were this bad?

MH: No. A lot of people are saying it’s because there hasn’t been that cold of a winter. We were infested with grasshoppers this year. I’ve never seen grasshoppers like we had in the meadow this year. They said it was because it wasn’t a wet enough spring. The ground was literally crawling with grasshoppers out here. I figure we lost well over 500 (five hundred) bales to grasshoppers. Maybe it’s the same as the beetles in the trees, there hasn’t been a bad winter.

SV: The hay that you put up when you first came, fed your own cattle? What about now?

MH: When we first started haying up here we were haying Ed Beck’s place (now George Beck’s), well both sides of the highway at Beck’s. We were haying Warner Lundberg’s place, Leistiko’s.

SH: And Meadow 17 . . . on Kraft Creek.

MH: It used to belong to Frank Jette, but I don’t know who owns it now. We hayed that, we put up between eleven and fifteen thousand bales a year. We had over a hundred cows here, for a while. And long winters. Now, we just hay the place here. We only have one milk cow, and the grandkids horses, and our horses, and a string of mules. And all of the kids’ horses. So we are pretty much just horses now. But still, the number we have takes about 2,000 bales.

SV: Are you getting enough off your own place?

MH: Yeah, but this year I had to hay that meadow south of the Lindbergh Lake road, to get enough because of the grasshoppers.

SV: How old were your boys when you moved here?

SH: Shawn was a freshman in high school, I think and Paul would have been in the sixth grade, and Stacy (who was born in Salmon) wasn’t in school yet.

SV: When did you start getting involved in the community?

MH: We were in the Community Club, Saddle Club, all along.

SH: That was about the only thing that was really here, then. There was no AARP, there was no other organization.

Mike Holmes and Sue Holmes Interview, OH 422-207, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
MH: There was no TV, so people spent a lot of time together. We had a lot of dances at the Community Hall, put on a lot of (trail) rides.

SV: But the Saddle Club was strong, with a large memberships. (MH: Yes, it was) Tell me about the rides.

MH: We used to go up Smith Creek. Everybody would just get together and take a ride up to the top of Smith Creek pass.

SH: We did a lot of snowmobiling.

MH: We had a snowmobile club. Then I started teaching Hunter’s Safety when we first moved up here. In Idaho, it hadn’t been required to have hunter’s safety. But when we moved up here, Shawn was old enough to hunt, but he didn’t have hunter’s safety. Guy Shenks (spelling?) was the game warden. I asked him what I needed to do to teach hunters safety. He said, “Pass the test.” He left me the book and the test. He said “If you get anything wrong, it’s your fault.” He basically gave me all the answers. I started teaching Hunters Safety and have been teaching it ever since.

[End of Side A]
MH: Saddle Club and Community Club were one in the same. We all used the hall. Then I got on the school board at the elementary school, and Sue got on the Missoula County high school board, for Seeley Swan.

SH: Shawn was still in high school.

SV: So, Sue, what else were you doing all this time?

MH: She helped me log, (yeah, I was logging with him – SH) and helped with haying.

SH: And when you were working over at Ovando, Smokey Mills and I were feedings. We fed a couple of winters. (Smokey died some years ago.)

MH: Smokey worked for us. He worked for Lloyd Hahn in the fall (outfitting BMW) and he worked for us in the winter. All through high school the boys helped us, they worked, logging and haying.

SV: So you got on the school board about the time you started in on the gym (to Mike).

MH: Rachel Veilleux and I built the gym. We finangled. We had to do some things in order to get the money to do it, and we did it. We got the gym built. There were thousands of man hours in that project. That floor was a big project.

SV: When did you first get on the board?

MH: Jane Eichman was the clerk when I was first on the school board.

Part of the reason for the gym was that we had basketball practice in the top of the barn. When it got cold, it was a little tough. So then we started hauling the kids to Seeley Lake, when it started getting cold.

I think it just took one year to build the gym. We contracted everything except the floor, which was all volunteer.

SV: I don’t think we were here when the gym was built. We came in 1980, 1981.

MH: That might have been the year. It would have to be around 1980, shortly after we moved here. I don’t think Paul ever played basketball in that gym.

SV: Anyway, the floor was the real time-consuming project.
MH: Those are all two by fours on edge that we nailed together. We had to cut them. A lot of nails in there. I think it was all fir and larch.

SV: So Sue, you went to the high school board, what were the big issues there, for Seeley Lake?

SH: Well, teacher’s contracts were always a problem, it seemed like, every year, and the budget. We changed superintendents while I was there. It was long before they combined the elementary with the high school district. So that wasn’t in the picture. But a lot of times I had to remind them that Seeley Lake was part of the high school board.

SV: And Kim Haines was the principal up here?

SH: Yes.

SV: And Gloria told me, that at the old gym at Seeley Swan High School, everybody had their narrow little space to sit . . .

SH: Right next to the floor. A lot of times we had players in your lap.

SV: Why did you think it was important to be involved that way, in the schools?

SH: Because our kids were in school.

MH: My mom had taught school forever.

SH: Mike always was a coach, and he was coaching little kids, because our kids were little. Not basketball, but baseball and football.

MH: We had little league, and football.

SH: We were always involved with our kids, and that kind of gets you involved in the schools.

MH; I guess we just felt we should get involved with it, is all. I was school board chairman forever, it seems like, but I don’t know how long.

SV: Do you remember any particularly sticky issues?

SH: I remember the teacher who went out and picked up a roadkill and brought it in to teach the kids anatomy. The parents were so upset. There was always something like that.

MH: It always happened in the spring, after too long of a winter.

SH: Spring fever.
SV: I went to a few of those meetings where it was pretty tense in March.

SH: I did two terms on the high school board, but I don’t remember the length of time, three years or four years.

MH: Ask Rachel how long we were on. She’s been at her job for a long time. She was there in 1979 when we first came back.

SV: So, figure mid-1980s, you got out of the school board. When did you buy the Hungry Bear?

MH: 1997. Before that, we logged all the time. Sue ran the cat and I sawed, and we did that in the winter.

SH: And then there was the time when we had the Comprehensive Plan. I was the chairman of that for however long that took. The first one. The County Commissioners came to the Community Club, and so they talked us into figuring up a Comprehensive Plan, and it took a couple of years.

SV: At that time, were people afraid of zoning?

SH: Oh yes.

MH: That was a bad word.

SH: Not so much the word planning, but zoning was a bad word.

SV: So you’ve been involved in the Saddle Club, Community Club, and then became president.

SH: We were involved right away. We were all riding, all the time. I was president of the Community Club for a long time.

I had a terrible time trying to talk people into doing the plan. They didn’t want a plan. They wanted things to just go on the way they had for years.

SV: Is that something that has changed? Today we have the community council.

SH: I think it has changed but I don’t think it has changed for the old people who have been here forever, such as Stylers.

SV: There is still a segment of the population that wants people to stay the same?
SH: Yes. (They bring out a copy of one of the early plans.) So it says here, Al Cluck, Michelle . . . no this was a second plan . . .

SV: So, Mike, you are working on this for the Community Council?

MH: Well, I’m designating somebody else to work on it. But, yes, we are rewriting it again.

SV: Did you feel good about the plan when you got it done?

SH: yes, I did. It’s been changed a lot, several times, but things change. Everything has to change. Times change, people change. Expectations of the valley and what happens, change. You have to go with the flow.

SV: Did you ever think you’d see an end to the timber industry here?

MH: I sure never did. Not like it did.

SV: There still hasn’t been a commercial timber sale since 1984.

MH: They are trying to get one up here on Owl Creek, but it’s a bug sale. But I don’t remember any for a long time.

SV: It’s a big change for your lifestyle, and for the valley.

MH: It’s forced a lot of people to change the way they do things, and to look for different jobs.

SV: So is that a reason why you bought the Hungry Bear.

MH: No, because at that time, things were still ok. She (to Sue) decided it might be an easier way to make a living.

SH: And I’m not sure it was!

MH: We were logging over at Warner Lundberg’s at the time.

SH: The snow was so deep.

MH: We applied for the job managing Liz Claiborne’s place, because we took care of their horses and we knew them both very well.

SH: This was the year before we bought the Hungry Bear.
MH: And Art called us and said we were exactly what they were looking for. They didn’t want to hire somebody they knew. They knew Roger and Jerry, and it was too personal. And I’m really glad we didn’t. Those people actually go through hell up there.

After that, we decided to buy the Hungry Bear. Tony Koessler really helped us a lot in buying the Hungry Bear. If it wasn’t for him, we wouldn’t have bought it.

SV: Tell me about being caretakers.

MH: Actually, we lease the land from Tony. I keep wood for all the cabins and the lodge. If something breaks down, if I can fix it, I fix it. Basically, all the land we can do what we want.

SH: We keep the fences up, and the weeds sprayed.

MH: Keep it looking nice. But as far as when he rents it (the new lodge) we don’t have to worry about any of that. He mostly has Dar Kearney take care of the people who stay over there. Shorty never rented the lodge, or the cabins or anything else. That’s a new business that Tony has started.

SV: Were you leasing from Shorty, in 1979?

MH: No, actually, Shorty hired us to take care of the place.

SH: We didn’t get any money from him but we could earn our living from the land. But we actually lease the place, now. When Tony and Jim took over from Shorty, when Shorty died, we had a different arrangement. We lease the place. We pay for our rent, now. We liked it here so well, that we agreed to the different arrangement. I’m not so sure sometimes if that was a good thing to do.

SV: So it’s not like being caretakers for hire, like at Tranquility?

MH: No, not at all.

SV: Had you ever done anything like a restaurant business before?

MH: We’d never even run a cash register before.

SH: I’d nursed, and kept the books for a logger when we lived in Salmon. I’d never even run a cash register. We’d cooked here, and we’d had branding parties, where we had the pitchfork fondues. The whole valley was invited and we’d have a big branding, and a bee.

SV: Who started the pitchfork fondues?
MH: I went to a bull sale in Missoula, and that’s how they fed everybody. Roger Watson went with me, and we thought that would be a lot of fun. We started doing that every year, when we branded. The people who put on the bull sale were where we first saw it.

SV: To think how many times you’ve done that!

MH: This has been probably our busiest year. And we still have two to go. It’s really fast. You can feed a lot of people. We can feed forty people in forty minutes and we’re done.

SH: Well, there’s a bit of prep work!

SV: What surprised you most about the bar business, outside of the learning curve.

MH: I think what surprised me was that we had to work so hard when we first bought it. We were down there all the time. We were a lot younger then. We learned an awful lot. I’d never cooked behind the grill, dinner. Betty Lake was working, Linda Styler and others. Anyway, Mike Lake had a heart attack. Betty was supposed to be working but she went to town. Linda was at Seeley Lake and without a phone. So there we were. We survived.

Sue did breakfast and lunch, right when we first bought it.

SH: We have never had a whole big problem with customers. Maybe a few. You could count on one hand the people we had trouble with in a year. People are nice, they really are, if you treat them nice.

MH: We met so many people that we never would have met if we’d never bought the hungry bear. A lot of them I still don’t know their names, but I know their faces.

We have employee problems, but you do, no matter what you do. But as far as the general public. I like people. I talk too much. Somebody said I should be a Walmart greeter.

But when I go down, it’s hard to walk through the dining room without somebody saying, Hey! Of course you go over and visit. It’s hard when you are really busy. We’ve met a lot of good people, made a lot of friends.

SH: Mike does the bar and I do the restaurant. He was the bartender. He does all the ordering for the bar, the beer and wine. And I do all the ordering for the restaurant. It just sort of felt that way, didn’t it?

MH: One thing that is hard to figure out, is that there is no way to plan for what is going to happen, as far as how many people are going to come through the door. We keep a calendar, and we have – everybody has – and record the number of people. It will surprise you how close one year will be to the next year. You’ll have a night that’s just horrible. And you’ll look at the
calendar, and it will surprise you how close it will be. It might be the next night, or something. But you look at the calendar, and you can tell.

After Labor Day, it will slow down, and we’ll cut people down to one day instead of two, or whatever.

SV: That all contributes to your knowledge.

SH: A lot of times you can walk through that dining room, in the summertime, and there won’t be a single person you know. Sometimes people come in at 10 o’clock. You don’t have any idea who they are. You wonder, where are they going? Are they going to drive clear to Kalispell or Missoula, at ten o’clock at night?

SV: What has changed the most?

SH: The number of people. Mike was related to just about everybody, when we were first married in 1964. He was related to just about everybody up here.

MH: By marriage, I still am!

SH: No, think of all the summer people.

SV: Where it felt like one big family, now it doesn’t have that connectivity?

SH: No, but there is still that basis. I still think that there is that basic core. Maybe eventually we’ll lose that, but I hope not. The friendships and the way people take care of each other is special. When something happens to somebody, everybody knows it.

MH: Seeley Lake isn’t that way. You can have a fundraiser here, with half the people and get twice as much money as you do in Seeley Lake. There’s nothing wrong with Seeley Lake. It’s just the way it is. The people up here take care of each other, and it’s always been that way, and I think it’s because of the caliber of people that are up here. They look out for each other.

SV: Do you think it has to do with the valley being remote for so long?

MH: It could be, but a lot of people who have moved up here have fit right in. Most of them do. They have the same feeling, it might take them a couple of years after they’ve moved in. I’ve heard people say that this is the only place they’ve ever seen people do that. I’ve done fundraisers in Seeley Lake, and have a lot of friends in Seeley Lake, but they just don’t take care of people the way we do up here.

SV: Why did you run for Community Council?
MH: I didn’t have any ax to grind or anything. I though the community needed a little better, liaison, with the county commissioners. And I think we’ve got that. We can’t do anything . . . we don’t have authority. But we can communicate with the county commissioners. Tell them what some of our needs are up here. I think they are starting to listen.

SV: And the Community Club is just not there anymore.

SH: Dar and I are still on the board, but we haven’t had a meeting in years.

SV: What has taken the place of that Saddle Club, Community Club core?

MH: I think TV has. We used to have a meeting once a month, and you can’t get people to meetings anymore.

SH: community council gets a lot of people.

MH; But that’s when there’s something on the agenda. . . .

SH: The community council has taken over a lot of what the Club used to do. We would communicate with the commissioners. But, it just sort of died out, and I don’t know why. But you just couldn’t . . . that last year we tried to have meetings, it would be Dar, and I, and Pam Hamilton, the only ones who would show up. So now, if there’s some problems with the community club, Dar kind of looks after it, and I’ll talk to Mike, and if we need to put a new toilet in, or something like that we get it done.

SV: So the challenges we face going into the future, are more for the Community Council?

MH: Well, one of the things we are working on now is the Refuse Site, the garbage dump site. And now we are redoing the comprehensive plan. Those are two of the things that are important now. They want to get a refuse site, if it’s feasible cost-wise.

SV: Is zoning still a dirty word?

MH: I think so. If we could call it something else, it would work a lot better.

I think subdivisions are even more . . . the subdivision over on Glacier Creek is a pretty hot item. It’s been changed. They’ve had two or three meetings and people have voiced their opinions. If I lived there, I don’t know how I would feel, but it’s going to happen. It looks to me like they’ve done a pretty good job of laying it all out. I’ve sure it’s going to happen, someplace.

SV: do you hope to retire here?

SH: As long as we are healthy and can stay here, we’ll be here. As long as Tony keeps us, I guess.

Mike Holmes and Sue Holmes Interview, OH 422-207, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
MH: Sue has a house on the lake at Polson, so we could always move over there.

SH: Mom and Dad’s house. We have a lot of good friends over there, a lot of our classmates are coming back, and retiring in Polson. But I don’t know what all of our grandkids would do with all of their horses if we had to leave.

We have six, no seven, grandkids. Stacy’s got a stepchild.

MH: Stacy got married this summer, so they are all married. Now they are all married.

SV: Shawn lives here . . . (he was the coach at Seeley Swan High School).

MH: Paul is in Missoula, and is up here every weekend. He cooks on the deck at the Hungry Bear on Saturdays. Stacy lives in Portland. It’s an eleven hour drive, it’s not that big of a deal, but it seems hard to get down there.

SV: What’s the best thing about living here?

MH & SH: The people.

SV: No hesitations! What’s the worst thing?

(Silence.)

MH: We like the winter. I don’t know what’s the worst thing.

SH: There’s not much bad about it. I know I’d never be able to live in town again.

MH: Other than when you were going to school and I was smokejumping, we’ve never lived in town.

SV: Most people who do smokejumping do it for more than one season.

MH: I did it while she was in school. When she was out, then we moved back up here. My brother did smokejumping, but he was a teacher, so he could do it in the summers.

SV: Why are you still involved in community service?

MH: I enjoy the Community Council meetings. There’s never a dull moment. And I think we are accomplishing something, like the Refuse project, and the dust oil on the roads. I think we have a pretty good communication with the county commissioners, though some of our members think the county commissioners pass everything off on rural initiatives. There’s only so much
they can do, and I get along fine with rural initiatives. I found out we could get some money from Parks and Rec. We got enough money to build the arena down there, and we have enough money coming yet to build some bleachers next year. And it helps to have your cousin approve the money – Jeannie Curtiss approves all of the grant money for the county parks and recreation. I’m sure she would anyway. It’s really been nice to have the funds. There were so many people turned out to build that new fence around the arena. There were enough people that they got most of it done in one day.

SH: They tore down all that wood and put up steel.

[End of Interview]