

Maureen and Mike

# Mansfield Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

## **Archives and Special Collections**

Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

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

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

The following transcript was provided to Archives and Special Collections by the [Northwest Montana Chapter of the Forest Fire Lookout Association](#) with its associated audio recording.

**Oral History Number: 453-015**

**Interviewee: Ted Clarke**

**Interviewer: Beth Hodder**

**Date of Interview: July 23, 2021**

**Project: Northwest Montana Lookout Association**

Ted Clarke: Well, I was born and raised in Eureka at the little hospital that used to be there. That was in '43. From there, though, we lived actually on the west Kootenai, which was then called Rexford. It was at the end of the old bridge. It was an old Neil Lumber Company town. But we didn't live in Rexford, we were up the Kootenai up towards the Canadian border about five, six miles south of the border. We lived along the river. And that's kind of where I grew up there until I was about five or six years old. We lived there on the west Kootenai on my grandpa's old place. He homesteaded that area. Had an old Dodge Creek Ranch that was on Dodge Creek. And he was a packer for the border when they were creating that swath across the country identifying the border; he was a packer and would pack supplies in to the crews who were cutting that.

My name used to be, or our name I should say, used to be without an E on the end of Clark. My grandpa and my dad had kind of a falling out somewhere along the line, because my dad took on the old ranch. It was down along the west Kootenai just above the river level, and he developed it into a workable ranch. And my grandpa decided gosh, that looks awful nice, so I think I'll just come and live there instead--well, because of it my dad put an E on the end of his name. So, it became Clarke no longer without the E. It happened after my sister was born, so she was born without the E on her name. My two brothers and I were born after that, so we all ended up with an E on the end of our name. So that's a whole gist of the Clarke name.

Beth Hodder: And did she keep hers or did she change it to an E?

TC: My sister was married then; she got she remarried. So, she took on her husband's name. And the Butts family was pretty well known in the area. They were a large family and there's a lot of Buttses up there. And we were the only Clarke's at the time. My younger brother Dave Clarke and I grew up together playing horseshoes, real horseshoes. Anyway, he became a chainsaw carver and he carves a lot of chainsaw sculptures all over the world.

We lived there until I was about five or six years old. I went to school in the old Tooley Lake School for my first grade and then in second grade I went to the Rexford School which then relocated when the Kootenai Dam went in, when the river was dammed, the Kooconusa

flooded us all out. But in the meantime, we had moved on from the west Kootenai over to the other side of the reservoir, which is now called the Rexford bench where the campground and the boat ramp is now on Lake Koocanusa.

BH: So, you had moved to the east side?

TC: Yeah, well, the Koocanusa runs north and south and the Rexford Bench is on the east side, and where the new town of Rexford now is located. I assisted in my later years in designing that relocation of the old Rexford town, and I designed the water system at that time that serves the Rexford community. The bench is right below the new town of Rexford. Anyway, we lived there on Graves Creek, or Tobacco River, it was called; then when the dam came in, they bought us out. The Corps of Engineers bought everybody else out that was in that bottom land country, so we had to move.

Then our house became inundated, or at least the property, and my mom and dad bought three hundred and sixty acres of land up on the Black Lake Road, which is up above the new town of Rexford. That's where they, then, began to develop after we got moved out from the reservoir. We built the old house there on the Tobacco River. I think that was about 1950. Yeah, I think it was 1950. We built the house there, then got flooded out later in the '60s. I went to school in the Roosevelt Elementary School in Eureka. When I was in third grade my dad was a school bus driver part of the year and the rest of the year, he would work for the Forest Service in the summers. That's how he started getting into the lookout stuff.

BH: Where did he work for the Forest Service? Rexford?

TC: Yeah, he worked for the Forest Service just doing odd stuff for 'em. They would hire him for doing carpentry work and stuff within the Forest Service. At that time, the Forest Service was pretty big in the sense that they employed a lot of woodwork people, but my dad took on the lookout stuff. Like I say, that was in '55, I think it was, we took the first lookout and that was in my memoirs there. That's our first year. That's how we got into the lookout system. They stayed in it. After that, they went on to Black Butte Lookout, which is just above Eureka. They spent several years there. By that time, they took that over. I began to migrate into my high school years and then on to college. So, I didn't get into that very much at the Black Butte Lookout. While I was growing up and went on to Eureka high school, my dad was bus driver during the morning, and afternoons he'd work Forest Service stuff. But in the summer, no school, so we were on the lookout. And that was two or three months we spent up there. Pretty awesome.

BH: I guess. What were your parents' names?

TC: Well, my dad was Ed Clark without an E. But then he put the E on after. My mom's name was Pearl Annabel Smith. That's where I came with my Indian heritage. I'm a tribal elder member of the Cowlitz tribe in Washington country. I think I mentioned that in my memoirs, too. But this is just strictly your lookout data. Right? It doesn't have my history on it, but that's part of it. Anyway, my mom's name was Pearl Smith, as her maiden name. That's where she came from. I had two brothers, and my older sister.

BH: Okay. What were their names, Dave, I know.

TC: Davey was my younger brother. Dick, Richard, was my older brother. And then my sister was the oldest of the four. Her name was Betty, Betty Clark, but she became known as Betty Butts, when she married.

BH: I was just gonna say, I was thinking that it might be nice to just walk you through what it was like as an eleven-year-old, the very first time you ever went to the lookout.

TC: It was my first experience with the pack mules and the pack train, because we had to load up all of our clothes and food or whatever we needed up there on a pack train. And I mentioned that in the memoirs; that was exciting. Wandering up the trail, following the horses in, and then once we got there, of course, getting used to this little, what are they, sixteen feet square house on the hill. And that was interesting. And then of course, we didn't have any water. We had to pack our water from clear down over the hill a quarter of a mile from the spring that we had developed. To get our water every other day, we made a trip down the hill and get our water, and then that would have to last us for that day and at least another day. Sometimes we'd maybe make it two days, three days without getting water and then that was fine. No problem.

I remember the first year we spent inside the lookout sleeping on the wood floor my folks had one regular twin bed mattress that the two of them slept on. Of course, it was one room, and that didn't bother us at all, but then we did pack in a tent. I think there's a picture of us where the wind blew our tent over. We were sleeping outside in a tent, and we had to be careful about that. That was the first year we went in, because there was no road access back there; we had to take that mule train in for three miles. Then the next year, I think was '56, they surveyed and punched in a road, a rough road, to get into the lookout, and we were able to get in there with our Jeep. That gave us access to a stream, a spring, that was down on the road coming in where we could get our water. We didn't have to go clear down the hill to pack our water. That was not a problem then; we'd just go down and fill up five-gallon jugs or buckets or whatever we had and just bring it back with the Jeep.

BH: So, the original spring that you developed--was there a lookout there before you and did they use a spring all the time?

TC: The old lookout was there all the time.

BH: I just meant a person type lookout.

TC: Well, I'm sure they must have had lookout people that would be in there, whether they were a Forest Service employee or private people like ourselves, I don't remember I don't know.

BH: I just wondered if they'd used the spring that you developed. Was the spring actually still there?

TC: There was an indication that it was an existing spring that somebody probably did use; we had to improve it. We just put a pipe in the ground and cleaned it up and allowed the pipe then to funnel the water and come out twelve inches off the ground when we could just put our buckets underneath or our pack sacks or water sacks and filled it that way. But yeah, so it was probably used by earlier people too; we had to develop it more, clean it up. And it's still there if you know how to find it. I don't know what kind of condition it is; might have an old elk or grizzly wallowing in it now. At the time there were no grizzly in that country. There'd be a lot of black bear, and we'd see them quite often. On top of the mountain of course, being all a rocky point, it was a prime area for blue grouse, which are different than the ruffled grouse and different than the Franklin or fool hens. We would have a blue grouse feed every once in a while.

The hawks also frequented the top of the mountain. We'd see them flying around and hunting for grouse. I remember one day we were watching a hawk circulating around the mountain, and all of a sudden, he folded up his wings and dove straight down, hit the ground just over the horizon from us a little bit and we went down there, and, there he was stunned, but he'd killed a grouse there on the ground. He saw the grouse and bombed him and got him. We had a lot of that stuff going around. I saw one grouse one day that flew off the top of the mountain and I just happened to have binoculars and we're watching the grouse. He flew way over the mountain; he must have been two thousand feet above the terrain below. A hawk spotted him and dove out of the sky. Got him out there, way out in the middle of the air. Nature at work.

BH: And they're not small either.

TC: No, no. Some of those hawks that we had up there we call them bullet hawks and that's what they were they were blue color and they would go through the trees, just like a peregrine falcon or something. They were extremely fast and agile. And that's what they'd be doing, eating those grouse up there.

Didn't have any real problems with bears at the time on top of the mountain; they would circulate and come around, but we didn't see very much of them. I remember one time, just as they were surveying the new road that was to be coming in '56, my dad had this uncanny sense about him that he could tell when there's bears around. The hair on the back of his head would just stand up. We went down one day in the spring, and we got in there, or summer, July. And we were looking at the survey stakes trying to get an idea where this new road was going to be coming in, and my dad stopped. He had this weird feeling. The hair stood up on the back of his head, he says, "There's a bear round here." We started looking. Of course, Davey and I were small enough, and we kind of huddled around him like chicks around an old grouse. Anyway, we got to lookin' and sure enough, there was a bear, but it was a dead bear. It had died somehow, either in the fall before or during the winter, or he got run out of his den or something. But we found him; he was dead, down over the hill in the bushes and, and then we finally smelled him deteriorating. And there he was. My dad had that sense.

So, we didn't have any problems with live bears. Later on, in Glacier Park, they were having trouble with bears, and then they would trap them in Glacier Park and started relocating them on to the West Kootenai side, which is our side of the Webb Mountain Lookout country. Then we started having trouble with bears, black bears, mostly, but they were trapping grizzlies too and putting them over there. And it changed the whole system in there.

Now I suppose I could argue with some of the biologists and the bureaucrats now that we didn't have any grizzlies in that area. We didn't, we never saw a grizzly when I was growing up on the west Kootenai. But they planted 'em there. Because there weren't very many people; there was only a maybe a dozen of us neighbors in the whole hundred square miles or whatever is up there. Anyway, now that the grizzlies were planted in there, they've shut all the road system down up there and that whole West Kootenai country clear over to the Yaak-- there are very few roads that you can even drive through there that haven't got gates on them for grizzly habitat protection. But they didn't bother us at the time. Later when we left Webb Mountain, in the last ten years, one of the grizzlies started making Webb Mountain Lookout area his favorite haunt.

BH: I'll be.

TC: He's up there now and has caused problems in the sense that all the roads are closed. That's the way life goes sometimes, I'm a little upset about all the road closures because of the grizzly habitat. They have more rights than human beings do anymore.

Anyway, I saw fishers, which is kind of like a wolverine animal. I saw a couple of those up in there. I didn't actually see any wolverines in the area. But we did see the fishers and of course,

big blacktail or mule deer would sometimes come up to a salt block over the hill that we put down there, and they'd come in at night and evenings and lick the salt and stuff.

BH: Elk?

TC: Never saw any elk. The elk only came in the '60s. They started migrating down from Canada a little bit more and they started working their way into the west Kootenai. I remember the first elk we ever saw down there was in the mid '60s. Up until that time, they were no elk; now there's a lot more elk in the area, which is not a problem. They aren't causing any problems.

I only saw a wolf one time and that was on a ranch down on the west Kootenai and that was back in the '50s. It was only a brief fleeting one. The same thing, the wolf kind of migrated down from the Canadian side and came into the area. I don't know how many there were in there. We never had any problems with the wolves. They weren't killing any of the livestock that I was aware of. There's more of them here in this Pleasant Valley area. Then the Federal Government decided, oh my goodness sakes, we got to kill them. So, they could go kill them. And they did. They wiped out this whole bunch of wolves that were in this area. I think they're coming back now. I'm not telling anybody about that because the federal bureaucrats will have decided they gotta change the ecosystem or something.

BH: So, can you describe the Webb Mountain Lookout that you stayed in, which was the original lookout?

TC: Yeah, well, like I say, I think it was about sixteen feet square, maybe it was a little bigger than that; I didn't ever physically measure it. You can see in the picture there that it's not very big. I would guess it was similar size as this room right now we're in, maybe just a little bit wider this way. This is about twelve feet. This is sixteen here. So, I'm saying that was probably more like sixteen feet square, with glass all the way around. And just a single bed in one corner. The alidade, which is the main thing that we had to identify fires--azimuth and altitude--with was set right in the middle. Then there was a woodstove in the one corner, and a couple of little cabinets along the other sides. And that's about all. We had, I think, a small dining table in there that the four of us would eat off of.

BH: Did it serve also as a desk for when it wasn't a dining table for, you know, watching for fires and writing things down?

TC: Well, we probably did. Our main thing that we kept track of was the alidade. And that one big lightning storm we had, it took all four of us, each of us watching an exposure because it was so frequent lightning strikes that one person couldn't register 'em. There was one all around us. So, it took all four of us at that time on that one storm to register the strikes, and we used the alidade then; we'd see a strike, maybe on the south exposure, and whoever was

watching that would get a bearing on it with the azimuth. Then if they could see a spot that was created by that lightning strike, they would try to get an altitude reading on it. Then they'd write that down. Then by that time, there's something over here and another one, another one over here, every exposure, and it kept us going for several hours. Finally, it settled down.

But before that particular lightning storm came in, and I think I mentioned this in the memoir, there was a loud buzzing sound from the solid copper grounding system that grounded the whole building--protected you from a lightning strike. The whole system started buzzing, just bzzzzzz you know. Pretty soon bzzzzzzz—it was creating this big static ball that got as big as a volleyball, and it would move out on the horizontal rods of the lightning rod system, and now on the vertical one, it would just keep moving back and forth like that.

BH: And this was outside of the lookout itself?

TC: This was outside on the gable. Like this is the gable, that rod would stick out about six feet or so. And then there was another one bent vertically. It was all tied together with this continuous solid quarter inch copper ground rod system, ground wires that ran down over the hill a quarter mile off of each corner and it would ground that. Well, this big static ball was on those rods, and it would just move in and then go up and then back out again and we can see it--bzzzzzzz. My dad he said, "Don't touch anything metal." So we didn't. Set on the bed which had bed springs. We didn't touch the old wood stove that we cooked on, because it was all metal. The alidade was metal. It was probably all grounded. It was but we didn't want to touch that thing. It kept up for probably a couple hours. We saw the lightning system starting clear down in the southwest towards the Libby country, probably where Swede Mountain Lookout was or Pinto Point Lookout. Oh gosh, I can't remember--Cliff Point--I can't remember all the lookouts that were down to the southwest towards the Libby country. Anyway, the thunderheads, we started seeing them develop.

Up until that time, it was a clear day. There was no lightning showin' up anywhere. But then later, we saw the thunderhead starting to develop. Then we saw the lightning strikes starting to hit the ground down southwest of us, and by that time, that static all dissipated out of the grounding system. And here it come, right over the top of us and surrounded us and it was lightning strikes everywhere. They set a few fires. I don't remember any of them got to any size, because usually once we'd record, the next day, when it was daylight, we'd have our azimuth and altitude readings. We'd be watching, you know, see if there's any smoke, then we would turn it in. And then the different lookouts in the area, Black Butte, Cliff Point, Pinto Point, Red Mountain, Webb Mountain, Marston, those are some of the lookouts in the area. If any of them could see it, then they would give their readings and the fire crew could back read against them



and get to triangulation and find themselves in there. Then they'd go to the fire. Usually, they'd only be two or three acres in size.

Later after I got off the lookout and I was into high school, I went to work with the Forest Service, and went and spotted some of those fires and worked my way into them and put them out. Usually, you'd get them under control within the day that you got there. Only a couple of times did we ever stay overnight, I and another college graduate student who was working in the Forest Service. In college, they would hire them once in a while in the summer, he and I went in on a fire that was down under Webb Mountain above the river. And Frank Bowles, who was kind of a managing resident engineer, not an engineer, but the ranger of the Rexford District. He went down on the east side of the Kootenai River and would watch across to the west side towards Webb Mountain Lookout. We were going in, this other kid and I went into the fire to find it, and we couldn't see it. Of course, it was dark; when we got way up on the slopes Bowles could see our headlight flashlights. He'd say, "Okay, it's a little bit to the north of you, move a little bit further to the south or west. It's still above you." We worked our way up into it. It was only maybe one hundred foot square. It was burning, just smoldering in the brush and in the logs and stuff. We got that line around it by midnight. One o'clock in the morning, we got to the line and stuff and we were tired by then too. So, we just decided we better stay in there and knock it all down in the morning when we could get better control of it. We had it under control.

We only had one sleeping bag. It was a paper sleeping bag you know those things? They kept some of the breeze off you and about all it did. So, we were sitting around one little hot spot there that we can kind of stay warm. Finally, we got cold and we got tired and we both tried to crawl into that sleeping bag together. We made it but it was not very comfortable. About five o'clock in the morning when it started getting daylight, we blew out of that and started finishing the fire. Of course, we didn't have any water. All we had was dirt and shovels. We got it out, put it out and worked our way out of there by noon and back into the camp. I wasn't in the lookout at that time. This was after I'd left the lookout and was doing some work with the Forest Service. That was just one fire experience I had.

And then another time we were on another fire. Five or six of us went in in the afternoon and got to the fire spot and got the line around it and started shoveling dirt, digging it up enough to get it down. We didn't quite get it under control. They left me. I was gonna stay there for the night and then watch it for the night and then finish it up in the morning. I built myself a little, I'd call it a hut, out of bows and limbs and stuff like a little hut. Well, it didn't work very good, because once it started cooling off, it was like an evaporative cooler and I just tried to stay warm in it and it was better for me just to get up and sit around the fire outside. Anyway, we decided

it wasn't that big of a deal, so we all walked back out. We got enough under control and they weren't worried about it. We just watched it. That was one of the firefighting things. And later, this was again after I was on the lookout, probably about....

BH: Now which lookout was this?

TC: Fifty-nine or sixty.

BH: So this was a different lookout?

TC: Yeah, it was still in the same area of time, 1959. I'd been about sixteen years old.

BH: Which lookout was this?

TC: This was after we left the lookout but I had been on Red Mountain Lookout myself for a while. Because of my experience on Webb Mountain Lookout, they were wanting me to go to guard school, which was a deal in the Fisher Ranger Station area. They would take people and train them on fighting fires, and looking for fires, and you know, compass and all that kind of stuff. So, I went on that, and then when I got done with it, they said "Okay, now you're ready to go. We're going to put you on Pinto Point Lookout." It didn't work out; I was just dating Ina. And I wanted to continue my dating exercises with her. So, they said "Okay, well, you got through guard school." I was the only one out of the twenty or thirty guys that were there knew how to find the North Star at night. So, since I didn't go on to Pinto Point Lookout at that time, they got somebody else to do it. They put me on a brush crew and trail crew, and then I did some firefighting during the summer in '59. And then was on Red Mountain for a little while because of my experience. They put me up there on a daytime thing. I'd go up six, seven o'clock in the morning and spend the day on Red Mountain Lookout. Turned in a few fires but I had to go back down by six or seven o'clock or eight o'clock at night because I had to date her. That's when you're full of piss and vinegar--you had enough energy. You could still go--can't do it anymore.

But anyway. Then my folks s went on to Black Butte Lookout and spent several years working for the Rexford Ranger District also. And then my dad died in '64. He had a lot of heart troubles. And so that kind of ended lookout years for him.

BH: So, were both of your parents then the lookout?

TC: Yes.

BH: Okay. They both got paid as lookouts.

TC: Yes. Well, they didn't both get paid. Only one person got paid. My dad. But he would go down once in a while. We had three hundred and sixty acres of Christmas trees land up there. And at that time, Christmas tree's a big thing in Eureka, it being the Christmas tree capital of the

world. So my dad and my brother and I would go down and we'd thin and trim and prune on our property on the Black Lake Country, which was just out of Rexford. Then my mom would cover for us on the lookout, maintain the viewing. I don't think she ever received a personal check, because she was just supplanting my dad, and they knew that. At least that's what I assume. I don't think she was paid separately. I think he was paid. And so, she would stay on the lookout and then we'd go back up in the evening, have supper with her and stay overnight. Then the next day we might all be doing lookout duties.

Remember one that we would do. We'd have to take the wet bulb and dry bulb temperatures every day and wind speed so they could determine the humidity levels to tell when it started to getting real dry. You know, the wet bulb dry bulb would start separating themselves to the point indicating low humidity and therefore a fire danger is getting greater and greater. Then call that into the Rexford District, and then they would share it with other readings from around the area to determine the fire danger conditions. That was one that we did every day. Sometimes my brother and I would do the readings. Sometimes my dad would report them.

BH: You were eleven years old at the time, eleven to thirteen. So, these were things that you just learned up there and helped your folks with. Did you do other things besides just the wet bulb dry bulb reading?

We would, at least every hour, we'd make a viewing of the whole area with binoculars, and glasses and always looking for smokes. We didn't have a lot of man-caused fires back during that time. It was mostly all caused by lightning strikes. We did turn in a smoke one time; I think it was about '56 or '57. That's a pretty heavy smoke and it's blue. I mean, it was dark blue. It wasn't like a light blue color from a wood fire. We turned it in and said, "we see a smoke." And that was before the logging industry got going real heavy. But there was a logger in there on a new cut. He fired up his diesel engine on his cat that morning. Of course, they put out quite a plume of dark grey smoke. That's what it ended up being, was just one of the tractors and they sent a crew up just to see what it was. Because we didn't know, there had been a lightning storm that we knew of in that area. So we reported it, and that's what they found.

After that, they started getting clearcuts and everything and swaths and roads and everything. It's completely different up there now than what it was at that time. When we were there in the late '50s, you couldn't see any roads hardly, you couldn't see any logging activity. It was in the '60s when it really got to going and taking off in the '70s. Then the clearcuts were everywhere. We finally got that curtailed, some with newer logging practices and stuff. My brother happened to be one of the timber sales guys that was working for the Forest Service. I don't know that he was responsible for all the clearcutting. But being one of the timber managers that was setting up the sales for the Forest Service back in that time, that's the way

they did it. You go in and you just clearcut everything and take what you can and then let everything else grow back up. Well, it makes quite a blight on the landscape that way. Now they do it a lot differently. They've learned. Anyway, that's the way it was. It's changed now.

BH: Besides helping your parents as lookouts, what did you do up there?

As kids we did a lot of playing. In my memoirs I mentioned the--I guess you'd call it a zip line today. We created our own with that number nine telephone wire that was used to be the communication link from the lookout into Rexford--the number nine telephone wire with the old crank phones. Well, a bull moose got in. It killed him and he got tangled up and it killed him and that broke the communication links and that's when we went to the two-way radios, high band radios I guess they were. So, we just played with that zip line we created out of that number nine telephone wire. And of course, we had slingshots. We grew up with a slingshot in our pocket and a pocket full of rocks and everywhere we went we were shooting slingshots.

We built ourselves a little fort or something out of rock pile or trees. We'd go hiking. We spent a lot of time in the woods all the time. And picking huckleberries and stuff in the fall. In August huckleberry picking was real good. My mom, she might stay in the lookout or go with us, or my dad would stay in the lookout. Anyway, there were usually two or three of us. We would go off in the old Jeep, get back in the woods and pick huckleberries until we're blue in the face, and blue lips and everything else. I had a problem with that because if I eat one huckleberry, I might as well quit picking, because that's all I'm going to do is eat 'em from then on. So, I had to caution myself, don't eat any huckleberries until you got your buckets full, and you're ready to go home and then you can eat some huckleberries. You know what it's like, it was addicting. I mean, you can't leave them alone once you have one.

We'd go over to Boulder Mountain Lookout. There's Boulder Lake in there and we would go over there fishing for trout in the lake. We couldn't go until at least closer to the middle of July, because the lake would usually be frozen shut with ice. That's when we got up on the Boulder Lookout, and at that time the lookout was still there. But within the next year or so they abandoned it. They didn't have it manned, But it was still there as a tower. It was probably thirty, fourth feet off the ground, whatever they are. Nobody was manning it and they probably didn't want to maintain it because that's when the airplanes started coming in and doing spot fire location with their infrared and stuff and so the lookouts started deteriorating, not deteriorating, but not being as advantageous for them. So, they tore the building down and burned it, apparently. But they left all of the quarter-inch ground copper wire rods as the grounding system there so we decided we'd just salvage it. It took us quite a while to locate it all and dig it up and pull it all off the ground and we got a hundred foot strands at a time. Each of us got two or three in each hand and walked down the trails and dragging it out of there.

That's what put my brother in college years later. My mom after my dad died didn't have any money. So, she pulled all that old salvaged ground wire and copper rods out. She turned it in and got some money to help him boost college.

We'd do that kind of stuff during the day. We usually had pets, we'd collect those. I call them chucklemunks, which is also in my memoirs. They were just like the size of a gopher. But they had the markings more like a chipmunk.

So a ground squirrel.

It was a [California] golden mantled ground squirrel--I think it was officially called--I looked it up in a book once and that's the closest little animal I could find. They frequent the tops of mountains in the rocks and stuff. They weren't a marmot, they weren't a chipmunk, they weren't a gopher.

BH: Not a pika.

TC: They were just a regular little squirrel -type animal and we just call them chucklemucks. Anyway, we'd collect them. And then we built a little wire cage we'd stick them in, and then they had that round circle wheel that we built with the spokes or, or an axle, and then cut a hole in one end of the wooden wheel that chuckmucks could crawl into. They'd get in there to run like a treadmill, only it was round. And every time it'd come over it'd clip their ears and their nose. They always develop those scabs on the end of their nose and no hair. We could always tell which ones were our old pets. They didn't have any hair on them. So, we'd let them go after a while, within a day or two they'd be so docile we'd stick them in our pocket and walk around and wander through the trees in the woods. Then after two or three weeks of them playing with us and stuff then we just let them wander wherever they wanted to do; they'd go back to the rock piles and sleep in the rocks. They did fine, them and gophers. The gophers were smaller up on top of the mountain. We'd catch gophers, and they would also be pets.

Like I mentioned, in the morning, the old wood cook stove would be sitting in the corner. The morning sun would come in and warm it up. Usually there was a stick and fire or something in there and it would radiate the heat and they would lay on that cart there and they would, I mean, they'd get flat as a pancake. Little arms all stretched out sucking up the heat, you know, they liked that. And mom, she used to cook bacon and eggs and pancakes every morning on that old wood cook stove. Throughout the day, I don't know what we ate during the day. We never had any problem with food.

BH: Spam?

TC: Spam was a big one. Yeah. Yeah,

BH: It still seems like that was a famous one for people who were up at lookouts.

TC: Yeah, it's easy to keep.

That and Boston bread or something.

Sometimes we would have things that have to be kept cold, you know, like butter, and like milk and some cheese and things like that. So my dad built this--it was a rock. We just picked up flat pieces of rock and he made this little hut that was about two feet square or so and about eighteen inches deep. Then he put screens on two sides, so that at night the air could circulate through and cool it and that whole mass of stonework would get cold enough that throughout the day, even with the sun shining it would hold the cold. And so we kept the food in there. Some of those things like that, because we didn't have refrigerators. We did have an old ice box up there, but no way to make ice. So once in a while my mom would go into town or something she might get a block of ice somewhere. But that didn't last very long in that icebox. We still have the old icebox. I gave it to my son, actually.

BH: Do you know if the box that your dad built is still up there?

TC: The stone box? It was when I took our grandkids up in the '70s or '80s "when were we up there, Ina, with Elizabeth?"

IC: Probably in the '80s.

TC: Probably in the '80s, it was there at the time. We would scrounge up old nails that we'd find laying around, rusty nails, and we'd take rock hammers we had and chisel our names and dates and stuff and those were still there. And I found 'em when we were up there in the '80s. They'd grown over with lichen and moss and I knew right where they were; I peeled the moss back and there they were. And that stone box was still there. But I don't know if it is there today. It worked effectively for us. But when they built that new building, the new lookout, with all that concrete block, probably they destroyed it not knowing what they were destroying. You can see it in that one of those pictures.

BH: Yeah, I did. It's very clever. Oh, the other thing you had a picture of in here you had a dog also?

TC: Yeah, there it is there. That's the little stone box. That was the door on it right there. And then the dog with his canteens. He had to pack his own water.

BH: Did he? Did you play with him?

TC: Oh, yeah. He was a good friend of ours. I've got mad at him once and I always felt bad about it. Because when old "Jim" crow, tried to eat food out of his dish with him he bit his head and killed him. Oh, that upset me, so I grabbed the dog and I flipped him over the rocks and felt bad

after--worried about it. He killed our other pet crow. He was just ready to start talking. We could almost make out his words. I had heard that you could teach crows to talk. Some people said well, you got to split their tongue. Well, we never did. And then no big deal that and but he started trying to mimic our words just like a parrot would. Anyway, that was the end of Jim. Crow But the little dog he was a dandy and he went with us everywhere. Wanderin' around through the hills. Later on, see that bobcat right up there on that on that log?

BH: Yes.

TC: Well, that was one of our pets. Not at that time, but we went back up there, back in probably the '80s or '90s. I went up, and Ina couldn't go with me that time or, yeah, you did, too. Just the two of us went up and spent the weekend on the lookout again. And I took that bobcat with me. He was a pet for us. It was a wild bobcat that this lady over here with us here was our secretary where I worked. She and her husband were raising them, so we got that little bobcat as a pet. We took him back up there with us. When I went down over the mountain from the lookout, he went with me and he would usually--I'd never tethered him or put it on a leash or anything like that--and he'd stay within thirty, forty feet of me all the time. We wandered down over the lookout and looking over the countryside.

At that time there had been a lightning strike fire that had occurred just below the lookout and burned several hundred acres of timber in there and I went down in there to look at it. I walked in on the biggest--millions and millions of morel mushrooms. Oh, they were like this everywhere. Within seconds I had my hat and my shirt full of these morel mushrooms. There was hundreds of thousands of pounds of those probably just went to waste because nobody knew where they were there.

Old bobcat he was with me. He'd, like I say, stay within fifty feet of us or so. So, I decided to hide behind a tree once to see what he'd do. There's a big tree down there that hadn't burned so I stood behind it. I peeked around the corner to see what he was doing. He was looking around and pretty soon he realized I wasn't there. And boy did he start yowling, trying to follow me--"yow, yoww. yowww." I stuck my head around there where he could see me and here he comes on a dead run, and from about fifteen feet away. He jumped and hit me right in the chest with his paws and bounced off and almost knocked me over, because he was just playing. " So now I see you, now I know where you are." Then he'd wander off and start wandering around; then a grouse flew up once. Oh, did that scare him. He didn't know what he was supposed to do with the grouse at the time. He was just learnin' and then, later on, he learned. Anyway, he came back with me and we went back up to the lookout. I spent some time up there with that bobcat.

I knew we had to have our pancakes and stuff for dinner. Eat a few huckleberries, didn't find any morel mushrooms that time. She's (Ina) not a morel mushroom eater; she's not a mushroom eater at all. It's kind of fun going back. When we took our grandkids up there, we all wrote in the old log book that was there. I don't know if there's any more log books ever kept up there.

BH: I would bet they do. They probably take them to the district office and keep them and then you know, put a new one up there when one's full. I bet they're still around. It might be interesting for you to find out.

TC: Yeah, I can't remember. It had to be in the '80s, wasn't it, that we were up there with our grandkids? Or '70s? Elizabeth was about 10 or 11 years old. How old is she now? She's got to be 45.

IC: I'll let you know when she was born.

TC: Anyway, when we were there then the kids all wrote in the logbook. They got to experience a little bit of the quiet and everything that was going on up there you know. All you usually had was just a gentle breeze all the time.

BH: And you said you spent two days there. Were you working? Or volunteering? Or just how were you up there for two days?

TC: You mean for the lookout? Yeah, We just went up because Webb Mountain Lookout now is open to people to reserve.

BH: Oh, as a rental?

As a rental. I think they're one of the few lookouts that do have that rental program yet. So we just had reserved it probably a year in advance. I don't remember. The last time I checked I would try to go back up another time and it was like two or three years out before you could even reserve a space. The best time to do that is coming up. Somewhere around the middle of August is where we usually experienced the most lightning storms and thunderstorms rolling through. And that's when we took our grandkids up. We were able to show them the experience of a lightning storm that came in, how there was lightning all around, and finally went through.

I don't think we--yeah, we did too. We saw one fire start from that particular lightning storm. I don't think it ever materialized because it just smoked for a little while and then it died out. Either somebody got on it or--

But the biggest fire that we [parents, brother, and Ted] experienced blew up right underneath our nose. And we didn't know it and it was caused by a railroad boxcar that had a hotbox, which



was just a dry bearing on the big wheels and stuff and throwing off sparks. We got a report. Again, it's in my memoirs, that people were traversing the west Kootenai side of the highway that used to go down to Libby. They were driving from Libby up to Rexford and reported a smoke they saw across the river from them which was on the railroad side at the time. We got a call from the ranger district. We were about to report, so we started watching. We watched--all four of us were watching with binoculars trying to spot smoke or anything down there below us and here we are on the lookout and we're looking down at the river down here.

The river drainage and the railroad track was on the other side of the river because there was a knob right here. We couldn't see behind it, see beyond it, see down in there. Never any smoke now we don't see anything. So we watched for a couple three hours there. Finally, behind this knob we saw "poof" and then it disappeared. A little puff of smoke. So of course, okay, well we saw a smoke but it's gone. It disappeared again behind the knob from us. We didn't have any way-- I mean, the knob was half a mile below us. No way for us to get over here to see. Within the next hour, then it showed up again.

All of a sudden, we could see, oh yeah, and it never quit then. That's when it blew up and right in front of us and then started going and headed right up Stone Hill, which is where they have all the rope climbing and stuff down there now. So here it was, I don't remember the acreage I want to say fifteen hundred acres that burned right up the mountain right in front of us. We could see that, just like a city down there at night with all the fire. And they couldn't get in there with borate bombers very well. I mean, they tried, but steep like this, you know. So the borate bomber would get in as close as he could and get out. But it was so steep that they couldn't have any accuracy in hitting the fires really until it got up on the top. When it crested on the top and then they would hit it up on the top with the borate bombers. And then they got it stopped up there. But in the meantime, they had fire crews down below. I mean those poor guys were fighting that fire. I used to hunt those slopes, and it was nothing but a series of rock ledges. They had to climb clear from down on the Kootenai River base. Climb clear up into that thing because there was no road access from above or from the sides. It all had to be manned from below. By the time they'd get up on the side of the mountain to try to do any firefighting, they were all pooped out.

Anyway, once they got the fire stopped at the top then they were able to better control it and it got back under control. We became the transfer station for all the radio communications. At that time, we were using the shortwave radios and they could radio us up. They might be a hundred fifty feet or a hundred yards from each other down there but they couldn't talk to each other. So, they'd use us and we'd relay it down to the other guy. Or they'd relay us "We need food for the camp. We need fifty pounds of steaks and fifty pounds of ice cream or

gallons." Whatever, milk, you know, whatever staples needed for the fire crew at night down there, so they'd radio us and then we'd send the information on to the district and they'd get their food supplies down for them. That was kind of fun at eleven years. thirteen years old.

BH: So that was '59? I bet that was fun.

TC: Yeah, it was pretty exciting. Some of the borate bombers, they were fighting some fires off to the west of us over in the Yaak country. I remember those. They were modified torpedo bombers, that were used in World War II. Great big single engine, radial engine on the front of these planes. The engine had to be that big around, three or four feet, three feet in diameter, at least. It's pistons, you know, out the sides. One big prop. And here he'd come. We could see him coming from the Mount Henry direction in the Yaak. They used us as a pivot point.

BH: So, you were their beacon?

So, they'd pivot and go back down to the Flathead to get loaded and borated again. And they'd come right over our lookout. We could hear them coming from miles away, just roarin' right over the top of us about twenty feet. That's pretty exciting to see that. Then they'd go down and get loaded up in the Flathead, and here they'd come again. "Whooo" right over the top and head off back into the Mount Henry country. And the Yaak to put out a fire over there.

Red Mountain Lookout was just north of Webb Mountain Lookout, about I suppose ten, fifteen miles, maybe even closer than that from Webb Mountain. And then because I didn't take the Pinto Point Lookout they put me on temporary on Red Mountain Lookout. I reported a fire on Mount Henry.

From Red Mountain?

From Red Mountain when I was up there. I was pretty excited because as I'd been driving up there in the morning to go up there on the first day, they'd had some lightning storm the night before. And I could see the smoke over there. But I was down in an area where it couldn't get any radio communication until I got up on the knob. I could see it and as I got up on the next turn, I could see it and then finally I got up where I could see it. By that time, I was so excited. When I called 'em they said, "Whoa, slow down." I was getting my excitement going anyway. They sent a crew up actually out of the Yaak district and put on it.

That was one of the things that different fire lookouts would--they would communicate once in a while and say, "Can you see the fire over on Dodge Creek or something and so we can triangulate?" "Nope, I can't see it." "Okay, well, I'll call the other guy." We would have that communication going on once in a while.

Then one night we were sleeping in the lookout in '55 I think it was, and the radio--no, it would have been '56 because we didn't have radios until '56. In the middle of the night here comes this call, "Four aces. Four aces." That was all there was; there was no call sign. No communication where it came from. We had no idea of where it was. But it sounded like the guy who was on Pinto Point which is a small lookout to the southwest of us. We never did find out what it was. One of the things that we figured out was maybe it was a lookout guy who was a sleepwalker and he was thinking about gambling in his dream or something then he got up and "Four aces. Four aces." That was it. Never did find who woke us up in the middle of the night.

BH: Yeah, that'd wake you up, too

TC: I've had a lot of experiences up there with that kind of stuff. Friend of mine. Well, there's a friend of my brother Davey's, Scotty Ingram. I mentioned him because of our slingshots. Everything we did up there we always had a slingshot in our pocket. That's when I was shooting over the hill. But didn't know they were down over the hill. He and his friend Scott Ingram. I popped a rock in the air, probably shootin' at a hawk or something going by. Here they come boiling up and apparently that rock went over the hill and popped on my brother's head and bounced off. Wow, that rock just hit you right in the head and bounced off. They were madder than a hornet at me because they thought I did it on purpose.

BH: Yeah, that's funny.

TC: Then we had to cut our own firewood and split kindling and stuff for the woodstove. Of course, we didn't have any chainsaws up there and chainsaws weren't really--they didn't come on yet as far as I know. Well maybe about that time they started developing 'em more, but all we had was a crosscut. I've got a couple three of them here now at my place here. We never knew how to use a crosscut. My dad had to show us how to use it. We had some more head knockers after that.

Those are hard to use when you're learning especially.

Yeah, you don't push you pull. Let the other guy pull then you pull and then he pulls then you pull and you don't push to help him. Cuz they always buckled up. They were true crosscuts. They weren't the single handle, they were the double-handle crosscuts.

BH: So did your dad, then, sharpen it and everything from up there?

TC: He used to sharpen them professionally. I know when I say professionally, that was not a word you used back then. He sharpened a lot of the crosscuts that loggers used around the area. And they always came to him because he knew how to sharpen them right.

That was another learning experience, learning to use a crosscut, which we didn't have to do anymore after that, because then the chainsaws came out. In fact, my dad even took on a little chainsaw business. He had the first little Comet saw it was called "C o m e t" Comet. That was the name of the manufacturer. Gosh, it was a little teeny thing like a toy, but it did cut. He took on that franchise for a while and sold several of them around the area. Some of them he sold to the electric co-op people because they use them in their bucket trucks and stuff whenever trimming trees, power lines clearances and stuff because they were so handy and little.

Then after that, then he finally set up his own saw shop down there on the Tobacco River where we lived. And he took on Homelite chainsaws and McCulloch chainsaws, which are both gone in the industry now. Later on after my dad passed away, my brother took it on, my older brother Dick. He sold chainsaws and then finally started selling Yamaha snowmobiles and different things like that in the Eureka area. Then he ran that for a while. He sold that business then to another guy whose saw shop is still up in Eureka, I guess, under different names now. That's some of the old history. Not a part of the lookout.

BH: Well, are we missing anything?

TC: I don't think so. Those things that I put in the memoirs are more of my close memories. You could talk to my brother Dave. I'd be happy to give you his phone number. You can get a little input from him if you'd like to. I'm sure you'd be happy to digress a little bit. He probably has some of his own memories of those trips that are a little different than mine. He's in Eureka still. He travels around quite a bit. His family's in Dillon and another part of his family is in Chico, California. He travels from three corners like that like I go to Kalispell. He does a lot of that. He used to do a lot of chainsaw carving work. He is very talented. He plays the organ and the piano and the guitar and the banjo and all by ear. He doesn't know a single note. He's like my niece. Very talented in what she does.

BH: Well and you're talented too, making wood furniture and it's beautiful.

TC: Now he's making cutting boards. He is making these things. He's got his own little shop. He makes different cutting boards. That's just one of them.

BH: It's beautiful.

TC: He puts his own name on them and stuff. My wife, she bought three or four or five of them. I don't know where they're all at now He does that kind of stuff. His name is David. Let me get my phone.

BH: Okay, do we think we're done with the interview? I'll turn this off if we're done.

TC: Oh, well, it's up to you.

BH: Well, are you finished with stories?

TC: Yeah, I think so. I've given you everything that my brain can handle.

BH: Well, thank you so much. This is really amazing to, you know, to get all your stories.

TC: Yeah, we're gonna get Davey's phone number and you can communicate with him.

BH: That sounds great.