

Maureen and Mike

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Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

Email: [library.archives@umontana.edu](mailto:library.archives@umontana.edu)

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

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**Oral History 425-01**

**Interviewer: Minie Smith**

**Interviewee: Donald Skillicorn**

**May 20, 2009**

Minie Smith: This is May 20, 2009 and we're at the home of Donald Skillicorn and he's talking with Dennis Sain.

Denis Sain: Because Harold went to Lolo for a couple years down there. That's when I.. when Harold went to Lolo that's... I was running that 44 AD6, skidding right away, down Lolo for Henry and Neal. Then they... that's when they were moving Harold in, so Ronnie Wall got that D6 and then I come over the years and run that HD15 up in Dirty Ike.

Donald Skillicorn: (unintelligible) It was mostly (unintelligible) that I remember.

Sain: Well he run the 22B for Harold and then he got the Lorraine.

Skillicorn: Oh, I don't know much around Harold.

Sain: (laughter) Harold is why I became a shop steward. He was doing stuff down there that the guys were complaining. Freddie Gunzel wouldn't... he was the shop steward. He wouldn't do anything because him and Harold bowled together.

Skillicorn: Yeah, I remember that. I thought that was a poor deal.

Sain: They made me a shop steward.

Skillicorn: I remember once (unintelligible) when Francis Smith was my boss that time. He... Ben was driving Cat and he had a choker setter. Francis Smith fired the choker setter and I says, "Ben, what was wrong with him?" He says, "I don't know. It was the best choker setter I ever had." Francis Smith was that way. If he didn't like the looks of you, he'd fire you. I remember one time I was hauling sawyers and swampers out to the woods. One guy just going to work got off the old bus. Francis was there and he asked this guy, "Is that the only pair of shoes you got?" He had tennis shoes on. This guy said, "No, I got a pair of Oxfords at home." He said, "Well, you can go home and wear them."

Sain: (laughter)

Skillicorn: That was that. He was that way.

Sain: Yeah. Elmer Wall would... he said he had his run-ins with Francis Smith several times.

Skillicorn: Yeah. If he liked you, you was in. If he just liked you for a time, he'd just looked at you; you was out. You might as well quit.

Sain: I only met him once. He came back to... I think Ernie Court (?) brought him and Don MacKenzie to camp one afternoon as I come in with a road grader. I got to meet Francis and MacKenzie.

Skillicorn: One guy that hooked on loaders... when we was logging up at Flathead Lake and skidding some of the logs with the loader and we had no one... I thought about him and I lost it again. He had that big ranch up at the upper end of Blanchard Creek.

Sain: Old Troutwine?

Skillicorn: Yeah, Troutwine. One of the Troutwine boys was hooking. Eh, what the heck. Him and Fitzpatrick worked in the shop a lot.

Sain: What?

Skillicorn: In their later years.

Sain: Yeah, later years. No, I couldn't remember. This was in '62. I couldn't remember who... Oliver Spencer was in the shop...

Skillicorn: Yeah

Sain: ..for a little bit. Then when Keith Glover quit.. because they kept the 14A when Bachmann got his twenty-five. Keith Glover was running the 14A. Him and Henry were building McNamara Road. Glover quit and then they... Oliver Spencer took the 14A. I remember, we're slinging tongs, picking up right-of-way(?) in McNamara. Henry and... we were up Ridge Road and Henry and Oliver were using the Cat and the can on McNamara.

Skillicorn: Yeah. Bill Hogan, he was mostly power cell mechanic.

Sain: Yeah and pick-ups. At that time, I didn't know who all was in the shop. This was in '62. '63, Oliver... Cliff Spencer started in '63. I think Cliff Spencer and then Floyd Pomolow (?).

Skillicorn: My brother worked the shop at that time, nights.

Sain: OK.

Skillicorn: He was in the shop at that time. In fact, he was the head mechanic until Bud Wolfe started.

Sain: OK. I didn't know in '62 whether Taggart was still in the shop or he had quit by that time. Bill Taggart.

Skillicorn: I couldn't tell you that either. I remember him being there. The company got part of their ground from him.

Sain: Yeah.

Skillicorn: They gave him an old D6 Cat for it. A heavy blade on it.

Sain: That old 9U, yeah.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: That's all I got right there right now.

Skillicorn: Yeah. You're doing pretty good.

Sain: Once I got started in this project, I was OK. Before I forget all the names, it's time I start writing them down.

Skillicorn: Yeah, the only way I can write names is I got everybody's phone number in my phone book yet

Sain: What we'd like to know: your history of when you started work for the company.

Skillicorn: When I first started working for the company, I was flunking in the kitchen. McEwan was the head guy. He told me he had to send to Helena to get a permit to work me because I was too young.

MS: How old were you?

Skillicorn: Let's see. I was probably about sixteen, seventeen. Right in there. I worked in the kitchen more or less just off and on when I first started. If they needed somebody, they'd come get me. If they didn't, I didn't work. But they did. I got on in about 1939; I got on steady. 1940, 1940, and '41 was when they moved me up to Camp Five to flunky. That's when Uncle Sam sent me a letter that he wanted to see me. I went in the army from there.

MS: Where was Camp Five?

Skillicorn: It's on top of Boyd Mountain. It's kind of on the South side. It's up on top of the South (unintelligible).

Sain: You can go ahead. It's still recording.

Skillicorn: I went to the army and that ended my flunking there. I went in the army two days after my birthday I think. My birthday was April 19<sup>th</sup> and I went in. I believe it was the 22<sup>nd</sup>. I went in at Fort Missoula. That's where I was sworn in at.

MS: How long were you in for?

Skillicorn: In the army. I was in the army four and a half years. In the army infantry. I went in in April of '41 and I was in the army about eight months, in there some place, before they bombed Pearl Harbor.

MS: When you came back, where did you go? Where did you start?

Skillicorn: When I got out of the army?

MS: Yes.

Skillicorn: Right here at home. Not in this house because I built most of this house. It was just one little room. I stayed there and I worked for the state forestry at that time. I was out of the army about a week when the state forester come up and got me and wanted me to go to work. I worked for him for about pretty close to two and a half, three years.

MS: What did you do for the state?

Skillicorn: Pardon?

MS: What did you do for the state?

Skillicorn: I was a scaler mostly and piled brush. I scaled at saw mills around for the state. I scaled up Seeley Lake at Russ Henderson Saw Mill. It was a small outfit. It was on state grounds and I done all the scaling of the timber come in. Nathan Hayes was the state forester. He was my boss. He told me.. one day he says, "There's a gippo hauling logs into this mill too." He told me, "Skilly, I want you to scale this truckload of logs when he brings it in." He says, "I think something's wrong." Something was wrong, too. You're supposed to scale the small end of the log and they were scaling the butt end. He said, "They'd a made a lot more money." So I wasn't very good friends with them.

MS: Did that happen often?

Skillicorn: Pardon?

MS: Did that happen often?

Skillicorn: No. Just that one time when the state forester decided to see what they would do. So I did.

MS: After the state job, when did you.

Skillicorn: I went back to the Anaconda Company. Went to work for.. if I could think of his name. Anyway, I went to work in the woods swamping. What they call swamping. You used an axe and a broken-off, cross-cut saw to limb the logs up. Sawyers, at that time, didn't limb the trees. They had swampers that come along and done it with axes. All they'd do is fall them and

lock them in links (?). Unless we was in tree links logging... sometimes there's just left tree linked and we'd skid in the landing.

MS: How many people would they have doing that?

Skillicorn: I don't know. They had about five Cats, I think, with a choker setter with each Cat. Then you had hand sawyers at that time that pulled cross-cut saws. That's usually about four or five gangs. What they called gangs of saws because there's two men to a saw. They had a saw filer so that sawyers got a sharp saw every day. They'd skid the logs in, a lot of the tree linkages landing and the sawyers on the landing, those two men teams. They'd get two fresh saws a day because they'd hit the dirt too much, sawing on that ground landing You'd team the horses to skid the logs up on skidways to the railroad track. It'd have guys there, what they'd call tailing down. And have.

MS: What was the last thing?

Skillicorn: They'd call tailing down.

MS: Oh, tailing down.

Skillicorn: Yeah. They'd have cant hooks. They didn't use PVs in them days. We'd take them out. It was like a cant hook, but it had a long spike in the end. For a good cant hook man, that spike was in the road. They'd just use a hook and they was good at it. When the camps moved up here. we had a saw mill on the place here. They moved it down on Cottonwood Creeks and we sawed ties for companies. They'd skid the timber in and then we'd saw it up into railroad ties. In fact, my boy done that for a couple years.

MS: This was your family that had the mill?

Skillicorn: It was my family and then we hired three or four local people. Had to cut them in cants and then we had an edging saw that would cut them in the right thickness and stuff. Had an old Russell Steam Engine that my brother run. I had the job.. .the first job was splitting slabs up for the boiler to run.

We hired a cook. The cook was an old family friend's daughter. I went in and helped her cook. We didn't get along too good. She'd make hotcakes and I'd save the hotcakes and use them for potholders. She didn't like that too much. She quit after a while. I had to do most of the cooking. I worked myself out of the job.

MS: So how many people were there working on the mill there?

Skillicorn: Let's see. It'd be (whispering: one, two, three, four) about six.

MS: Six.

Skillicorn: Six, eight. Most of it.. .four of them were my brothers. I was by far the youngest one in the family.

MS: What year was this? What time are we... this is the... late '40s?

Skillicorn: No, that was before the war when I had that job.

MS: Before the war.

Skillicorn: Yeah. That'd be about '38 or so. Might've even been a little bit earlier than that. The camps moved in about '34 and they started building the railroad into where the headquarters came to be. Shortly after that that we start cutting. Moved the sawmill down there and cut ties for them. We cut some lumber for them when we had the mill up here, when they was building the camps. We cut a bunch of the two inch stuff for them out of our own timber.

MS: That was here?

Skillicorn: Yeah. That was right up against the hillside here.

MS: That... does that have a name? The area that this area is called?

Skillicorn: I don't know. Just Skillies you might say.

MS: OK.

Skillicorn: Now they call it.. .they call it Skilliville now, but that's just in later years. I went to grade school down the road here two miles, until we moved up here from Billings in 1930, when they bought this place. I went to grade school there.

MS: What was the school called?

Skillicorn: Park School. It was a split district. Ten and seventeen. It was in Powell County and Missoula County. I graduated from there. When I got out of eighth grade and went to...me and two other brothers went and found what they call a drag saw to sell wood for the ACM camp. I got my education splitting wood all summer long.

MS: That was called a drag saw?

Skillicorn: Yeah. It was a drag saw. My brother Murray made it right up. Gas engine and we was sawing in an area down here, what they call the James Place. It had an awful lot of cull logs in it. My brothers would skid them cull logs with an old truck. They'd skid them up to the drag saw and then saw them into blocks. We'd haul the blocks down to the ACM camp, put them all in a row there, then get on top of them with splitting logs (?) and split them into firewood.

MS: It was a big job.

Skillicorn: Yeah, it was. The head cook, he sent my nephew. he was flunking there at camp that time. He sent my nephew and told us not to split it so small because their kitchen stove was a lot different than our wood stove. It took bigger wood.

MS: How many students were there in the school? How big was the school?

Skillicorn: It was probably about six or eight. All the grades.

MS: So it went up though... what was the...

Skillicorn: Eighth grade. Yeah.

MS: After you graduated from school, you went.. .that was when you started with...

Skillicorn: That's when I started working. That is the most heavy work. I never went to high school. Eighth grade was as far as I went. Most of my education was just learn how while you're working. On the job.

MS: That's often the best kind.

Skillicorn: Yep. I thought after I got older and was. logging camps it was ended. You get these foresters in out of logging school, forestry school. I had a secretary and they'd leave notes. I'd have to get her to see if she could read them. I couldn't. She'd manage to figure out what they talked about. They wrote like doctors instead of foresters.

MS: How long did the mill stay.. .did you have the mill here?

Skillicorn: Pardon?

MS: How long did you have the little saw mill here?

Skillicorn: Oh, not too long. Got rid of it before I went to the army. Got rid of it after we quit cutting ties for the company. We used to cut...when we was cutting lumber in the '30s, they would cut clear pine out of our timber here. People'd come and sort it out, if they wanted it for \$16 a thousand foot. So there wasn't much money in it, just like everything else in them days. There wasn't any money in anything.

Sain: I probably bought you \$50 worth of clear pine out in the shop.

Skillicorn: Yeah. Right after I got out of school, I was working for Mrs. Wolfe; lived down here. She remarried. Her husband was from Chicago and he was a steam engineer. He had to go back there to keep his license going for a while, so she hired me to do the chores around there. It had an outside pump and it'd pump water. She was doing the laundry for lumberjacks from headquarters camp and camp two and I'd pack all that water in. She'd heat that water and do everything. I'd get the wood in there and milking six cows a day, twice a day, for 50 cents a day. Put up two months and then I quit.

MS: Headquarters camp was where?

Skillicorn: Pardon?

MS: Headquarters camp.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

MS: Was. Where was it?

Skillicorn: Camp one was there at Woodworth.

MS: At Woodworth.

Skillicorn: It's just a short place from where she lived.

MS: And camp two? The other one?

Skillicorn: At Shanley Creek. That's...

Sain: S-H-A-N-L-E-Y. Shanley.

Skillicorn: It's a little creek that runs..as you go towards the Vandround Loop (?), it crosses the road down there. People by the name of Swanson own that now. That place there... so much of that place has changed hands. This guy by the name of Dilts (?)had a big meadow there, alongside of where headquarters camp was. We wanted to ask MacKenzie... he was the superintendent. Wanted to use the water out of the creek. It was coming down near part of Dogwood Creek. The guy that owned, had the water right on it, wouldn't let MacKenzie have it, so they dug a ditch clear up to what they call Spring Creek, up in the foothills, and piped the water to camp. MacKenzie put a railroad track right through his meadow because they had the right of way to go there. So he put a railroad track through the meadow.

MS: When you came back from the war you... and you said you went to the state forestry and then you worked for Anaconda after that?

Skillicorn: Pardon?

MS: After you worked for the state, after the war...

Skillicorn: I went back to Anaconda Company. I worked for... my boss' name was Joe Grace. First one I went to. He was a French-Canadian and he was an old-time logger when he used to run the river. One of his favorite expressions, when he'd get to drinking, was, "Hop high while your log strikes." That was an old saying as a river driver's curse. You wore spiked shoes and you rode the logs down the river. You had a long pole that you separated the logs with as you went down to keep them straight.

MS: So they would ride all the way down from the camp?

Skillicorn: Yeah. All the way down. Down the bottom from...

MS: What did you do for him?

Skillicorn: Huh?

MS: What did you do for him?

Skillicorn: I swamped in the woods to start with and then I set chokers for him. This Francis Smith had camp three. His scaler, for scaling out, fell and broke his arm. He was. Richard Dicks was the manager in Bonner and it was his boy. He fell down, so Francis had to have a scaler. They knew I'd scaled for the state, so I went to work scaling for Francis Smith.

MS: Did you like that better? Or was it just different?

Skillicorn: Oh yeah.. a lot of work. They had probably six gangs of saws. They'd be spread from one section corner to the other. Francis Smith wanted me to scale them twice a day to keep up on them; so I did. This young fellow, Dicks' son, came back to work after he broke his arm. I was out with him showing him around when we was working and he fell down and broke his arm again.

MS: Oh no!

Skillicorn: So he said, "The job's yours Skilly, I don't want it." I scaled for about eight years for Francis. When he retired why he had done. MacKenzie, the logging superintendent, had me take his place as log foreman from then on.

MS: What year was that?

Skillicorn: I can't remember what year that was. I know it was when we first got two-way radios.

MS: That's OK. So you moved around to different areas then...

Skillicorn: Oh yeah. That's one thing I really like about logging: every place you went was different. Different than.. of course, we logged all the real good ground first and then wound up having to log a lot of steep ground which wasn't much fun.

MS: Did Anaconda leave a lot of the trees or was there...

Skillicorn: Quite a few. We.. when we... when I was scaling and running the saw gangs, you cut on a diameter limit. The tree had to be . if it was larch, it had to be 16 inches diameter. If it was pine, it was 18 inch diameter. Your fur, you cut most of that because that was considered a very good tree. I think it worked a lot better than it did after they put a lot of foresters out there,

marking trees to cut. They sawed trees that really should have been cut. Francis Smith told me, he says, "Skilly, if you see a tree that's marked to leave and you think it needs cutting, you go ahead and cut it." So I did. They'd, some of them just out of school..they didn't know as much about what a tree looked like as I did at that time.

MS: I'm sure they didn't. They had book experience, but not real experience.

Skillicorn: Yeah. Like the one forester was logging up, Bear Creek (?) I guess it was. He marked a bunch of trees and he went up to Francis Smith and says, "I marked a bunch of trees up there in them rocks. I don't know how you're going to get them, but I marked them." Francis got so mad at him. He said, "If you don't know how I'm going to get them, what'd you mark them for?" They didn't know much about logging. I can remember, one time, we used to do quite a bit of hand logging in steep ground. Francis Smith, he was in charge of the railroad crew that loaded logs on railroad cars. He would fix it so that whenever the train couldn't make it up from Bonner and they didn't have nothing to do, he'd take them and put them up someplace where it's real steep and hand log it. It worked pretty good.

MS: So that was how he got the steep logs down?

Skillicorn: Yeah. Where the ground is real steep. Years ago, after I got superintendent, I had a couple of rubber-tired skidder operators told me they didn't have enough winch-line to reach some trees on real steep ground. I says, "Well, we'll show you how to do this." I got a couple of PVs and a couple of axes. We went up on the hill and showed them how to roll them over on the belly, sipe (?) the end, turn them loose, and down the hill they'd go. They thought that was great; they wanted to do more of that.

MS: Where were some of the places that you logged around here?

Skillicorn: Oh gosh. I don't know. Just about every place. A lot of Boyd Mountain and a lot over around Shanley Creek, all that country. Up around Cottonwood Lake, up in that country. Up back at Big Sky Lake, all that hills back in there. We logged this steep, these hills back here. Had the railroad track right in front of the property here. They had landings down there and we skidded them logs for two miles down with D8 Cats with no blades on them and no winches. They didn't have winches on the Cats until later years.

MS: Was two miles a long skid?

Skillicorn: Two miles away.

MS: Was that a long skid or was that an average length?

Skillicorn: That's very long. Takes a lot of time. You only do two or three drags a day. At the time, the choker setters. they had choker setters with them and they would stay out in the

woods. You had two sets of chokers that you hooked behind a Cat. While they'd go in with one drag full of chokers, you set the next drag in around on the logs where you're coming back to. He'd pull into and then you'd hook him up to them again. He'd take off again. Then you had to hit the chokers you used. You used them again. You done that all day, but a lot of places you only made two or three drags a morning or afternoon if you was lucky. If we skidded up.. I don't know whether it's Blanchard.. .no, wouldn't have been Blanchard Creek. Up Pearson Creek. We skidded one place for a long ways because it was made for a truck road when they first started trucking. The weather got too bad. They couldn't truck it so we had to skid it. That was another couple miles skid.

MS: How many logs would you take on a skid there? Does it depend on the size?

Skillicorn: About thirteen. You had...when they first started that, they used to make their own chokers. You'd get the lines from the Butte mill. When they would get rid of it or get so one wasn't safe, they'd send it out in the woods and blacksmiths would cut it into links, put ends on it with babbitt, and a hook on it. That's what you used for chokers and seven-eighths chokers. You get a hold of one of them and if it wanted to go one way it went that way. Couldn't hardly bend it. They'd go to put them in the choker fantail box and they'd twist and turn. You had a terrible time getting them in. And last, when we finally would up, we used real small chokers, done the same thing.

MS: And that worked better?

Skillicorn: Yeah, much better.

Sain: I have one... two of them old babbitted chokers.

Skillicorn: Did you?

Sain: I found one over here when Ed and I were building the road in Cottonwood.

Skillicorn: Uh huh.

Sain: With the hook babbitt on a hook choker.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: It had one of them seven-eighths mine cable ones. I took them to that seminar.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: Then I found a three-quarter button-button choker, where you had skidded in the Gold Creek burn.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: One of the Cats had lost it. Brand new. It had only been .no kinks in it. I blame. Huey lost it. That's what I thought.

Skillicorn: Yeah, we had a lot of experiences though the years. 35 years of it. It's hard to remember it all.

MS: It's a long time.

Skillicorn: Yeah. But it was a job that I loved. I loved working in the woods. Main reason was you was into something different all the time. Different ground, different timber.

MS: Did you pretty much work with the same crew of men all the time? Or did that...

Skillicorn: I had about the same crew most of the time and I was pretty lucky. I always had a good crew. We had three crews working for Harold Smith and Larry Smith and our crew would beat them in production every day. Pretty near so Al Lawson's boss was going to fix that so he switched me with one of the other crews. Then that crew started to get a bunch of logs so I went back to my original crew.

MS: Sounds like they had a good leader.

Skillicorn: If you work with people, you got to like them and they got to like you. That's the only thing I could ever figure out. I had one guy working for me one time and some of the guys says, "Why don't you fire him?" He was kind of an ornery guy. I says, "Oh, he'll make it." I worked with him and he worked with me and turned out to be one of the best hands I had.

MS: You were very patient then.

Skillicorn: Yes. He had worked for some gyp. Most of them are hard to get along with to start with because every penny they lose they lose out of their pocket.

MS: When did you two... when did you, Dennis...

Sain: In May of 1962 when I started.

Skillicorn: When you started?

Sain: When I started working. I come up in the woods. I come to camp that first morning in late May. It was after Memorial Day weekend. You were in Dirty Ike and Dawson said, "You're going with that man there." You told me to go back to Bonner. Everybody...the crew was meeting at the Y. So I went back to Bonner and we went to Dirty Ike and.

Skillicorn: You didn't want nothing to do with Dirty Ike, I tell you.

Sain: Well I set.

MS: Is it pretty steep?

Skillicorn: Oh, real steep.

Sain: You set me up setting choker. You got Keith Glover running that 44-86.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: Had me setting chokers for Keith Glover...

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: . up there. We were right in the bottom of Dirty Ike, where the switchback in the bottom, where you leave the creek bottom. You were just finishing up. Then we moved to Kendall Creek.

Skillicorn: I hate that Dirty Ike. I'd be down in the bottom of it and I could hear rocks rolling. I'm praying that somebody wasn't rolling a Cat or something.

MS: They were rolling down the...

Skillicorn: Yeah, rolling down the steep hill. It was bad country.

Sain: It was about sixty, seventy percent. It was...you couldn't climb it; you had to go back trails.

Skillicorn: Yeah, we had one place we sawed in Dirty Ike. It was so steep. Don Montillas (?) was working for me. He went around to skid one place. There was a lot of rocks and stuff and he got hung up there in them rocks. I didn't want him to try and come down. That thing was steep and we, if I remember right, sent another Cat. We had a long line where we used to pull the brush down with. That Cat went up and hooked on to Don Montillas (?). The first pull that pulled on him, it pulled the handle off of that cable. Don finally brought that thing down.

Sain: Led him over the cliff, yeah.

Skillicorn: Yeah. Old Bob LaProwless (?) was the one that marked that timber. I can't remember who the woods boss was at that time, before Cory Cork (?) was working with him. What the heck was his name? When I first met him, he had gray hair and was gray-haired forever. I can't name. I came up and showed him. He came out in the woods. I drove across the draw from him

and showed him where the heck the Cat was. He about had a fit. Says, "Who the hell marked that timber?" I said, "It was Bob LaProwless." He was unhappy.

Sain: There's still some belt logs (?) in Dirty Ike we didn't get.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: The saws fell them and there was just no ways getting a Cat to them.

Skillicorn: You couldn't get to them. No. That's when timber marks first started marking timber and they didn't know how to get it or anything.

MS: Do you need to stop and have some food?

Skillicorn: Pardon?

MS: Do you need to stop and have some food? Because we can...

Skillicorn: Chop them down?

MS: No, do you need to stop this and eat something?

(Woman in background): Do you need to test your blood, Don?

Skillicorn: Oh yeah, we had lunch at noon.

(Woman in background): Do you need to test you blood now, Don? Skilly?

Skillicorn: I got about eight minutes yet.

(Woman in background): I'm off by eight minutes, sorry (laughter).

Skillicorn: You got to be right on time.

MS: That's great. What was your favorite area that you liked?

Skillicorn: Gee, I don't know that I ever had a favorite area. I guess you might say Gold Creek was probably one of the best areas. We was there the longest. Was there long enough you could see it growing back up again before we was finished cutting.

MS: How long were you there? I mean, a year?

Skillicorn: Gold Creek?

MS: Yeah

Skillicorn: Must have been there pretty close to 27 years because that's when I lived in Bonner. I rented a company house.

MS: On the. which one. which number was that?

Skillicorn: I think it was 41. I'm not sure. It's still there. I don't know why they even want to move them houses. They ought to just burn them. Ten foot ceilings and wind blowed down the river and blowed the curtains right away from the wall, the windows.

MS: It didn't have any insulation.

Skillicorn: No insulation. Built in 1910 I think. They didn't amount to much.

MS: Did you have... did it... how was it heated? Wood? Or steam?

Skillicorn: Propane. And I put a little wood stove on the back porch. Bring wood home from the woods and that would work it. It didn't amount to much. It was just a porch, kind of. Closed in porch.

MS: Did you prefer to live here in this area...

Skillicorn: Oh yeah.

MS: . Than in Bonner?

Skillicorn: Yeah. When I quitted, my boss says, "Skilly, you got to take four weeks of vacation at once this year." I says, "Four weeks! That's too long." Yeah, we went four weeks. I put the four weeks in and it got where it felt so good that, when I went back to camp, I told them I was through. (laughter)

MS: When was that?

Skillicorn: That was in 1981. November, I believe.

Sain: Yep.

MS: Then you worked part of the time for Champion.

Skillicorn: Yeah. Anaconda sold out to U.S. Plywood and then U.S. Plywood turned into Champion.

MS: Was it different working for Champion than Anaconda?

Skillicorn: In some ways, I think it was. One thing, I was the one foreman that never lost a minute's work. They kept me right on. I was guard at the camp part of the time. Then I went right back to work for them.

MS: In that transition period, you mean, you kept working?

Skillicorn: Yeah. I never lost a penny.

MS: There weren't many people who were kept on were there, during that transition?

Skillicorn: No, there wasn't very many of them. Of course, they kept the forester on, Ernie Corik (?) and a couple of his staff. While I was working there, I worked on some of the cars that needed worked on; put a new starter of some of them and other things like that. I could work... what I could do in the shop.

Sain: When did they make you logging superintendent? I know it was when Dick Black left.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: But I don't... what year was that?

Skillicorn: There's a few things I want to change, especially with the trucks. They'd talked them in for leaving their trucks down at Bonner. Then, somebody could go down and get them so something, say they've worked on them (?). I didn't think that was such a good idea, so I had them put electric pulse in the YR shop and made all the trucks come to camp. It made quite a few Bitterrooters kind of unhappy, but at least we had the trucks there where the mechanics could check them out nights and do what they thought needed to do, not just what the truck driver thought.

Sain: If it was Elmer Wall, you just had to have more power every time you came in the shop.

Skillicorn: Yep. He was one of the unhappy ones. He was living up around Hamilton.

Sain: Every day.

MS: So you kept the same vehicles over a long period of time?

Skillicorn: No. About average three years or so, we'd change. It would be my job to order new trucks. I'd go to different dealers and get all their ideas, what they thought was the best trucks and a lot of the drivers and what they thought. I kind of put it all together and put in our bid for that type of truck. I usually got them all.

MS: How often did you have to change the Cats? How long did they last?

Skillicorn: Until they wore out (laughter). That wasn't that often, but you had to get something new because they remodeled them so much. Like what our old Cats start with is gas tanks and gas Cats and no winches, no blades, no nothing. No cab on it or anything. We gradually worked out of them and got into Cats with winches on and newer gas. We got diesel gas instead of gas and it kept working out, but my pride and joy mostly was the rubber-tired skidders. I liked them real well. It was truly good in the woods, but you had a place for them. You couldn't go where a lot of the Cats could.

One nice thing about them... I had a log (indistinct) on state ground, out of Twin Creek, and it was up real high. I can't think of the.. I think his name was Myers or something like that, was a state forester. They had a limit on stump heights. I think it was 14 inches, something. I told two of my sawyers, I says, "If you want to do a good job, cut those stumps as low as you possibly can." And they did. That state forester, he was so tickled at that. I was too because your rubber-tired skidders could drive right over top of the stumps; even your Cats wouldn't get hung up. He, this forester, wrote a letter to the company saying how good a job we done up there on that piece of ground. That's something new to get out of the state. They usually find something wrong. We got a good job. Jim Shaft was one of them sawyers. He was good.

Sain: Jim Shaft could BS half the day and still beat day's pace.

Skillicorn: Yep. He really liked to talk, visit.

Sain: Yeah (laughter).

Skillicorn: But he was good.

Sain: Yes.

MS: Do you have any favorite stories that.

Skillicorn: Any what?

MS: Favorite stories of things that happened when you were out in the woods? Probably have many.

Skillicorn: Yeah. One thing I like real good: the crew I had would get the big shots back from New York for the company and I'd tell the guys, "I don't want all the Cats coming in at the same time or something." There wasn't the time to unload and get back out so nobody's sitting around. Boy, they done that. They put on a good show. They'd come in and get unhooked and by the time they got back out there, another Cat would come in and it worked out real good.

Sain: They had to sit down on the stump and discuss that a while before they came in, some of them.

Skillicorn: Yep. But they done good. There was no use of them just driving in on the landing and sitting there for twenty minutes. I'd rather they sat out in the woods where somebody couldn't see them.

MS: Have we gotten to your eight minutes? We don't want to...

Skillicorn: Pardon?

MS: Have we gotten to your eight minutes? We don't want to...

Skillicorn: Yeah. It's a couple minutes past.

(BREAK IN TAPE)

MS: You were talking about Ovando as being...

Skillicorn: That's where I was born.

MS: You were born in Ovando?

Skillicorn: Yeah, right next to Colburn's (?) store up there. Used to be Kilburn (?) at that time. In the middle of Ovando. We moved to Billings when I was a year old. Moved back in when I was eleven years old.

MS: So what year were you born?

Skillicorn: April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

MS: You had all your 19s (laughter).

Skillicorn: Yeah. I had it done that way so I could remember it (laughter).

MS: You. there was logging in Ovando.

Sain: Yeah.

MS: Then you went back later on and did some of the logging there.

Skillicorn: Where at?

MS: In Ovando.

Skillicorn: Yeah, out of Ovando, yeah.

Sain: That'd be the best place to log really.

Skillicorn: Two Creek Ranch. We logged all that. The company had a timber deed on a lot of that ground up there. They owned the timber, but they didn't own the ground. That was some of the best logging I ever run into. Some of the biggest. Flat ground, meadow. Had a guy...

Sain: Up by Doney Lake, you logged that one winter.

Skillicorn: Huh?

Sain: In Doney Lake.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: That was good. That was all winter. That was some of your best logging.

Skillicorn: That was good logging up there. We had two crews logging up there: Larry Smith's was logging and I was logging. I had a loading operator by the name of Spooner and he was getting lots of logs in. He says, "Skilly, why don't I catch a truck early and we'll go up and we'll start logging early. I says, "OK." But when the other crew started to work out there and saw two of my trucks going to town already they didn't care too much about that. That Spooner, he was an excellent loading operator.

Sain: One of the best.

Skillicorn: Yep. He was one of the best.

Sain: And the guy that Orville Spooner trained, Les Zimmerman, was just as good as Orville.

Skillicorn: Yes. He had a good teacher.

Sain: Yes he did.

MS: Was that mostly pine up there? Or what kind of..

Skillicorn: A lot of yellow pine.

MS: Yellow pine.

Skillicorn: Yep.

Sain: We got several four-log loads out of there.

Skillicorn: Yeah. It had been logged... some of it had been logged before, too. Or a lot of it.

Sain: Rossignol (?).

Skillicorn: Rossignol, yep. Rossignol sold out to a guy by the name of Wolfcule (?). Then he moved up to Thompson River country to log.

Sain: We have a cabin up there, at Noxon Reservoir, just below where Wolfcule's cabin is.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: Old Al's.

Skillicorn: I don't know how many of his family is still alive. He had a couple boys, I guess.

Sain: They. he died and the family sold the cabin.

Skillicorn: Did they?

MS: Were there particular areas that were particularly difficult? You mentioned Dirty Ike but were there other areas that were particularly difficult to log?

Skillicorn: No, not really.

Sain: Allen Creek had some steep.

Skillicorn: Yeah. That was really steep. That Dirty Ike and a couple of them was steep. Along towards the last, you run into quite a bit of steep ground. The heck of it is, the logging superintendent didn't have nothing to do with putting the roads in. They put a lot of roads in we had to Cat skid, when it should have been roaded up to be line skidded because it's so steep for Cats.

Sain: I still say, after building road, that the guys locating road. the only reason they hung the ribbons was so they could find their way back to the truck.

Skillicorn: Yeah, right. One thing I always hated was that they never put a place to turn around at the end of the road (laughter). It'd just do dead road, quit and back out.

Sain: Yeah, with a road grader that wasn't fun sometimes. You'd have to back a half a mile.

Skillicorn: I know it. But we did log pretty near all company timber. I did log one state and one forest service job. I got along good with both of them.

MS: So that... you mean on forest service land or in...

Skillicorn: Pardon?

MS: On forest service land? Is that what you meant by that? You were logging on...

Skillicorn: Logging... timber company had bought off the forest service or off the state.

Sain: Now didn't...In Gillespie Creek, didn't the company buy some of that when we built the road in Gillespie?

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: You logged in Gillespie Creek.

Skillicorn: Yep.

Sain: That was a joint cost share with the forest service, when we built that road.

Skillicorn: Yep. I always hated the forest service built road. You had to sort every little twig out of the dirt and everything. You couldn't have nothing in that dirt or anything. I'd go on there and log it and skid right across it. It's stupid. They spent an awful lot of money making it like a regular highway and then you go in and tear it all up when you go to log it. I could never figure that one out.

Sain: On the road building crew I always argued that with them. That.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: Why do we have to build a superhighway because the loggers are just going to tear it up.

Skillicorn: That's right.

MS: Did somebody have to go back and...

Sain: Yeah, we had to go back and then fix it afterwards.

Skillicorn: Fix it up, which paid for it twice.

Sain: You had to do that anyway. Yep.

MS: Are there other areas that we should cover?

Sain: His home band.

MS: Oh yes. Tell us about your band.

Skillicorn: About my band?

MS: Yes. I hear you had a band.

Sain: Kozy Korner Skilly Band.

Skillicorn: We had. to start with, we had an eight piece orchestra all in the family. We used to play up in Swan River, Ovando, Helmville, and around. I started playing drums when I was thirteen years old in our band. As I got older, they fell out, so it wound down to about four or five of this, and then it wound down to three of us. We played all around Seeley Lake and everywhere.

MS: Did you play the fiddle too?

Skillicorn: No, drums. I started out when I was about eleven years old. I played the piano and then the family got a set of drums, so that ended the piano playing.

Sain: I remember being over at Kozy Korner and you playing your washboard bass over here.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: And Bob Signs was up playing.

Skillicorn: Them was pretty good parties.

Sain: Yeah (laughter).

Skillicorn: They really wasn't very legal, but they was parties. Some of them old Cat tracks I sold and stuff that is all supposed to go through the warehouse, but I didn't bother with that. I got by with it. Maybe we shouldn't put that in (laughter).

Sain: It's too late now (laughter). Statute of limitations is long gone on that.

MS: The company's gone (laughter).

Skillicorn: That's one thing I hated about the superintendent job: you couldn't buy what you wanted to at the time you wanted to. You had to get it all put up for bids and there's once a year deal. By the time we got a hold of it, everybody else had had it for two or three years. Like with line skidding. We was about the last ones in the Blackfoot Valley to ever have a line skidder, I think.

Sain: Then you started with the Banums (?) and they couldn't go that far.

MS: Banum is a . ?

Sain: Brand Name.

Skillicorn: Banum was a small loader.

Sain: I think there's still one of the old Banums left down by Darby.

Skillicorn: Oh?

Sain: I was seen it, saw it sitting back in somebody's field. After they cut... The Banum had that heel boom to start with. Then they chopped it out to make it a straight boom. One of them with the chopped out straight boom is sitting down by Darby someplace.

Skillicorn: I didn't gain much by that, but some.

Sain: No. Then they bought the Skagit.

Skillicorn: Pardon?

Sain: They bought that Skagit.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: That was after they bought the Banums. That was...Chuck Clark, he quit driving truck and went running the Skagit.

Skillicorn: Yep.

Sain: But that was down at Fish Creek most of the time.

Skillicorn: Yeah, I went back to Iron Mountain, Michigan to get that.

Sain: Yeah.

Skillicorn: That and a logging truck were the...

Sain: Oh no. Not the self-load. The Skagit, the skidding jammer. They bought it from out on the coast.

Skillicorn: Oh yeah.

Sain: It was down at Fish Creek most of the time.

Skillicorn: Didn't.. what the hell was his name? I can't think of the guy that run that when they would gyp on it.

Sain: Yeah, Chuck Clark. He would drive a truck and then he went on the Skagit. Then he...I don't remember. He quit. I can't remember when he quit.

Skillicorn: No, this guy was a mechanic I'm thinking of.

Sain: Oh, he fell off the Lorraine, yeah.

Skillicorn: Huh?

Sain: Yeah, I can't remember his name now. He lived in Boulderville, the mechanic. I can't remember his name right now. I'll ask Jard (?). Jard might know.

Skillicorn: The mechanic that lived in Boulderville was Marvin Curtis.

Sain: Yeah, well there's others...he lived right next to Gary Smith in Boulderville, this mechanic. Then he he'd run shovel. They had the Lorraine in the shop. He fell off the counter balance on the Lorraine and bonked his head and then.

Skillicorn: I remember when Don Montillas (?) fell off that loader he had. He had his wedding ring on and they hung everybody's wedding ring.

Sain: Yeah (laughing).

Skillicorn: Poor thing to wear around, when you're working with machinery.

Sain: I remember when Don Montillas he was off work maybe a week the time when the unhooking that choker at the landing and it sprung back and hit him where you shouldn't be hit (laughter).

MS: Were there a lot of accidents in the woods or did... was it a fairly safe?

Skillicorn: I don't think.. considering how many men we had working, I don't think there was so many. I think, at one time, we had 91 men working in the woods.

Sain: We were actually. a lot of minor, little twists and sprains. Occasionally a sawyer would cut himself. But...

Skillicorn: Couple of them killed, I remember.

Sain: Clint Gentry.

Skillicorn: Yeah, he was driving his car when he got killed.

Sain: No, no. Clint Gentry, he rolled a Cat up at Lolo. He rolled that sixteen up in Woodman.

Skillicorn: Clint did?

Sain: You're thinking of Duke Middlemist (?).

Skillicorn: No, Duke Middlemist.

Sain: Oh Richley(?)! Wasn't Richley the one that had the wreck?

Skillicorn: No, this was a Cat skinner. He worked for Larry Smith most of the time.

Sain: That would be Duke.

Skillicorn: Two of them. They couldn't get along good together and then one spring I wound up with both of them. I set one of them setting chokers for the other.

Sain: They were Duke and Shocker. Bob Shocker and Duke Middlemist.

Skillicorn: Could be.

Sain: That I put on my list. Duke is the other Cat skinner I couldn't think of on Larry's crew.

Skillicorn: Yep.

Sain: Because Duke, when he retired, he drove into Lolo Creek.

Skillicorn: This guy I'm thinking of went off the hill at the end of Salmon Lake.

Sain: Oh.

Skillicorn: Where you start down.

Sain: Yeah.

Skillicorn: He was a Cat skinner. He was driving Cats for me when we was up at Vaughn Creek.

Sain: I can't remember his name now, yeah. I remember that, but I can't remember his name. In the woods, Clint Gentry was killed when he rolled his Cat. And Bill Jones....

Skillicorn: Bill Jones? He was up Hoover Creek and he fell this big tree. He was bucking this tree into logs and a big snag fell down and hit him on top the head. I remember that one well.

Sain: But as far as. then the knot bumper over at Ovando.

Skillicorn: Yeah.

Sain: That's the only ones I can think were killed. We had.

(Woman in background): Do you need to eat something, Don? It's after twelve.

Skillicorn: I did.

Sain: He did.

Skillicorn: I had enough to tide me over.

Sain: He had two or three eggs, yeah.

(Woman in background): Alright.

Sain: The other one, Joe Lennon, he tipped his Cat over and he cut his ear off. They found his ear and they sewed it into his belly. But it healed up.

Skillicorn: Yeah, so they could put it back on.

Sain: He'd walk up to me and talk to me and he said, "Speak to me! I can't hear!" And push his belly out (laughter). Then we had some sawyers get hurt.

Skillicorn: Didn't do him much good. He died anyway. He had some kind of disease.

Sain: Cancer, yeah.

Skillicorn: He was living on borrowed time all the time.

Sain: As far as killing, I can't think of but three, maybe four, that we killed. We had several get injured.

(Woman in background): What about that guy that was up, rolled a Cat up Lolo.

Sain: Gentry. Clint Gentry, yeah. We had a series of crooks working for us, up there. We had... I can't remember.. He was living with Justine there at Clinton at the Poor Henry's Bar. He was, I think, a Cat skinner. He was living with Justine in Clinton and he... one morning he didn't show up for work. She had that thousand dollar silver dollar. He'd stole probably all the silver dollars out of her bar and left the country.

Skillicorn: Who?

Sain: Then we had that .what was he. a choker setter that kidnapped that girl and held her at that little ranch there in Belmont that .when that little road used to go beside that ranch house in Belmont. He had her in captive there. I remember when they found out who he was and they come into camp. We come into camp that night. He was carpooling with Dwayne Charbeneau (?) and the sheriff arrested him and put him in the car and Dwayne Charbeneau says, "Does that mean you're not going to carpool with us anymore?" (laughter).

They had the tong slingers for Jimmy Nelson when they were down at Lolo. They didn't show up for work and Jimmy got somebody else to come sling tongs. Found out that day, they had robbed a little store up at Lolo Creek. Because they come out at Lolo and stopped at that little store to get something to eat or something. One day, these two tong slingers never showed up

and Jimmy went to work that day and found out his tong slingers had stopped by the store and robbed the store (laughter).

MS: What's a tong slinger?

Sain: What?

MS: What is a tong? What was the job?

(Woman in background): Tong slinger. She wants to know what that is.

Sain: Yeah, a tong slinger. you got the set of tongs on the end of a line on a shovel and you got the big, ice-hook like they used to use for carrying ice. You take the tongs out and throw them over a log and a shovel operator will pull it up. The tongs will grab the log, pick it up, put it on the truck. We had about four different sizes of tongs at that time because we had some hellacious big logs. You had to get those big tongs that were a man-killer just to pack and we had the smaller tongs that weren't bad to handle. Some of them big tongs were a real man-killer.

Skillicorn: Yeah, some of them can be pretty dangerous, especially if you're standing in the wrong place when they start to pull on that line. A lot of times, those tongs come out and go flying through the air. If you're in the road, you'd get knocked down.

Sain: A few tong slingers got their hands crushed because they'd slap the tong on a log and then he would pull up, the shovel operator would pull up, while that tong's biting the log. Then your hand is caught. You learn to hold the tongs. There's a little groove in them. Hold that tong, slap them down; keep your fingers up, thumbs up, and when he pulls them tight, you got out of the way.

MS: A lot of learning on the job.

Sain: The other guy that got hurt. I got hurt. They dropped the heel boom on me up in Bear Creek.

Skillicorn: Oh?

Sain: That was another accident. Padog, Bob Padog (?), dropped the heel boom on me.

MS: Do you have anything else that you'd like to... ?

Skillicorn: I can't think of anything much.

MS: OK. We certainly appreciate you sharing your history of your life with us.

Skillicorn: Yeah. There's a lot more of it, if I could just think of it.

Sain: You can always think of things an hour from now or two hours from now.

Skillicorn: Yeah, wake up in the middle of the night and think about it.

Sain: That's why I started my little notebook because I started thinking about this stuff once I got involved. So now I add on as I go.

[End of recording.]