

**Oral History Number: 221-002**  
**Interviewee: Ray E. Nelson**  
**Interviewer: Gladys Peterson**  
**Date of Interview: April 10, 1988**  
**Project: Nelson Family Oral History Project**

*Note: Ann Nelson, Ray's wife, is also present and participates in this interview.*

Gladys Peterson: —he lives at 3715 Rattlesnake Drive in Missoula. The date is April 10, 1988. Ray, it's a pleasure to talk to you this evening and this will be especially important because the Montana Centennial is coming up and we're interested in finding out why people like you came to Montana, where you came from, what it was like where you came from, so, why don't we just start at the beginning. I've heard from a couple people that you're from North Dakota. Were your parents homesteaders in North Dakota?

Ray Nelson: South Dakota.

GP: South Dakota?

RN: The northwestern corner of South Dakota.

GP: Northwestern. So...

RN: Father homesteaded in 1911.

GP: Your father homesteaded in 1911. And, did you grow up there, then?

RN: Well, sort of. I went to grade school in South Dakota.

GP: Was it a country school?

RN: A country school.

GP: Was there a town nearby at all?

RN: One town about fifteen miles and one about twenty miles, and our main town that we went to was Bowman, North Dakota.

GP: Bowman.

RN: I was 52 miles from there. My grandfather lived there, so that's where we traded most of the time. It was a two-day trip with horses to haul our grain if we had any grain to haul.

GP: Did your grandfather homestead, too?

RN: Yes. Well, in a way - he bought two or three other homesteads.

GP: He must have done that earlier than 1910.

RN: No.

GP: No?

RN: No, it was about 1910.

GP: Well, where did he come from?

RN: South Dakota - Sioux Falls, SD.

GP: I see. He'd been living there and just decided to homestead?

RN: He decided to go west.

GP: To go further west? He hadn't farmed before, though?

RN: Yes, he had a farm.

GP: Near Sioux Falls?

RN: About ten miles out of Sioux Falls.

GP: I see. So, farming wasn't new to him, then?

RN: No.

GP: Well, that was your grandfather. He was pretty far west then. Now, he wasn't born in South Dakota, was he?

RN: He was born in Germany.

GP: Oh, in Germany!

RN: Alsace-Lorraine. Sometimes he was French and sometimes he was German.

GP: Do you remember him pretty well?

RN: Pretty well, yes. He died after I graduated from High School.

GP: I see. Did he ever talk about the old country?

RN: Not too much, except about the way they confiscated animals that they raised chickens and

whatnot. They would raise so many chickens and they'd take so many of them, restricting....

GP: The government took them? People were hungry so they did that, I suppose?

RN: Well, that was in lieu of taxes, I guess. If you raised a bunch of chickens, why then, they would take a certain number of them.

GP: I don't suppose you have any idea when he did come to America?

RN: Sometime in the 1860's. He made four trips up the Missouri River. He came when he was sixteen years old. He made four trips up the Missouri River to Fort Benton on steam boats.

GP: Why did he do that?

RN: Well, a man had to do something.

GP: Well, was he making a living doing that? Did he have goods on it, with him?

RN: Sure, sure. They worked for a steam boat company.

GP: I see. So, he did that before he settled down, then, and farmed? So, you said you went to school there, near Bowman?

RN: That's where I graduated from high-school, but we didn't have an accredited school close by in South Dakota, so the school district paid my tuition.

GP: To go to Bowman?

RN: To go to Bowman High School.

GP: Then, did you live there with your grandfather? Is that where your grandfather was?

RN: My grandmother passed away. There was just my uncle - there was only one boy in the family, and he was the only one left at home, and Grandfather and Uncle lived there on the farm.

GP: Did you intend to farm when you graduated from high school?

RN: I started teaching.

GP: Oh, you did? Where did you teach?

RN: In South Dakota.

GP: In a country school? An elementary school?

RN: Yes, a rural school.

GP: What do you remember about those days?

RN: Well, it was busy.

GP: I'll bet!

RN: One year, I had seventeen pupils and seven grades.

GP: Oh, my! Did you have to take a test every year to get a license? How did that work?

RN: Well, you'd get a teaching certificate, and then you had to go to summer school to keep up your teaching certificate. You'd teach and go to summer school, so I took subjects that I thought would help me if I went on to college. I went and started electrical engineering at South Dakota State one year, but I could hardly make enough teaching one year to go to school the next year.

GP: About when would that have been, Ray?

RN: I graduated in '24 and I started teaching in '24.

GP: When you graduated, were you able to get a teaching certificate right away?

RN: I went to summer school and wrote on the exams.

GP: I see. I've seen some of those licenses or certificates. My husband's grandfather taught like that in Indiana. It had things on it like Handwriting and Geography and History. Is that how yours was?

RN: Everything. Sometimes you had time to get all your subjects in and all the classes in and sometimes you didn't quit make it before 4:00 came. The children stayed until 4:00 then, they didn't leave in the early afternoon.

GP: And you had to build the fire and haul in the water and do all the teaching?

RN: Well, a lot of times you had a well close by, and children like to go and get the water lots of times, but in two or three schools - we didn't have a well. We had to carry our water.

GP: Now, why did you change schools?

RN Because I could do better going somewhere else.

GP: Sure. Did you have what was called a teacherage at each place? Or did you live with families?

RN: I lived with families.

GP: Why did you quit teaching?

RN: Well, like I said, I was hardly making enough to continue my education and then, I just got the idea that sitting around wasn't too good for me health-wise.

GP: Well, you had to do something to make a living, didn't you?

RN: Yes, but I figured I'd rather do it on my feet.

GP: Well, you weren't sitting around when you were teaching, were you?

RN: Well, there wasn't much chance to walk around. You had to sit at the desk most of the time, or just walk up and down the aisle and that would get kind of monotonous.

GP: Well, it isn't for everybody. So, what did you do next, then?

RN: I fooled around breaking horses some while I was teaching school, but I found out I couldn't do that either. I was having back trouble and I went to a chiropractor and he told me that if I didn't quit fooling around with horses, I wasn't going to live to a ripe old age, so I decided I had better quit. And seeing as how sitting around didn't help me either, why I went out to Idaho and went to work for the Forest Service summers. And then I packed apples and did packing house work in the winter time.

GP: What were you doing for the Forest Service?

RN: Working with blister rust.

GP: Blister rust? That was a disease?

RN: That was a disease in the White Pine. Idaho has a lot of White Pine. There's a lot of White Pine in Idaho and I worked in the White Pine forests over there.

GP: Was it easy to get work with the Forest Service?

RN: I didn't have any trouble. I hit them up for a job about the time of the 4th of July and the supervisor said that usually they didn't have as much help after the 4th of July as they did before, because a lot of fellows didn't make it back. So, he said there was a pretty good chance to get on, so I got on.

GP: I am thinking this must have been around 1930?

RN: 1932. I visited and stayed with my uncle first when I went out to Idaho. Uncle was living out in Idaho and I went out there and visited him and worked around there.

GP: Backing up a little bit, you said that the grandfather you stayed with was from Alsace-Lorraine originally. Your name is Nelson. Was this a mixed settlement where your father homesteaded?

RN: No, that was my mother's father.

GP: That's what I wondered, ok.

RN: A. H. Peru - August Peru.

GP: That you lived with?

RN: My other grandfather came from Sweden.

GP: I was wondering about that, because there are a lot of Scandinavian people in the Dakotas, aren't there?

RN: Pretty near as many as in Minnesota.

GP: I guess so. So, that kind of reminds me - I just finished reading the biography of Hugo Aaronson. Do you remember him?

RN: Oh, I sure do! We had a centennial here when Hugo was Governor, and down at the Fair Grounds, [they] put on a show down there for a couple times in a few days. A fellow who was from California was head or chairman of the outfit and had a big meeting and he hollered out and wanted to know if anyone in the group could milk a cow, and Ann held up her hand, so he said, ok, you can milk the cow. So the next time we met, he said, well, did you get your cow, yet? So it turned out it was up to us to get the cow, so we borrowed a cow from a friend that lived down in Missoula, so we took care of the cow - I don't know - three or four days, while the centennial was going on. They put on a show....

GP: They just wanted someone to milk a cow down there? Is that what it was?

RN: Yes, they wanted somebody to milk a cow, so my wife said in order to do things right, why, I'd have to build her a milk stool, so I built a three-legged milk stool. All milk stools had just three legs because they sit better, so I built a milk stool, and I guess we still got it. At the last performance, why, for some reason or other, Ann was milking away and the old cow kicked her over.

GP: Did she get hurt?

RN: Not exactly. It just hurt her dignity.

Ann Nelson: Just knocked me over!

GP: Let's back up now. You say you went to Idaho in 1932.

RN: I went there in 1930.

GP: 1930, ok.

RN: I went to work for the Forest Service in '32.

GP: Ok. Did you say you had a relative out there?

RN: An uncle.

GP: An uncle, yes. Is that why you went to Idaho, because he was there?

RN: Yes.

GP: Were you being affected by the Depression in 1930?

RN: Well, I got away just in time. I left in '29, when things were pretty good.

GP: You left South Dakota?

RN: Yes.

GP: So, you were working with the Forest Service on blister rust. What did you do? How did you fight that?

RN: Well, it's kind of a perennial disease that goes from one year to another. One year it's on what they call a bush, a host bush, and then the spores go to the White Pine.

GP: They travel.

RN: And then, back to the blister rust to the...well, there are two or three different bushes that...like in wheat, why, there's a Japanese bush that black rust goes from the bush to the grain. And it works something like that on trees.

GP: Did you remove it or did you cut the trees, or what?

RN: Well, they did when they logged them, but our job was to pull the bushes.

GP: And get rid of them.

RN: Get rid of the host plants and so I worked for the Clearwater Forest one year, and the next year I got a chance to do a little better on the St. Joe, so they sent me up to St. Joe.

GP: But it was seasonal work?

RN: Yes, seasonal work.

GP: What did you do in the meantime, when you weren't in the forest?

RN: I went down around Idaho and packed apples. If I got down soon enough, before they got the

apples all picked, I picked apples. And I dug spuds.

GP: So this was now really about at the heart of the Depression, wasn't it?

RN: Yes. It was about then, yes.

GP: What do you remember about those years in the Depression?

RN: Well, if you wanted to work, it seemed like you could get work, all right. But, back in Dakota they had trouble because of the dry. That was at the time when Oklahoma and places like that went dry.

GP: Yes, the Dust Bowl.

RN: The Dust Bowl area. There wouldn't have been so much of a Depression, I don't think, if the crops had been good [but] on account of the dry weather and the winds and whatnot....

GP: Do you remember - you were working for the Forest Service - the CCC's at that time?

RN: Yes. The Three C camp?

GP: Yes. So, you were not part of the CCC's, but you were familiar with them and the work that they were doing?

RN: The second and third year that I worked out there, I lived and boarded at the Three C camps. I think it cost us \$25 a month.

GP: You weren't married then?

RN: No.

GP: Were you able to save any money?

RN: Oh, I managed to buy a Model A Ford - not brand new, but....

GP: Did you know some of the people in the CCC's then? The boys in the CCC's?

RN: Well, the first year I worked for the Forest Service, I was in a Forest Service camp, and the next year they started the Three C's. That was in '33. And I was at the Three C camp and the first year they [the boys] were from New York, mostly - from the Bronx. I had quite a time understanding some of them.

GP: I'll bet!

RN: One of them told another fella, "Yous only think yous been woikin jus cuz yo short's doity." So, the next year, they were from Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio. And, of course, they have their

own lingo, too. I was checker foreman, and I was going through an area to kind of see what the country looked like, and I came upon a crew - a three man crew – pulling bushes and, it just happened that the foreman wasn't with them. I smelled cigarette smoke beforehand, and, of course, when I got there, there wasn't anybody smoking. We weren't allowed to smoke in the woods. So, I visited with them a little bit and I asked them how far it was to the top of the ridge. We worked from ridges, and then there are these other crews that came up from the other side. So, like the watersheds in our area, I was up following these creeks or streams that came down from this watershed ridge, and I asked him how far it was up to the ridge, and one of the fellas very obligingly said, "Well, now, I reckon as how it's a right smart piece up to that thar ridge." So I asked the foreman, when I saw him, how far a "right smart piece" was. He said that was the distance I was supposed to go to get to the top of the ridge! But I told the fellas, I said, you know, you can smell cigarette smoke for a half a mile. And they looked kind of sheepish.

GP: They never admitted it though?

RN: They didn't admit it but the foreman said, after that trip he made through there, "You know, I haven't smelled cigarette smoke around that [?] since you went up through there."

GP: You scared them!

RN: Well, I told him that you could smell it for half a mile.

GP: Yes. They have a reputation - the Three C's - of doing good work. Is that what you found?

RN: Yes.

GP: Even the boys from the Bronx and Kentucky learned how to work in the woods, I guess.

RN: Well, they were able-bodied boys and some fellows were pretty good vocalists. Several of them were pretty good boxers. One fellow I remember banning from [it]. I think he was around [?] and was a first class boxer. We used to have boxing matches around between different camps. They were a pretty good bunch of fellows. They all seemed to be willing to work.

GP: Did they like the west? Did they get homesick? Did you run into any of that?

RN: A lot of them planned to come west when they got a chance. They liked it out here. They liked the woods.

GP: They probably did. The west has changed, hasn't it? Well, do you remember any of the other Roosevelt plans during the Depression? Did you have any contact, say, with the WPA?

RN: Well, in 1935, I was back in eastern Montana. I used to go back there in the winter time and a fellow had a sheep ranch and I worked some with sheep before then, and I would go back there - usually about January and February when the apple packing would wind up. So, I could go back and visit.

I worked at this sheep ranch until I'd get the word to come back to work for the Forest Service

again. In 1935, I was back there, and, I had an aunt and uncle that lived in eastern Montana at the time, and a fellow that lived near them had a pretty good-sized farm, and he got a job on the WPA - as a foreman on a WPA job [?] back there in eastern Montana, and they were putting this [?] on the road. That's a red burnt clay that they dig out of the hills. So, when he propositioned me about putting in his crop, I worked for him then, putting in his crop instead of going back. Seasonal work for the Forest Service wasn't too good, but there were a lot of other jobs you could get, of course.

GP: Sure - and you were young and strong and able to do that.

RN: I put in his crop for him and when I got through with that, why, another relation of the fellow I was working for - well, it was his nephew [contacted me.] So, I went up to Fort Peck Dam and worked on the Fort Peck Dam for a couple of years.

GP: That must have been quite an experience!

RN: Yes, that was quite an experience. My brother came up after I'd been working there for about six months. [He was] my younger, kid-brother, and at that time, I had two brothers working on the home place and there wasn't really enough for them to do, the way things were, for two boys - two young fellows on the place - so, my kid-brother, he was always looking for something better ... so he came up and got a job on the dam. He worked on the spillway and I worked on the main dam. We had two days off a week. He had Sunday and Monday off, and I had Saturday and Sunday off, so we went up tramping around the country in that Model A that I had. We drove around and saw quite a bit of the northeastern part of Montana just taking a trip. On nice days we'd drive out...they were digging out dinosaurs near the dam at the time, and we went out and watched the dinosaur diggings, and we went up to Nelson Reservoir and watched them fish. We didn't get a license to fish and we didn't have any reason to fish. I never did care for this "catch and release." I figured if I was going to bother catching a fish, well, I would just as soon catch one to eat. As long as I was working there at the dam, why, I didn't have any reason to ....

GP... to have fish.

RN: I've a niece and her family living there in Glasgow now, so now I could go fishing and give them the fish!

GP: Get them a paddle-fish. Well, you must have a lot of memories from working on that Fort Peck Dam. You're the first person I've talked to that has told me that he did that. That was dangerous work! They lost lives up there, didn't they?

RN: Well, they had a slide up there where they lost a few. And then, a couple fellows got electrocuted, but it wasn't such a dangerous job all the way through.

GP: What were you doing?

RN: Well, I was bending steel the first year. They put [it] in the tunnels. When they cemented up the tunnels, they put steel in the tunnels and then had a grout machine to fill grout around the

steel bars we put in.

GP: You didn't have any experience before hand - was it hard to get that job?

RN: No, they had a machine there. All you had to do was to...

GP...bend it?

RN... and to run the bars that were about 20-25 foot or 30 foot bars, through the machine. They could adjust the pressure on it, so you measured the bars, and when you got through they were in a half circle, and then you measured the bars one point to the other, and if they were off, then you adjusted the machine to make allowance for it.

GP: There were a lot of people up there, then, weren't there?

RN: At the peak, I think there were 11,000.

GP: Amazing, isn't it? You worked there two years?

RN: Practically. I started in '36, worked all of '37 as far as '38.

GP: Well, that was a good place to be during the Depression, wasn't it?

RN: Well, yes, that was all right.

GP: It doesn't sound like the Depression hurt you too much.

RN: Well, like I said before, it seemed like if a person wanted to work, why, you could get a job.

GP: Well, a lot of people had problems, though, that I've talked to. Maybe it was because they were in the cities.

RN: Oh, yes, it made a difference - the population.

GP: I've also talked to people who said that they knew people or they, themselves, were from North Dakota and they came to Montana at that time because they couldn't make it farming in North Dakota. Some of them settled on the west side of Missoula, I understand.

RN: Well, 15-20 of them came out here and worked at the White Pine.

GP: They did?

RN: I know quite a few fellows that worked at the White Pine.

GP: Did they get on during the Depression?

RN: Yes.

GP: So, the White Pine was hiring during the Depression then?

RN: Yes, when the war came along lots of fellows went into war and they even had a lot of women work there during the war.

GP: Yes, the war is really what changed things, wasn't it?

RN: Here, yes. They didn't have much change about the farming back there in North Dakota.

GP: That didn't get any better, did it?

RN: No.

GP: Well, what brought you to Missoula? Maybe I should say, what did you do after you left Fort Peck?

RN: Well, like I said, I used to go from Idaho back to North Dakota and South Dakota in the winter time. When the job would run out there, I would take off and do some ranch work back in North Dakota. My sister was living there with her family and mother was still alive down on the ranch, so I'd go back there to visit and work there at this ranch and be around the family. I went back and forth through Missoula quite a little bit and decided that I didn't like the wind. We'd get our crop in the spring back on the farm, the wind would start blowing and dust would fly a little bit, so the grain would start turning a little yellow. I don't know - I would get a stomach-ache. I wouldn't feel too hot. I got allergic to cattle, deer, and elk ... of course, deer and elk didn't bother back there, but the cattle did. I got out here and it bothered me going hunting or something. One fellow said that if it bothered him like it did me; he'd never go hunting for the rest of his life.

GP: Was it the fur?

RN: The hair, yes. I was walking around through the woods and got on a game trail and my nose would start running and I'd sneeze a little bit, and then, I'd begin to look around and I'd see deer hair caught on the bark of the trees or something on the trees. But it didn't bother me working with sheep, so—

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

RN: —laid off and it was a pretty rough winter back there and they were putting steel in the tunnels at the time, and they had to put two motors on to take a load of steel into the tunnels on account of slippage on the rails out in the drift-over during the winter. The snow was about twelve feet high there in a drift where they had their cars parked out at Fort Peck and I had a job every once in a while with fellows getting laid off to get help them get their cars out of there. I could always start that Model A so I could pull them out. But I said, you dig your car out and I can pull you out. So, we're going into the tunnels and the drift over the rails - the drift-over and they had to put on two ... another extra motor, so I got a job running the second motor. And then, when the job finished and they got the tunnels finished, I got laid off. So, I came out and stopped in at Missoula and got a job working on a ranch.

GP: In the Bitterroot?

RN: No, we were up the Clark's Fork.

GP: Oh, yes.

RN: They had a big ranch up the Blackfoot - Will's ranch. They had a ranch on the Clark's Fork and one up the Blackfoot, and we worked between the two ranches; I went back and forth. Then I worked a couple summers back on the Forest Service out at the Lolo Ranger Station. I was out there for two summers, and I got laid off in the fall. That was a seasonal job on the smoke crew, chasing, and I worked on a lookout, so I went out and got a job topping beets. Then I took a job in the sugar factory, then the war came along. I was working at the sugar factory when Pearl Harbor hit.

GP: Now, somehow or another, we haven't fit your wife into this.

RN: Oh, leave her! (Ann Nelson laughs.)

GP: You better back up a little bit, now. We have to put her in this picture!

RN: Well, that was about then that I had been traveling around working from one job to another, and seasonal work for the Forest Service wasn't paying too much. A fellow had to have something year-around, and so, just before the war, I came up the Rattlesnake looking for flowers one day. A friend of mine I knew from eastern Montana was in the hospital and so when I came to town and heard about it, I decided, well, I should get her some flowers.

GP: So you came up here in your Model A, I'll bet.

RN: Did I have the Model A then?

AN: You must have, sure. You left it parked when you went to the war, didn't you?

RN: Yes, but that was a V-8. I traded the Model A in on a V-8. But anyway, I came up Rattlesnake

looking for flowers, and I stopped in at Jacklin's (they had flowers all over) but Jacklin was raising iris, so he said, go up to Sain's. They got a lot of flowers up at Sain's. He told me how to get to Sain's, so I went on up the road. So I went up to get some flowers. Oh, I don't know. I guess that was the beginning.

GP: That's how you met her.

RN: That's when I met her, yes.

GP: Well, that probably changed your job picture [and] your lifestyle.

RN: Yes, my lifestyle. That's it - it changed my lifestyle.

GP: And you probably settled down a little bit after that, except for the war.

RN: Well, after the war, I decided I had to get a steady job so I went to work for the White Pine.

AN: He worked there for twenty-seven years.

RN: I worked there for twenty-five years.

GP: If you don't mind, let's back up and talk about the war. What branch of the service were you in?

RN: Army Air Corps.

GP: Were you drafted?

RN: Yes. I went down to see about enlisting, but I was too old. They said just wait around awhile and you'll get in anyhow. But they thought I was too old for enlisting. But after Pearl Harbor, I went in to see about it.

GP: Where did you go? What did you do in the Air Corps?

RN: Repaired airplanes. I wound up down in Texas in airplane mechanic's school at Sheppard Field, Texas.

GP: Is that San Antonio?

RN: No, Sheppard Field - that was outside of Wichita Falls.

GP: Oh, Wichita Falls, yes. RN And I went out to California - Douglas Aircraft - and trained there for a while. [I went to] Pendleton Field, Oregon, and spent the winter there; [I went to] Tar Paper Junction, and [I went] back down to California again to San Bernardino. They liked our outfit down in San Bernardino and they would have liked to have had us taken over to the airport over there in San Bernardino, but we had a CO that said, "We're going overseas, and we'll have a

glorious adventure! It will be a grand and glorious adventure!" Nothing doing! He didn't want to stay at ... he said, "We're going overseas!" So, overseas we went!

GP: Where did you go?

RN: India.

GP: India? That must have been a "grand and glorious adventure!"

RN: It was.

GP: Was there a particular kind of plane that you were working on?

RN: Well, we started in with P-40's and wound up with P-47's as it progressed and we got better airplanes. The last airplane I worked on was a C-47. [It had] a 2000 horsepower engine in it. It sounded like the whole country was tearing apart when you started one up!

GP: Do you remember what was going on in the war when you were over there? Was it a pretty active area?

RN: Well, we were in the swamp where they flew them out. We were taking care of airplanes that had trouble or were shot up or something, and got planes ready to fly "over the hump" to China. The rest of our outfit was over in China. They split the group up and they had the 377's stay there in India, and [?] quarter outfit went on with the other service squadron over to China - [?] China. The last I heard was the "great white father" that wanted to go on a "glorious adventure" got mixed up with some geisha girls over there and he was reduced to his permanent rank of ....

GP: Private?

RN: No, 2nd Lieutenant. No, he was an officer, so they couldn't bust him any lower than that, but they busted him to 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant. That was the last I heard of him.

GP: Well, he had his adventure, huh?

RN: So, we were assigned to this other group on this side of the hump, and the rest of them went over on the other side, except the plane that had trouble over there. I never did see any of the rest of the bunch that we were with at Pendleton Field and San Bernardino after we landed in India, because, when the war was over, they started shipping us old men back to the states.

GP: How old were you? What was an "old" man?

RN: Well, forty-five....

GP: Oh, you were?

RN: Oh, I wasn't forty-five, no. That was in '45. I'd be thirty-nine. I was thirty-nine when I got back.

GP: Well, you did your duty. I'm sure that you were a good mechanic.

RN: Well, we tried to keep them going!

GP: Do you have a lot of remembrances about India? Did you get out much, or were you just always on the base?

RN: Well, we were on duty 24 hours a day during the war, but then, after the Japanese surrendered, we didn't have it so bad (steady) then. But, we could get a three-day pass about once a month, and they had a little camp in the Forest Service - they called a "spike camp" - and over there, they just called it a "camp," down on the Ram [?] River. We could get down there on a three-day pass about once a month, and I went down there every chance I got!

GP: You called it a "spite" camp?

RN: That's what they called it in the Forest Service.

GP: What did they call it that for?

RN: Well, I guess that was [like] a spike that you drive into a plank, you know.

GP: Oh, a spike!

RN: Yes, not spite - spike.

GP: Ok.

RN: So, that was just a side deal. They had cooking down there. There were two or three fellows around keeping the place cleaned up and going. The Indians, at one time, worried about the Japs coming. While we were over there, the Japs did get in. At the [?] Breakthrough, they did get into India. That was about forty miles from where we were...

GP: Your camp was?

RN: Yes. They had built - I don't know what you'd call it - a long deal that they fixed up for a shelter so they could leave the town and go across the river to this place that they fixed up. Just about the time that we left there, it was all falling down, so it wasn't built to last long.

GP: Then you came back to the states and were discharged somewhere in the US?

RN: Salt Lake. I joined up at Fort Lewis, Washington, and got out at Salt Lake. I was discharged at Salt Lake.

GP: They have a Fort Douglas there.

RN: Fort Douglas, yes.

GP: Is that where you got your discharge? Yes, I know where that is. So, Lillian's mom was home - and Lillian - and were waiting for you to come back?

RN: Yes, they stuck around here!

AN: (Inaudible.)

GP: Yes. Did you go back to White Pine, then?

RN: I started it.

GP: Oh, you started at White Pine. I see.

RN: I started after the war. I decided that I had to have a permanent job or try to get a permanent job, anyway. A little bit steadier than what I had been doing.

GP: Was White Pine expanding at that time, too?

RN: Well, they were doing pretty good. Oh, yes, they are expanding now. Over TV last night, I see where they are tearing down buildings down there and they're putting up a new building - a five million dollar deal.

GP: They are? I didn't know that.

RN: Yes, they put in a lot of new machinery after I started working there.

GP: Well, you probably saw quite a few changes due to the environmental laws. Did White Pine have to change their operations to conform with the pollution restrictions while you were there? Were they burning sawdust?

RN: When I first started to work there, in the morning, about seven o'clock, there was a black cloud that came up over, so you could see a black cloud over in that direction. And they burned a lot of pine. Of course, that gave a lot of black smoke.

GP: Did anybody say anything about it at the time? Were they concerned about it? Were you concerned about it?

RN: Well, at first, people were glad to get work. It isn't so much the workers that make all the "to-do" about environmental trouble, it's the people that aren't working. Just like the deer eating our flowers - if you don't have anything, it's like, "Gee whiz! Look at that deer out there!"

GP: They think it's pretty.

RN: Yes, to see that deer out there, but two years ago, we were selling twelve - fifteen dozen

glads [gladiolus] a day down at the Bitterroot Floral and last year, we took down two and three dozen a day.

GP: Instead of fifteen dozen?

RN: Instead of twelve - fifteen dozen. We'd spray with egg and water solution, but the flowers bloom out during the night and you have to keep spraying because when they open up, the deer eat the flowers. The buds come out ... and it's just like I say, if you don't have a garden, why, it's fun to see the deer around. We looked out here one time and there happened to be a buck laying down out there. I opened the door and hollered out at him, and there was another one standing just a little ways away, and he laid there [while] two or three times I opened the door and hollered at him. Finally, he got up and walked off.

GP: When he felt like it?

RN: Yes, he took his own sweet time. I didn't go out and chase him or anything. It wouldn't do any good.

GP: Where do they come from? Do you have any idea?

RN: They walk back in the driveways - like where you drove in. I could take you out there now and show you deer tracks on the driveway.

GP: Do they live up on the hill over there?

RN: I don't know. Mostly I think they live down on the creek. Because this old doe that - I called her Moocher - lived in here in our yard, she came around in the daytime until I got to throwing rocks at her and scared her away. Then she started coming at night. And in the fall of the year, why, she came up here just as proud as a peacock to show us her fawn. She brought her fawn along with her [as if to say], "This is the little girl you've been feeding all summer!"

GP: Well, you still have some country life up here, don't you? I mean, with the deer in your back yard?

RN: Yes.

GP: I know they are a problem. Now, did you work on this place when you were working at White Pine, too? Were you helping?

RN: Oh, yes.

GP: Were you doing that at night and on weekends?

RN: We raised strawberries and for two or three years we put out 6000 strawberry plants. One year we raised strawberries. I wouldn't be working Saturdays, and once in a while I'd only work a half a day and I'd go to Butte with Ann and a load of flowers in the panel truck.

GP: It sounds like you just like to work.

RN: Well, I really think that a person can stay healthier by doing a certain amount of work.

GP: Sure, absolutely!

RN: A friend of mine I'd seen once in a while who worked at the White Pine, his father worked there and retired, and in those days, you had to retire when you were sixty-five. That was the end of your work. So, he became sixty-five and he retired, and he was a hard worker. He worked out in the yards handling rough or green lumber, and he retired and passed away about a year after he retired. I'd see Jake once in a while and he'd say, "How you doing Ray? Gee you're looking good," he says. "You got plenty to do - just keep at it. Don't do like my dad did!" And that was his story all the time - "Don't do like my dad did!" Because when his father retired, he figured that he'd done his work and he wasn't going to work anymore. All he did was walk out to the mailbox and get the mail, walk back to the house and sit down in his easy chair. He didn't last very long. So, whenever I'd see Jake, he'd say, "Ray, keep active. Don't do like my dad did."

GP: Well, are you able to do this work by yourself now - you and your wife? [Can you] keep up this place with all your trees and all your flowers?

RN: Yes.

GP: You're still able to do it? You don't find it too difficult or anything? You just keep at it, just plug away at it.

RN: Yes, of course, I wonder now how in the world I ever did what I did around the place and still work....

GP: Eight hours a day!

RN: Of course, you'd have to figure ten hours a day, because you worked eight hours, and then you had an hour off for noon, and it took an hour going back and forth pretty near that you spent [traveling]. Even if you didn't work the whole time, it took you that long to get there and back again. You couldn't do anything here for ten hours.

GP: There are two things I haven't asked you about. One of them was Prohibition. What do you remember about Prohibition?

RN: Well, you could buy a gallon of pretty good alcohol for \$3.50. What did you want to know about Prohibition?

GP: Well, what you remember about it. Did you see a lot of bootlegging going on?

RN: Well, this fellow hauled alcohol - it came in gallon cans like you get oil or gasoline. It would come in gallon cans and he flew back and forth from Minneapolis back to North Dakota.

GP: You weren't living here at the time - during Prohibition?

RN: No. You could get all you wanted to drink if you lived here.

GP: Oh, there was something else I wanted to ask you, too. It's slipped my mind now. But, do you have any regrets that you never got that electrical engineering degree?

RN: No, I guess not. I know a lot of them that did that aren't any better off than I am now.

GP: You've had a full life.

RN: I guess.

GP: And a happy, healthy one.

RN: I could have done a little better in the army, maybe, if I'd have... if a person had graduated from the University or college, usually you could do a little better in the army. You could get in as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, anyway.

GP: Well, a lot of people didn't, though. A lot of very smart people didn't have the opportunity to go to college in those years.

RN: Well, it seemed like I would have like to have gone on to the college part of it, all right, but I [couldn't] figure out how I was going to be able to make the money to go to college - of course, it didn't cost as much then as it [does] now, but then, I got jobs whenever I could get a hold of them when I was going to school.

GP: It was tough, though, to go to college in those years. It wasn't easy for people to go to college.

RN: What you were getting in those days for teaching school, well, I got \$90 one year and I was offered \$100 if I'd come back again, but at the time I'd put in an application at the home school and I figured I could do better staying at home and teaching home school than I could someplace else for a difference of \$10 a month.

GP: What was the home school? What did that mean?

RN: Well, the school that I went to when I was going to grades. The grade school I went to.

GP: Oh, I see - that one.

RN: It was two and a half miles from home. We always called it the home school. A short time ago - you're talking about 1889 - I got a notice that we're having a big get-together back in North Dakota, all the high-school alumni. They sent me word that they'd like to have me come back.

GP: That would be a wonderful experience!

RN: Well, it would be just about like the experience I missed last summer. I had a big doings - the fifty-year celebration of the Fort Peck Dam - and I'd like to have gone to that, but my brother was having his fiftieth wedding anniversary on the same day, and I couldn't hardly get to two places at once. So, I figured I had to go back to my brother's fifth wedding anniversary, so we went back there instead of taking in the doings at Fort Peck. I said before that I had a niece that was living in Glasgow and she has three children, three daughters, and the middle daughter's boyfriend's father had worked at the Fort Peck, and when he found out that I'd have been there if I could have made it, why he gave here one of those deals ....

GP: Programs?

RN...programs telling all about building the Fort Peck Dam. So I got one of those anyway through her and her boyfriend and her boyfriend's father.

GP: I suppose, for the centennial, I should ask you about the brother who worked up there. Did he stay in Montana?

RN: He passed away. He died of cancer about seven years ago.

GP: But did he stay in Montana?

RN: No, he was from South Dakota.

GP: He went back there, then?

RN: Yes.

GP: He stayed on the family farm there back then?

RN: Yes, he took over the family farm. Mother passed away and he took over the family farm. [He] got married and settled down there.

GP: The other question that I wanted to ask you was: did you ever do anything besides work? Did you have any hobbies?

AN: The square dance for fifteen years.

RN: Back there I broke horses for the fun of it. The last year I taught school, the brother of the fellow I was staying with had some horses he wanted to break, so he propositioned me about breaking a horse for him, so he picked out a horse that he particularly wanted broke because the horse's mother was such a wonderful horse. I didn't think too much of the looks of the horse - [it had] big feet and it didn't look too sharp to me. He had some others there that looked like they'd be a lot more fun to ride, but he wanted this one broke, and so we caught the horse. I rode him a while until this brother that I was staying with, he told me that if he didn't have to buy any hay, it

wouldn't cost me anything to keep the horse there for the winter. So I rode the horse back and forth. I had about seventeen miles, maybe, to go from the home place where my kid-brother was living with my mother to where I was teaching school, so I rode that horse all winter. Instead of riding my own, I rode his horse because I'd get free feed. One time it was in the middle of the winter and, it might be kind of a weird story, but in the middle of the winter I was going from home over there where I was staying at about 11:00 at night, and the snow was about six - eight inches deep - crusted, and I crossed the Little Missouri River on the ice, and was riding up a slope from the river, probably about a mile away, and it was about twenty below zero with about a thirty mile wind blowing ...

GP: Oh, my!

RN...and you can't wear a Stetson hat when you're riding like that, so I'd bought a "scotch cap." I don't know whether you know what a scotch cap is - it's a cap that you can pull down over your head and cover your ears. It has a little thing up on the top of it.

GP: Yes, I think I know - a little visor, maybe?

RN: Yes, a little thing sticking out in front - not much. It came down over your ears pretty good. That's how I managed to keep from freezing my ears. I was riding up about a mile after I crossed the river on a gradual slope, heading into the wind, and a rabbit jumped up right under the horses front feet almost. I'd been riding the horse for a short time, but he wasn't exactly broke. He started bucking and, in the meantime, I managed to stay on the horse, but I lost my scotch cap! I got the horse quieted down a little bit and looked back. It was light enough that I could see my cap disappearing downwind. So, I loped back. The horse was pretty excited, and I loped back, got ahead of the cap, and jumped off. The reigns were about six foot long, my arm was about that long, and I reached as far as I could and the cap went by me about six inches. He was broke to lead very good - I hadn't been riding him long enough. So, I watched the cap go on by. I got on again and the next time, I decided that I was going to do a little better, so I run a little farther. I didn't stop too soon that time. I got a little farther ahead, and I got off a little easier and got lined up like I was going to catch a ball playing short-stop and when the cap came along, I grabbed it. I beat the snow out of it and went back over to the horse. I suppose I could have made a mean horse out of the deal, but I felt kind of good about getting my cap back on my ears because they were getting pretty cold about that time. I put my arm around the horse's neck, petted him, and got back on. I don't know - two or three different times that I was on that horse I figured that he helped me a whole lot. We were pretty good friends after that. But I thought afterwards ... they didn't have a "chill factor" in those days. You just looked at the thermometer—

GP: It was a good thing you didn't know how cold it was!

RN: You sucked your finger and held it up to see if it would freeze or not, but you knew when it was pretty cold. I was feeling pretty good about being able to stay on, even if my cap didn't. If I'd have got thrown off or hurt, I thought afterwards, I might have just laid out there on the snow.

GP: When you think back on those things, you wonder how you had the nerve to do them, don't you?

RN: Yes! I wouldn't have the nerve enough to do anything like that now! I don't know - it just went along with the job.

GP: Do you think that it's easier for a young man to get by today than it was in those years when you were going from job to job? Do you think it is tougher today than it was or easier?

RN: Oh, I don't know. It seems like they get by today without doing anything, a whole lot of them. So, it must be easier now.

GP: They get their educations easier, don't they?

RN: Yes.

[End of Interview]