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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

Oral History Number: 448-001

Interviewee: Ed Beck

Interviewer: Arne Nousanen

Date of Interview: circa October 1976

Ed Beck: —night before we left. (unintelligible sentence). It was that much snow. They had to go way up here.

Arne Nousanen: And the first winter you all went to Milltown.

EB: Yes, we had to after...By gosh Maki (?) sold me a pair of moccasins out of raw deer hide. When we got to Hengrin's (?) Store in Milltown.

Unidentified Speaker: Nobody'd see or kid you.

EB: We didn't want nobody to see them. Ain't that somethin'? Maki sewed them. That man was 93 years old.

AN: That was in 19—

EB: [19] 17.

AN: Winter of '17.

EB: Yes. Then they came back again.

AN: And then you all came back the next spring.

EB: Oh sure. They came back.

AN: How long did it take you to come back?

EB: Oh god, I don't know.

AN: Two weeks?

EB: Was so many because they had to...I remember the first time, they had a stop at Seeley Lake for two, three weeks they couldn't get through mud holes. From there they went as far as Charlie Brown's. That'd be...oh gosh. They stayed there. The next, third move, they had a week or so to stay at Rainy Lake, (unintelligible) near the Clearwater River. You could see it down

there. Stayed there and they made a (boat) to drag their wagon over the summit because there was that much snow.

AN: Was that early in the spring?

EB: Yes. You know what time they got down here. There was no roads here. (Unintelligible) 17th of May.

AN: And you left when?

EB: I don't remember. But there was that much snow on that meadow over there yet, and that trail went up along. Back then they called it (unintelligible) Trail. Across the river down here. That Indian trail there (unintelligible).

AN: Then that was, how old were you then?

EB: I don't know how old I would have been. That must have been 1918.

AN: That was 19...When were you born?

EB: 1907.

AN: Seven.

EB: That's how I guess I can remember.

AN: Boy, that's all. You were only—

EB: Yes, I can remember that. That's the way that—

AN: 11 years old.

EB: Eleven? Would that be eleven?

AN: And Earl was two years younger?

EB: Younger than I am. Yes. Anyway, that's the way I can remember.

AN: That was seven years, your second trip?

EB: Yes. That's when they came up. That's when they finished the cabin.

AN: Now did you finish the cabin the first summer?

EB: Yes. They made—

AN: Or the second summer?

EB: The second summer. (Unintelligible) those walls turned black. Didn't have a roof. Then they made that shingles. You know how they made them shingles? Not shakes.

AN: They weren't shakes?

EB: Well, nobody knew where there was a shake tree. (unintelligible)

AN: Well, what'd you do? Just chop those shingles?

EB: No. They made like the made in the old days with lodgepole.

AN: Yes, but did they chop, split them?

EB: No. Around here, anybody today would look at you. They don't know how they made them. They made a big sweep about this long of lodgepole. Pegs in it there and everybody—all the women and all the men—they'd pull it back. It was made like a big plane. I got the (unintelligible).

AN: Oh, that's right!

EB: —dogged a block there, and then you pulled it back.

AN: Pulled the log back.

EB: Pulled that sweep back.

AN: Or that sweep back. Okay.

EB: Then you took a shaving off. Then when you got down to where it wouldn't take any more, you turned the block over. Us kids'd take the shingles away. You can look at the gable at the house.

AN: Do you still have that shake machine or that shingle machine?

EB: I got the blade there (unintelligible). That's how they did it. Took quite a bit of pressure. But you look at that gable at that house over there and you'll see...It was about that long. There was

no way of finding a shake tree. Couldn't even find a rock in around this timber, that's solid log there.

AN: How about your next winter then. You and your mother and Earl stayed all winter.

EB: Yes, my dad went to Bonner.

AN: He went to Bonner about when? About Christmas time or before?

EB: You know I can't remember when he went. He had just enough money to give that guy down at Potomac or something for a ride. He said that's all he had. Went to Hamel's (?) and boarded. Slept at Karcanen (?) until he got first paycheck. Ain't that something?

AN: But you and Earl and your mother were here.

EB: That snow was that deep. Oh Jesus. Boy oh boy. She give (unintelligible) us kids. We had to go way up. When you'd go get them, you had one horse.

AN: One horse is all the animals that you had?

EB: One horse, and then we bring them in, you could stand them up face forward. Have to have them by that old wall stove for a long time before you could skin them. They was like rocks. Had to get some (unintelligible).

AN: Now did you have wood cut enough for the winter?

EB: We had some dry trees around there, and we'd go out and saw a block or two with an old saw—crosscut. God that must have been...I can remember that.

AN: Holy moly.

EB: We was pretty small. Earl—

AN: Yes, 11, 12 years old, and you were ten.

EB: He couldn't even gut the deer. Mother would have to go and gut them.

AN: Now you stayed over winter, two winters, didn't you?

EB: Oh god, we stayed here for many hundred years now.

AN: Without your dad?

EB: Yes, he went to work every time.

AN: Every winter?

EB: Yes, sure. He had to go to Bonner at the darn lumberyard to work, or wherever it was. I never did know. He worked Power [Montana Power?]. Them guys, they'd give him a job right away. They all got a job at the (unintelligible). Then, of course, the boarding house was there. They worked up here, you know how they had to work? He says when they shipped everybody out to the boarding house, they was gone and he was still eating.

AN: He was really filling up.

EB: He said it took three weeks to get the wrinkles out. Before they could stop to eat like the rest of them. There'd be 30 men there eating. They was two big sawmills.

AN: When did you get your first cow up here?

EB: Oh gosh, I don't know. It seems to me he got a cow the first time, and he left it up here that winter when we walked. He bought a cow and brought it up, and left it over at Gazer's (?) for Wilbur Fox to feed. It starved that winter.

AN: Starved to death. Is that right?

EB: It was a Jersey. I can always remember that calf. There was a guy that run the dairy across the Hellgate. You know where that bridge is? Name of Hill (?), that's where he bought it. I wonder what the heck the idea was bringing a cow and the kids and an old lady—

AN: Get milk.

EB: They had to have the kids go when their wagon got stuck in every creek. Then the kids'd have to go up in the creek and find a foot log and go across. They'd pull the wagon through to get the horses loose. There wasn't no bridge. Surveyors had a trail. That's all there was.

AN: When was the first road then?

EB: Surveyors had the first road, and that ended right over here. They never built no bridges or nothing. From here there was no road. It was just a pack trail to Swan Lake.

AN: To Swan Lake?

EB: Yes. Then the homesteaders finally got tired of packing stuff on their back. We run out of groceries down here at the old Forest Service ranger. That dry (unintelligible). They walked clean down to Swan Lake where there's a camp there. The Great Northern had a camp there (unintelligible). They sold him groceries. Limey (?) and Dad and (unintelligible) and old Petias (?) went.

AN: Spud Petias?

EB: Yes. They went down there. They left early in the morning, and they got back the next morning. Never stopped. They had 60 pounds apiece, I think. They had to. They was, families were starving. That's the way it went until finally a bunch of them got together from Samuel Perry (?) and Smeck. Spud and Dad went. Maki didn't go. I don't know if...He was feeling pretty rough. That camp furnished them groceries down there, and they chopped that trail out wide enough for a stone boat.

They was no bridges either.

AN: Yes, you could ford them.

EB: They'd take the horses down, and they got a team and they'd take the horses down with that stone boat. That first, that high back, that's usually they had put little runners on, (scab on it). So it wore out the ground. Just keep putting new bottoms on.

That's the way that company sold them groceries (unintelligible). That was the Summers Lumber Company (?). That was a Great Northern. (Unintelligible) was the guy that run it.

AN: From '17, '18, '19. Then it must have been about the middle of '20s before your dad started to stay here year round?

EB: I can't remember. That's what I'm trying to figure out. He started to stay here, I guess, when I was able to go to work. I think so. I went to work in 1924, '25.

AN: You went to work for the Forest Service.

EB: Just a kid. Worked with those old Swedes. Odd job (unintelligible). I think he stayed then. He was brought on a jury a few times when they had a murder trial. Remember there was several? I can remember that. He stayed down there six weeks.

They had two murder trials. That one postman went crazy and shot a bunch. Rattlesnake. Then there was a woman killed some (unintelligible) some people. He was on the jury even in the bootleg days. They dragged him in. Pulled him in every darn year for it. He was on there. I seen old Karkanen, and I says, "I wonder how he's doing." He came up here hunting, and the jury

trials—Prohibition days—they could have a jury trial for buying moonshine. You know what Art Karkanen said? “Cee-ten, cee-ten.” That was the verdict on all. Innocent.

AN: Oh, innocent. Oh

EB: Innocent. Cee-ten. That's an old timer there.

AN: I'll be darned. Now when did Maki's come here? Same time you did?

EB: Same time. Same wagon.

AN: Same wagon?

EB: Yah. The same (unintelligible).

AN: Now did he go out every winter too, then?

EB: He went to Bonner too.

AN: Did she go? She must have gone with him?

EB: No. She stayed here.

AN: No? She stayed up here alone?

EB: She stayed here. Then he went a few times down to Swan Lake (unintelligible).

AN: Oh, for crying out loud.

EB: Down in that logging camp where (unintelligible). That's 25 miles now.

AN: Then she lived here alone then?

EB: She stayed, yes. Then, of course, after few years got a job and Dr. Kessler started building that. Got a job there building (unintelligible).

AN: Jacobson.

EB: Jacobson. That's when he got (unintelligible).

AN: Well, I'll be darned.

EB: There's a lot of tragedies happened in that time.

AN: Holy moly. What a life

EB: Well, that was part of the life. (unintelligible). You know what they did? There was no schools nor mail either.

AN: That's right. No mail at all.

EB: No school either. But they went, them homesteaders, and built schools. Little log cabins. They went down here. Had to walk across from home across (unintelligible) the bridge way up to where (unintelligible).

AN: Past Jacobson's?

EB: Yes. Then (unintelligible) 23. Walk across that section 23, over there until you hit section 24, across that damn thing and then turn and go across into section 15. There wasn't a kid over there. They was all right...There they built this...It's still standing. They was thinking of taking it out of there and putting it up down here somewhere. It's still there.

AN: I'll be darned. Then you, of course, had to walk when you went to school.

EB: Walked, hell, there was no way (unintelligible). Then when the snow got deep, you didn't go. That's what they did. I don't know what the hell prompted them. They could have built one down here where the (unintelligible)

AN: Well, that was a school section probably. That should have been the 15.

EB: That was 13 (unintelligible) NP Railroad Northern.

AN: Well, I'll be. Section 15 was the school section

EB: It should have been a section 15, but they didn't, they could have...Just why the hell didn't they build it right out here?

AN: Yes. Somebody donated a quarter of an acre outside of any place.

EB: They could have built it any place. Hell, it was built on NP land. It's there yet. All logged off. (unintelligible sentence). I don't know what the hell they was...Carl (?) had two kids. Us two, that's four. You get (unintelligible), that's five. Martha and Carlos (?).

AN: That's it?

EB: That's all. They was all right here. (Unintelligible sentence).

AN: Well, for crying out loud.

EB: If they'd a built it right over here. Yes, I can't think why they—

US: Was there a teacher?

EB: Oh, they got a high school girl out there, and she's still alive around the Flathead.

AN: She taught for several years?

EB: She came, I forget how many years. She's taught quite a few years. I seen her after Chris died. (unintelligible) after Chris' funeral. She come up to me and says if I knew her. (unintelligible sentence). She was just a little skinny...She didn't know no more than we did. She had to tell me who she was.

Chris Sorenson (?) died. That's the one that (unintelligible) got. Yes, but she was related to Chris. I can't remember what the heck her last name was. She got married, and she's down there. They finally got word to her. She was the only relation.

AN: That sounds like lots of life.

EB: (unintelligible)

[Break in audio]

Mary (no last name): Can you hear me speaking now, because I'm speaking directly into the speaker.

[Break in audio]

EB: (unintelligible)

US: (Do you) have a lot of wildlife in here?

EB: (unintelligible)

AN: You don't have many elk though, did you?

EB: Oh yes, the elk was...They wasn't down here. You had to go toward (unintelligible) Creek (unintelligible).

AN: Oh, there were more elk then than now?

EB: There was more elk, but they wasn't down here. Not like they come round.

AN: You had more deer though?

EB: Oh, jeez, Deer in the summer and then later on. (unintelligible sentence). That river was full of fish.

AN: It was?

EB: That's the same. Soon as the winter come, they all went over. They wasn't fished out, they just left.

AN: Oh, they left for the winter, is that right?

EB: They all went to (unintelligible). They'd be in the summer, every river would be black when they'd (unintelligible).

AN: Whitefish then or just trout?

EB: No, trout. Cutthroat. There was only whitefish, cutthroat and bull trout. Believe it or not, the old lady just gave me (unintelligible). Nothing but eastern brook.

AN: There's eastern brook in here now?

EB: That's all there is. That's the way that fishing was. If they leave...The only place they don't leave now, even now if there's anything left, I think they're all chewed up. There's the eastern brooks in the Beaverhead and the lakes. The river that freezes to the bottom. That's what's (unintelligible).

US: The Coho didn't come this way? Salmon?

EB: I've seen in the last 50 years, I've seen a few of them.

AN: (unintelligible)

EB: Come up in the summer. (unintelligible sentence). I don't think I'll even get my (unintelligible) this year. Caught two whitefish.

AN: That's your limit.

EB: (unintelligible) got one, and I got one.

[Break in audio]

AN: The next will be a few remarks again from Ed. This is now October 23, 1977. The first part of this tape was made last year about the same time.

[End of Interview]