

Oral History Number: 422-027

Interviewee: Warner Lundberg, Margaret Lundberg

Interviewer: Suzanne M. Vernon

Date of Interview: June 25, 1998

Project: Upper Swan Valley Oral History Project

Suzanne Vernon: —Warner Lundberg today. It's June 25, 1998, and we'll be conducting the interview at their home west of Condon. This is for the Pathfinder, they are the grand marshals for the Fourth of July parade this year.

[Break in audio]

SV: —so I might move this microphone back and forth to you guys, don't panic if I do that.

Warner Lundberg: Okay.

Margaret Lundberg: That's fine.

SV: So, were you born here? Did I understand you right?

WL: No, I was six months old when I came here.

SV: Six months old, okay.

WL: And the reason I wasn't born here was the homesteaders that were married in here, I mean, that lived in here that were married, they went out usually in the fall of the year to make a grub stake to come in here and spend it. [laughs] So that's why I was born in Missoula, and then in June, in the spring, I came up here with my mother and two sisters in a horse and buggy. [laughs]

SV: Which sisters?

WL: Clara and Mabel. Clara's dead. She's been dead for several years.

SV: And Mabel's still...okay. So they were older than you, obviously.

WL: Yeah.

ML: A year, little over a year...No, two years.

WL: Yeah. Two years.

ML: Two years.

SV: So did you stay just through the summers, then, on the place here?

WL: Up until about 1924, when we started living on the homestead steady.

SV: What year were you born and how old are you?

WL: 1919. But my dad was in here in 1914 and homesteaded with my granddad and grandmother.

SV: Did they farm, then, or did they have livestock?

WL: Well, that's the tough part. There weren't any beef cattle in here at the time, so what most of the homesteaders had to do is milk cows and sell cream and ship cream. And—

ML: And clear land.

WL: Pardon?

ML: They had to clear some land.

WL: Oh gosh, that was the problem, clearing that land and pulling those stumps. They didn't have any [unintelligible] CATs [Caterpillar equipment].

SV: You own a huge meadow over here. Was that open, or did your folks—

WL: Down by Craft Creek (?) Road?

SV: Yeah.

WL: Well, that was a homestead that belonged to Bob Sheehan (?), and I bought it in the '40s from Bob Sheehan.

SV: [unintelligible].

WL: And it hooked onto this place.

ML: This is what his father bought—

WL: This is what my father bought from the Northern Pacific in 1927.

SV: So there was a homestead, and then there was deeded land he bought, and then you added another homestead.

WL: Yeah, yeah. The Northern Pacific owned every other section in here, and Dad bought a section from the Northern Pacific.

SV: How many acres of meadows did he have to clear?

WL: Well, that was pretty much clear down there. It was open spots because it was kind of a river bottom, and it was mostly willows with a tree every once in a while that you had to take out.

ML: But his homestead was back—

WL: Yes, his homestead was back about two and a half miles back...I don't know if you've ever heard of Heakens (?)?

ML: You know where Heakens place is, that was their homestead—

WL: That was our homestead.

ML: —where they went in 1914.

WL: Yeah, he homesteaded that in 1914.

ML: He moved here in '29...'28.

WL: '28.

SV: Before the fire?

ML: Yeah.

WL: Yeah, yeah. We were here during the fire, and the Forest Service moved us out of here because it was so dangerous. In fact, it was right there, you see? All that thick stuff? That was where it burned, so they moved us out and took all the kids from the school there and took them up to the Gordon Ranch, and we stayed there until it was safe to come back here.

SV: Did that all happen in one day, when they moved and everything? How long did the fire burn, do you remember?

WL: Well, it was in October until the snow came in November. It was a really dry year that year, in '29.

SV: You were ten years old?

WL: Yep.

SV: Wow. What do you remember about the fire and the smoke?

WL: I can remember pretty much everything. After they moved us out, the Forest Service moved a big camp in here. They had 110 men in here with pumps and they did save all the buildings, but we lost all our hay.

SV: So the buildings down here, that you called your mother's house, was one of those buildings they saved?

WL: And the barn, and that was...Well, Dad was just building the barn then, in '29, but they saved all of the buildings.

SV: They did a good job, then?

WL: Yeah, with 110 men, they were falling over each other.

SV: What did they do? They put water on stuff, or they dig lines?

WL: They had several pumps in here and pumped out of the creek.

ML: You have to go down to see the rest of this place, because the lake that's there now—

WL: We have a lake here now.

ML: —was not there then, in '29. It was just a creek.

WL: That was Indians.

SV: I've heard a little bit about the Indian story, maybe tell me more about it?

WL: They were here when we came, and that camp—Indian camp—well, it may have been here for 100 years, nobody knows. There was a massacre. A game warden shot six of them, but they got him, too. A 14-year-old boy shot the game warden. We have Indians come in here the last two summers. They came in, and—

ML: They came in from the cultural center over at—

WL: St. Ignatius.

ML: —St. Ignatius.

WL: And they come in and—

ML: Tell her about that one gentleman.

WL: This older man—he's 91 years old—and he said, "My mother was pregnant with me during that battle they had down there. She was at the camp."

ML: He came back again this year to see where it was. He was here last year.

WL: He's a real nice guy. We told him he could come back anytime.

SV: Sure. But it's all underwater now?

WL: It is. I had to point out what...and I told him sorry I couldn't show him the whole thing, but I says, "That must be progress."

ML: That picture Joyce sent is in there, isn't it?

WL: Yeah. The teepees were here when we came here.

SV: They had teepees?

WL: Oh yeah, they had several teepees down there in...that where the lake is was a meadow with a creek running through it. They had teepees and bathhouses along the creek. They'd heat those rocks and go in the bathhouse and throw cold water on the rocks, then they'd jump in the creek [laughs], and that was a cold creek.

SV: Boy, I guess. Did you kids swim in that creek?

WL: We didn't swim in the creek. We swam in the lake after Dad put the lake in.

SV: Do you remember when he put the lake in then?

WL: Yes, in '28...in '47.

SV: Okay.

WL: He used it for irrigation and quite a bit of recreation for us. We planted fish in there, and there still is fish in there.

SV: What kind?

WL: Rainbow, mostly.

SV: Do you remember any particularly funny things that happened when you were a kid growing up when you'd pop back over here?

WL: All I can remember is work. [laughs]

SV: All you can remember is work? Okay, that's—

WL: I tell you, I took a man's job in the hay field when I was ten years old, and Mel...you know Mel Nelson (?)?

SV: Oh, certainly.

WL: He stayed with us every summer, and he would work in the hay fields with us and he could tell you a lot, too.

SV: Now, why did he stay with you in the summertime?

WL: Well, after school when they lived in...Well, first they lived in Missoula, and he just loved it up here and we got along so good that he came every year after school. When they moved to Tacoma, he still came out here.

SV: Good. You guys put up hay then. Did you sell the hay, or was it for your own stock?

WL: No, we had our own stock—milk cows and few horses. My mother milked cows and sold cream, shipped cream to Missoula.

SV: Who picked up the cream? Was somebody out there—

WL: The mail carrier picked up the cream, and then she also sold raw milk to whoever she could. Even Margaret and I, when we first came here, we...There you go.

[Margaret brings out a photo album]

SV: Now, this must've been what [unintelligible] cabin fever?

ML: Yes.

SV: Where did these pictures come from?

WL: [laughs] My uncle—

ML: This is one of Warner's uncles.

WL: —he was a great photographer. He was from Norway, and he loved it up here. Well, both of my uncles, they helped Dad on the house down, and that's when they took those pictures.

SV: So that was kind of down toward the river bottom...or creek bottom.

ML: Yeah, creek bottom.

WL: Yeah.

ML: Now, this is the homestead?

WL: That was our homestead, and that's my sister.

SV: So this is on what they call the Roll Place (?) now—Heaken.

WL: It's Heakens now.

SV: There's none of these old buildings left out there.

WL: No, no. But our homestead cabin stood just about where Heakens cabin stands today.

ML: This is both—

WL: There's both homesteads.

ML: This is Roll's [unintelligible].

WL: This is Roll's homestead, and that's my dad and mother's homestead.

SV: They were both side-by-side.

WV: Yeah, and they joined. They were all in the same section.

SV: I'm seeing all these stumps in the picture.

WL: Yeah, well, they cleared those, and they didn't get them all pulled. [laughs]

ML: But they had to clear, what, how many acres?

WL: They had to have 20 acres under cultivation before they could prove up on the place. They took up the homesteads in '14, and they proved up on them in 1917.

SV: Three years?

WL: Yes.

SV: Like you said, no [unintelligible] CATs to help stuff out there.

WL: No. My dad made a homemade stump-puller.

SV: [unintelligible; speaking to Margaret]. How did he do that?

WL: Well, I couldn't do it. He took a big stump and wrapped a cable and fixed it so when you hook...put a long pole and hook a team of horses to it, it would wind the cable around the stump and the stump would come out. They were all green lodgepoles, so they were tough. Dad says some of the bigger ones, he'd take all the tension he could on it, and in the morning the stump would be out—after he put all the tension on it and then left it. Then the next morning it'd be out.

SV: That's different, isn't it?

ML: Yeah.

SV: Pretty genius, I would say.

ML: Yeah, he was quite a—

WL: Yeah.

ML: He really figured a lot of things out. I'm amazed at what these people did when you look at all these old barns and buildings that they put up and how they've stood.

WL: You wonder how they did it. Yes, it was tough going.

ML: Warner had some of these pictures, and when he wanted these large ones for this Indian over at the reservation, we couldn't find our original pictures. He remembered that when he visited his cousin in Seattle, she had them in an album. [laughs]

WL: That was her father that took the pictures.

ML: So we called her, and she says, "I'll have them enlarged and sent to you." So she sent this...got to go out there and go through her whole album and get copies of some of her pictures.

SV: There's a lot of interest in these kinds of photos now, because everything has changed so much. People are really interested in knowing what it used to look like.

WL: We have that picture of Ruth Dettwhiler (?).

ML: Are you going to ask him for a picture.

SV: Not right now.

ML: I was trying— [laughs]

WL: Ruth Dettwhiler was the teacher—

ML: —teacher at the Rolls School.

WL: —at the Rolls School, and this picture was Ruth and my sister, Mabel, eating lunch on a log pile by the school. I don't remember who took the picture.

ML: It was Ruth's camera. She's still living and lives down in Hamilton.

WL: Ruth McQuade (?) is her name now.

ML: We had her up here, it's been three years ago, I think it was, and Warner happened to see in the paper where her brother had died over on the Idaho border. He read this in the Missoulian, and he said, "That has to be Ruth Dettwhiler." So she was living in Missoula, then. So we called her up and talked to her, and then we went to see her. She had an apartment there. Her son and her daughter brought her up here one day, oh, about a year later in the summertime, and we took her back the old Roll...well, the Heaken place, yeah. I call it Heaken's—

WL: about the teacher at that time lived with us.

ML: And she lived there all—

WL: She was about 18.

SV: Pretty young.

ML: Yeah. We went over the hill and she says, "Oh, I remember where I am now." After all these years, she could remember [unintelligible].

SV: That must've been fun.

ML: Yeah, she had a great time.

SV: There was no electricity, or plumbing, or any of that stuff.

ML: There was none of that when I came. [laughs]

WL: Kerosene lamps. They finally got those gasoline—

ML: Lanterns.

WL: —lanterns that you pump up and put mantles on them. That was a little better, but they were a big nuisance, too.

SV: Did anybody have gravity-flow water systems into their houses, or anything?

WL: No, they dug wells and had hand pumps.

SV: What about refrigeration?

ML: There wasn't any. Ice [unintelligible].

WL: I'll tell you what my mother used to do. She used to take any fresh meat she had and put it in a crock—in a big crock, I still have the crock—and she'd put a layer of meat, and salt it, and another layer of meat, and salt it. Then she'd put that crock in the cold creek down there and tie a tight cloth around the top so flies couldn't get at it. She'd go down there and get what she wanted and put it back in.

SV: You didn't eat that just like a steak, right, with all that salt on it—

ML: Mostly stew and stuff.

WL: Yeah, that's right.

ML: She was a great stew-maker.

WL: Yeah, she loved stew. She loved to make...she made—

SV: What was her name?

ML and WL [at the same time]: Olivia.

SV: And her last name was Roll then?

WL: No.

ML: No, her name was Lundberg. Olivia Kvammen—

WL: Kvammen was her maiden name.

ML: From Norway. K-V-A-M-M-E-N.

SV: Okay, okay. She liked the stews? Do you remember eating a lot of venison or beef or—

WL: We ate an awful lot of venison. If Dad sold any beef—you know, meat—he'd butcher it and take it to Missoula and trade it for groceries in a store. Boy, they wanted every bit of it. They wanted the tongue and the liver and the heart. We couldn't keep any of it, so we lived on deer meat.

SV: Isn't that the way it goes?

ML: So we don't anymore.

SV: You don't eat venison anymore?

WL: No, no, we don't.

ML: There's two reasons for that. One, Warner's tired of it, and I don't like to cook venison. [laughs]

WL: I couldn't shoot one of these deer now.

SV: You couldn't?

WL: No.

SV: They're pets?

WL: They're pets. They go walk around here, and—

ML: It doesn't make a difference whether they're here or where, Warner will look at them and say, "How could anybody shoot one of those?"

SV: Is that right? They're so pretty now [unintelligible]? So have you noticed any big changes in the deer populations?

WL: There's not as near as many as there was those days.

SV: Were they all white-tail during those days?

WL: Yeah, yeah. There were a few mule deer, but they stayed on the higher mountainsides, mostly. Down here, it was all white-tail.

SV: How about for size? Oh, go ahead...

WL: What?

SV: How big were they?

WL: Oh yeah, you can't see the big bucks like we saw in those days. I have some of them, the horns, you know.

SV: A lot of difference then?

WL: Yeah. The deer population then—when you'd pass a field, it would be just like, there'd be white tails all over.

SV: Really?

WL: Yeah.

ML: It used to be that way, when we'd go down to Nelson's—

WL: Yeah. That meadow down there by Nelson's, that'd be just white-tail deer all over. Same way with our meadows here. Then the elk moved in. When Dad first came in here, there weren't any elk in this country. Then when these packers started taking dudes into the Bob Marshall [Wilderness], why, they finally drove them over the hill and down in here, and then the elk population started here.

SV: You think they came from the south?

WL: Oh, yeah, yeah. Dad hunted—

ML: They used to be prairie animals.

WL: Dad hunted all the time, and he never did see an elk in here.

SV: What did he see?

WL: Deer.

SV: Just deer?

WL: And these Indians. He would run into them out in the woods, and they'd have deer strapped on their saddles. When I was a kid, I'd hunt back west here, and I'd run into these Indians and they'd come over from the Flathead down through the...well, they had a pass through Elk Creek. Nobody could ever go through there and find their way going. But that's the way they came, and they were headed for this camp I was telling you about down here. They'd stop and ask Dad if they could camp there, and he'd say, "Sure, go ahead and camp." There was no harm in them, you know?

SV: Did they fish, too, then?

WL: What?

SV: They came for deer, and—

WL: Yes, mostly deer.

SV: They didn't fish too much?

WL: They did in the summer. They usually came twice a year. I remember there was one Indian male, you know, man. When he came over here, he always liked to come up to the house and talk to Dad. He could speak pretty fair English. When World War Two started, he came up one day and said to Dad, "Tell me now who savage—Indian or white man?" [laughs]

SV: What did Dad say? Probably, he didn't answer.

WL: He didn't. [laughs] He probably just laughed a little bit.

SV: Yeah, pretty good comment. Did you work here after high school, or school days were done?

WL: I work here all the time. I was telling Margaret, the coach in Missoula when I went to high school wanted me to go out for football, which I did, but I couldn't stay with it because I couldn't practice. I had to come up and work on the ranch.

ML: He'd have liked to have taken music—

WL: I like music, and I wanted to but I didn't do it.

ML: Our son is quite musical, thanks to his father, not to his mother. We were in last night to hear the Helena State Capital Band, which he plays in. They were to play in Helena

last...Missoula last night, so we were sitting out at Bonner Park, waiting for the concert to begin. They were tuning up and it was raining—

WL: Pouring rain.

ML: —and Warner sees these guys with these horns and says, “I always wished I could play one of those.”

SV: I bet that happened to a lot of kids here.

ML: Oh, yeah. Oh, I think it was a problem, because when I started in Missoula in '55...40, yeah, '55, we had the Seeley Lake, I mean, all of this area had to be bussed, either moved into Missoula or bussed from Seeley. Mr. McCormick (?) took them in. They couldn't take part in any of these any activities. They'd go in the morning and come back right after school, 6:00 in the morning until 6:00 at night.

WL: I went to school with a lot of boys, well, girls too, from Ovando, in that area. They were in the same boat, they couldn't take any extra.

SV: You said you cruised timber for the railroad, though, for a while.

WL: The Northern Pacific. They were real good friends of ours, and they would come up here—the crew would come up here—and they would stay with us here. It was crowded down in that cabin, but my mother, she'd cook for them. They stayed there, and then they got me going with them. First, I was running line for them with a compass, and then they taught me to cruise and I cruised timber for them. Of course, timber in those days was dirt cheap. We cruised a section of big, young ponderosa pine up by Holland Lake, and when we were all through, they asked me, they said, “Warner, why don't you buy this section?”

I said, “What would I do with all this timber?” [laughs]

Well, even Shorty Kessler, he had commented that he didn't realize this was going to happen. He said, “I could've taken 50,000 dollars and bought every place in the Swan Valley.” But, he couldn't see it coming either. Did you know Shorty?

SV: No, I never met him. I guess I met Barbara, later.

WL: How about his son—

SV: Tony?

WL: —Tony.

SV: Yeah, I met him and visited with him.

ML: He's like his father.

WL: He's just exactly. He looks like him. Same size. He comes over here quite often when Mike is haying here. Mike Holmes.

SV: Does he hay this down here?

ML: Yes.

WL: Mike Holmes, yeah.

SV: Good. When you were cruising timber, you worked all over for Northern Pacific?

WL: Mostly in here to start with. Then they had camps, like up in the West Gallatin, and I'd go up there. Down at Seeley Lake they had a camp in, and I was down there.

SV: How about differences in the trees then to now? Were there bigger trees, different kinds of species that they logged?

WL: No, the same species. But now they've cut all the big ones. [laughs] They're a lot smaller now. Clear-cutting, but I guess they've kind of stopped that.

SV: Do you remember any big trees that really stood out in your mind?

WL: There's one still standing.

SV: Is there?

WL: Up here along the Gordon Ranch meadow [unintelligible] ponderosa pine. I'd like to go see it, but I understand there's a huge larch. You've probably heard of that.

SV: At Seeley Lake?

WL: At Seeley Lake.

SV: Yeah, that's something [unintelligible].

WL: Did you ever see it?

SV: Yeah.

WL: How do you get to it? I'd like to see it.

SV: You go kind of—

[Break in audio]

ML: —the [unintelligible] place. It's on their place, as you're kind of walking down by the road to their cabin. It's just right up close.

WL: I didn't have anything to measure it with, I'd have liked to have measure it. That's an awful big tree. There used to be a fir tree back here where my brother and I used to go elk hunting, right along Craft...or, Glacier Creek. A man, if he stood like this, he would take three times around it to get to it, and that was a fir tree.

SV: That's pretty good-sized.

WL: That's a fir tree. By golly, if they didn't take that. They've clear-cut that whole park in there. That's how they ruined the country. [pauses] But it gives a lot of people jobs, I guess. Like I said before, that's progress.

ML: Well, some of them will rot, too.

WL: Yeah, eventually they all... [pauses]

SV: How about bear stories?

WL: [laughs] Yeah, we've got those. We had one right here, and we had a picture of that.

ML: Yeah, that was a pretty tame one.

[Break in audio]

WL: We had a grizzly sow come out of the creek bottom, just right over there behind that little house. She come up through there with four cubs.

ML: We just happened to be standing at the kitchen window, and Warner saw...we saw first two cubs.

WL: It was cubs, first.

ML: They were kind of trying to get around, and she was mad—

WL: And she was mad because she wanted the cubs to stay behind, and she cuffed them and put them back. Pretty soon, she walked out in the road, there, and four cubs came—

ML: We watched them. [laughs]

WL: —came right behind her. She stayed pretty near all summer.

SV: Just right on your place here?

WL: She was down in the meadow where Mike was haying, and...what was it?

ML: Katie Matthews (?) was mowing.

WL: No, she was raking.

ML: Or raking, yeah. She was out kind of down there all by herself.

WL: And here comes this grizzly out of the brush, and those cubs, and she was scared to death.

ML: She just drove the tractor and kept going over—

WL: —until she found Mike.

ML: Oh, then Shaun was loading, and—

[Break in audio]

ML: But they go back and forth for the most part. They don't come close to the house.

WL: This is a crossing for them from the south fork into the Mission wilderness. It's a crossing through here.

SV: Did you ever have any problems with your livestock or anything?

ML: We have one time we were here, and it was early spring and we thought we'd see if we could get to Glacier Lake. We always like to see how early we could get there. So we started out with the old yellow pickup. We got so far and we couldn't go any further, so we turned around and came back home. We said, "Well, we might go down to [unintelligible] Lake and go fishing." So Warner says, "We'll take the other truck, if we're going to go down there." He changed trucks, and I came in the house to get something and I went out, and we left. We were gone all day.

WL: She shut this gate.

ML: I shut...Normally, it is shut. Always, when we leave. But I just shut it and away we went. We came back, and there was a big pile of bear manure right there where the flowers are along of the side of the house. We got to this door, and it had been hit—cracked, like a V. Two screens were gone on this side of the house. Then we went around to the front door, and the front door was veneer—

WL: Wood.

ML: —and it had been eaten, half of it of.

WL: Eaten. He almost got through that wooden door.

ML: The screen door was just hanging in shreds [shreds]. He just opened that, and it just hung there.

WL: He was trying to get it for some reason.

ML: Well, he was also trying to get out.

SV: You think so?

WL: Yeah, he was in by the side of the fence here.

ML: Yes, what must have happened was, the first time we left, we must not have left the gate closed. Then when we came back, I just shut the gate—

WL: And locked him in here.

ML: He must've been around on the other side of the house nosing around, and we didn't see, just in and out of this door. So in order to get out—

WL: He had to back up and run and hit that screen. He couldn't go over the top because those sharp prongs are up there.

ML: He hit it out front.

WL: He hit it so hard that he broke the wires.

ML: And it bulged. You could see a bulge. It opened up from the bottom and he got out.

SV: Well, good thing he got out.

ML: Yeah, we were glad he was gone. [laughs]

WL: The only other time we had any problems was, my stepdad and I were building fence on the west side over here, and we had an old brown boar. He followed us for two days and he would kind of lay for us. He'd get behind a bush. He was really interfering with our work, so I finally shot him.

SV: Was it a grizzly?

WL: No, that was a big brown. Examining his teeth, he didn't have any. He was that old. But I told Henry, "I wouldn't want him gumming me." [laughs]

SV: No, I don't think so.

ML: Back when they used to have a garbage dump—an open garbage dump—over here, we used to have a lot of bear around, but they'd come in and get into garbage. Well, one day, there was a little one sitting out there close to a tree down behind. [laughs] A packer and his son were here, and the kid couldn't stand it any longer. He says, "Warner, have you got a bear tied down there?" [laughs] He thought that—

WL: a—we had him tied to a tree.

ML: He was just sitting down! They weren't doing any harm, but they go through here and stop.

WL: I always hated to shoot a bear, because they're actually no good for anything. I don't like the meat, and a fur—a bear rug—is a—

ML: Moth-catcher.

WL: —moth-catcher. So I never did care for a bear skin. I've seen one bear this year that's all, this spring, down in the meadow. The elk are very different this year, too.

SV: How?

WL: They don't stick around long. We used to have a lot of them in the meadow this time of the year. But they've been in there—

ML: They're someplace—

WL: But they are someplace.

ML: Because they come in here in the night. Spooky.

WL: I saw about 14 cows, they came in right over here on the flat. But there was only about four or five calves, so, you see, that isn't a very good reproduction. I think what they should do is close it for four years and let the bulls—

ML: Just killing big bulls.

WL: There's a few spikes around, but... [pauses]

ML: We haven't even seen mountain lions this year.

SV: Haven't you? Have you seen them in the past?

WL: Oh, yeah.

ML: Oh, yeah. They've been in here.

WL: That's another thing I don't like to shoot. We had one sitting out there by the trees, and I took the gun out. We didn't want him to get our cat. I took the gun out and I went through this door, and I was real quiet because I figured he'd run. I thought, well, I'll scare you anyway. So I shot in the ground right by him, and he just looked around and walked closer to the fence. He came closer! [laughs] Tex Baker was here one day, and a big one came right by the little house there. You knew [unintelligible]?

SV: [unintelligible]. He could tell stories, too.

WL: Yes, he used to come up—

ML: He had a couple good stories.

WL: He used to come up and trap beaver for me.

SV: Okay. Did the beaver get in your lake or pond?

WL: No, if they did, they were always causing trouble.

ML: Yeah. They'd make it difficult to get the hay.

WL: But they liked to flood the meadow down there. In fact, I got one or two down there, I think, right now that Tom Parker is going—

ML: If you get ahold of Tom Parker and talk to his mother-in-law soon. I don't think you'll ever see Tom, he's [unintelligible].

WL: He was supposed to come over and live-trap them, because I don't like to destroy them.

SV: Did Tex live-trap them too, and just move them?

WL: No, he didn't at that time. But he said it is a possibility to do that.

SV: Sure, yeah, I think they do it often.

ML: He also taught Warner how to trap skunks so they don't smell.

WL: Did you smell any skunk over at Nan's?

ML: They were logging out today. I'm taking care of Nan's dog. They're cleaning house today and washing carpets, so I went in and fed the dog and came out.

SV: You've got Sandhill cranes out in this meadow, too? I've seen them.

WL: Right, they were here this year again.

SV: Were they? You kind of have a little wildlife preserve going on here now then.

WL: We usually get swans in the lake, but I haven't seen a swan this year. Everything is different this year.

SV: Do you think it's the moisture?

WL: I don't know.

SV: You came in the '50s? Is that when you guys got married?

ML: We got married in '47.

WL: '47.

SV: And then you came after that. So you didn't hardly ever have to go out for work, for 20 years or something. I noticed a lot of—

WL: I was out in work cruising.

SV: Yeah, that you told me about.

WL: I worked a year with Al.

SV: Otherwise, you just ranched here?

WL: Yeah.

ML: Well, when our son got ready for first grade, he was an only child, and there was no one his age in school. Barney Jetty (?) was a little younger, and he would've been alone. We thought he needed some people his own age to meet. So I got a job at Missoula County High School. They were building Sentinel, and they needed more teachers. I lucked out in getting the job I wanted. So we spent the school year in town.

WL: I was here back and forth.

ML: Then Warner and his mother would come up here early spring and stay late fall, and he'd do different things in town. He liked to put machinery together from Menard's implements and different things—

WL: In the winter times.

ML: —in the wintertime. Then he got to haying out at Helmville, and that was a big project. He'd do that, and then come home and hay here and so we—

WL: The Wineglass, have you ever heard of that [unintelligible]?

SV: Yeah.

WL: I hayed there. I put up about 1,500 tons there.

ML: Every year.

WL: For Mrs. B.—Blankenship (?).

ML: For 20—

WL: I did 21 seasons.

ML: By then, I'd retired. [laughs]

SV: I guess so. But the Wineglass mill didn't operate that long, though...you hayed the property.

ML: No, this is the Wineglass. Yeah, this is the Wineglass. Shorty had the Wineglass mill here, then he bought this ranch and named it the Wineglass over—

WL: By Helmville.

ML: —Helmville.

SV: Okay, so that's where you were.

WL: So Blankenship bought it from Shorty.

SV: Okay, I got it, yeah.

ML: It goes right up the mountain. As you're looking, you can see this clear-cut up the mountain over toward Helmville. Beautiful ranch.

WL: Yeah, it's a beautiful ranch. About 20,000 acres.

SV: Wow. This sounds kind of silly, but I bet you have a lot of people now wanting to buy your place.

[Telephone rings; Margaret answers it]

WL: Oh, yeah.

SV: You ever going to let somebody subdivide it, or is it going to be for wildlife?

WL: No, not as long as I'm around.

SV: Good for you, all right. Because you sure do have a lot of wildlife and stuff.

WL: Yeah, it's a nice place. Beautiful place.

SV: I had to ask you that. It seems like you've kind of turned conservationist.

WL: Yeah, I have. I miss being able to do my work, like putting up my hay, you know? But it got too much for me.

SV: Yeah. Retirement time.

WL: Yeah, I guess.

SV: Do you have some hobbies then that you do a little bit around the house?

WL: Well, not really. I go down and look at my tractors. I got five tractors and they wanted to...I have people who want to buy them, but I like to look at them.

SV: Lots of things have changed, then, over the years. What do you think is one of the biggest changes here? Just people, or the way the country's changed?

WL: You mean in the valley?

SV: In the valley, yes.

WL: Oh, that's probably the biggest, there's so many more people.

SV: Yeah, population?

WL: Gosh, you know, I sold...Today, before you came, I sold a yellow pickup—Chevrolet pickup—to a young fellow from...well, he lives in here. He had a car, and he said, "Would you drive your pickup down to my place?" So Margaret drove with us with our car, and I took the pickup and he took his car. We drove in down past the school and turned in, and I wouldn't believe all the places that are back in there.

SV: Really? I haven't been on that road.

WL: Gee whiz. He's a real nice young fellow, his name is Tim Cosky (?). He's a Finn, Finnish, and he works for the Salmon Lake...you know the old Vorhauer (?) place? He works there, and he also works at the restaurant there at Seeley Lake at the mall there. He works in there.

SV: He's got a lot of jobs? Did you have to work a lot of jobs, I mean, besides the haying? Did you do a lot of odd jobs?

WL: No, we had cattle, we sold cattle. It wasn't very productive. Just like it is right now. Cattle prices are way down right now. Mike had, he had 100 and some head up there at Gordon Ranch, and he said he couldn't make it on cattle. He logs some here and on the Gordon Ranch, and even that fell down. So that's why he had to do something. He bought the Hungry Bear [restaurant]. I think Tony helped him buy it. But he's doing pretty good, I think. He seems to have a lot of customers.

SV: Got a lot of people around. Everybody likes him well. That helps.

WL: Yeah, yeah, they're very nice people.

SV: People people?

WL: Yeah.

SV: Were you guys involved in any community clubs or churches or anything over the years? I'm kind of a latecomer, so I'm not up on this stuff.

WL: Not really. They didn't have much in here, it was a long time before they even had a church going. They finally got the community hall, and everybody would go down there to a dance or something.

SV: You remember the dances, then?

WL: Oh, yeah, I used to play.

SV: You did?

WL: I'd play an accordion.

SV: All right. I've talked to a lot of people that remember the dances, so that must've been a pretty big social event.

WL: Oh, that was. That was the one. Then these dude ranches, like Babe Wilhelm, over here, he'd put on a big party in the fall of the year, and everybody would come. Then Kat Blair (?) from the Lindberg Lake, you've probably heard of him.

SV: Sure.

WL: They put on one every once in a while, and everybody would go. We used to ride saddlehorse up there, because in the wintertime you couldn't get through with a car. That's about all the community projects there were.

SV: Sure. So that's something that's changed then. You've got electricity and emergency ambulance crews and telephones. Okay, all right. Did you ride horses a lot—horseback?

WL: Yeah, quite a bit.

[Margaret re-enters the room]

WL: Who was that?

ML: Joe.

WL: How's he doing?

ML: Fine. He said he got everything set up for the concert tonight. It's thunder and lightning, and there was a tornado that came down by Lake Helena. He thinks they ought to call the concert off. I do, too.

SV: Scary thought.

WL: Missoula's supposed to be over to Helena today.

ML: Yeah, see, they're changing concerts. Missoula's invited, and he said, "I don't know if we'll even have it." But they got it all set up, anyway.

SV: I had just asked Warner if you guys were involved in any community things or remember what the social events were, and it even kind of came later, but he was talking about dances.

ML: Yeah, they did a lot of those things before my time. Because after I came, there weren't any dances because your mom used to always say, "They aren't like the old days," she'd say. We'd all get together and have a dance here and a dance there."

WL: There got to be too many people.

ML: Yeah, yeah.

SV: Do you think television changed any of that?

ML: Of course, there was a long time where we didn't have television.

WL: It was a long time before we had a radio, down at my mother's.

ML: Yeah, and—

SV: Do you remember when you got a radio?

WL: Oh, let's see, it was a radio...it was a Atwater Kent radio that my dad got, and it had one of those big horns that came out. [laughs] That's what you listened to.

ML: It had to be in the '20s.

WL: Yeah.

SV: What was your dad's name?

ML and WL [at the same time]: Charles.

SV: Okay. Yeah, television came way later then?

ML: Oh, yeah. When I first came, I had a little radio with a great big back-battery pack.

WL: We've still got it.

ML: Yeah, we still...and now we—

WL: It's up in the attic.

ML: Not only that, but you'd only run it just...you'd find out when the news was and when there were one or two things you'd turn it on so you'd save the battery. That was a switch, you see, because I came from where the radio went all day long if I wanted it to.

SV: Did you miss it?

ML: A little bit, yeah. I mean, it was...

SV: Do you remember what your first impression was when you came here?

ML: Oh boy! [laughs]

WL: She came in on a shovel.

ML: You're getting ahead of the story. We had come from Helena on a Sunday to pick up Warner's mother in Missoula and bring her up to the ranch. His brother was going to college there, and he went with us. No, he was still in high school. He was in high school. So Frank said, "I'll drive." We had an old Chevrolet, what was it?

WL: '40?

ML: A '40 Chevrolet. We'd had two or three flat tires coming from Helena over anyway.

WL: That's why I brought my brother with me—

ML: To help change tires. So we get to Potomac, and I think, well, this is nice farming country. This must be about where we're going. I said, "Where's your place?"

"Oh, it's on up the road." Well, [laughs] we kept coming up the road. Every time I'd see a field, I think, this has to be it. We got just before your house, before we got to Fred Messer's (?), right there on that curve, and it was winter and snow still—some banks on both sides of the road—so it was a one-way road. You didn't meet somebody unless you slowed down. Well, somebody coming out of Fred's place was not going to slow down, and he hit us head-on.

WL: He took the front wheel off.

ML: And there we were. We needed to be back to Helena [laughs], we needed to get Olive up here. So Warner went to work, and he put a shovel—

WL: I had a shovel.

ML: Tell her how you did it.

WL: It was snow, and I jacked the car up and put the shovel under the wheel that was broken. I tied the handle of the shovel to the bumper, and it was snow so it slid. See? It'd slide along, and we came clear on in here with that shovel. [laughs]

SV: Oh boy.

ML: These men that hit us followed us, and they were going to Helena, would you believe? So they took us back to Helena that night. Warner's mother fixed a little supper for us all, and we went back.

WL: I left the car here, and Dad fixed it—got some parts, and...

SV: So what did you feel like when you saw this?

ML: I thought it was a long way in here, but I still didn't think I was ever going to live here. [laughs] So I learned. Of course, I knew farmland. I knew what farmland looked like, and I knew how farmers farm but they didn't do the same things they do around here. They didn't get wood, and they didn't have to milk the cows. But I did. I had chickens and cows. I didn't milk. I never did do that.

WL: She had chickens and turkeys.

ML: I had chickens and turkeys, and I learned that one of the cleanest things you can do is to clean the chicken coop and then go take a good, hot bath. [laughs]

WL: In a tub.

ML: In a tub. So when we got running hot water, I didn't mind cleaning the chicken coop.

WL: Now we haven't got anything, but a cat.

ML: And we had a cat and a dog.

SV: Did you garden?

ML: No, I'm not a gardener.

WL: It's rough to raise a garden in here.

ML: I'm not much of a gardener, and I'm not much of a flower gardener.

WL: My folks always had a big garden. Yeah, they had everything that wouldn't freeze.

ML: She raised the most elegant strawberries you ever saw.

WL: And Dad raised tons of potatoes. He fed the milk cows all winter on them.

SV: He did?

WL: Yeah.

SV: That's ingenuity. And strawberries?

ML: Well, they had carrots and rutabagas and—

WL: And then we had root cellars in those days.

ML: And it all kept. I came along with a tin can in the can-opener days. And I had lived in a big city. I'd lived in a big city, and we didn't garden. My mother was a widow and she was working out all the time, and so we just didn't do those things at home.

WL: My mother used to like to make home brew. [laughs]

ML: And Warner liked to steal it.

WL: Well, us kids would steal it, but we wouldn't drink it. We'd hide it, and then in the summertime, when my dad would come in and it was hot, and he'd say, "Boy, I wish I had a beer." And we'd go dig up [laughs] a beer for him, and we did that every time my mother made beer. During this fire, when I told you we had to leave, my mom had a lot of beer in the root cellar. I don't know how they got wind of that, these firefighters.

ML: Just looked.

WL: But anyway, they tore the lock off of the root cellar, and they got in there and they drank all our beer. [laughs] Didn't bother anything else, just drank the beer, which wasn't too much.

ML: That septic tank man and I are going to have trouble. Do you get the septic tank man?

[Break in audio]

SV: Were there more fires than that '29 fire? Big fires around?

WL: That year, that was the only one. It burned about 6,000 acres.

SV: Wow! Did it go through pretty fast, that time of year?

WL: Pretty fast. It was dry, all dry.

SV: Do you think the woods are any different nowadays, I mean as far as—

WL: Oh gosh, with all this rain...and of course, these clear-cuts they got, it's going to block it a lot, too, you know.

ML: We just haven't had a fire—

WL: Fires just scare me to death. I just hate to build a little brush fire out here, burning something. I had one small one—I got a permit for it this spring—and I didn't know when I was going to burn it, but I finally, finally did. Mike's got two big piles that he's got to burn. He tried to burn them once, but it was too wet and he's got those to burn yet.

SV: Might have to wait until fall now, and see what it does. Well, do you think...we talked about the main changes, and he thought it was mostly the people. There were just way more people.

ML: I think that the paved roads, the electricity...well the, I guess you'd say progress, that's come in has just opened this up. It used to be a place where very few people knew that it existed.

WL: At one time, I knew every homestead in the valley, but I sure don't anymore.

ML: Well, we did, even when I came up. I knew everybody, or knew who they were at least. But now, gosh. They come into vote, I don't know half of the people that show up. But that's a great job to learn to know people—

SV: How long have you been doing that?

ML: Well, not so very long. About four, five years. June Underwood wanted me to start when I retired, which was in '73, and at that time I just didn't want to do anything—anything I had to do. So I didn't. Then they were short of people, so I started. And I like it, because I like being able to see people and know who they are.

SV: And you go out with the girls to lunch or something.

ML: Yeah.

SV: Is that AARP thing?

ML: No, that's the retired generation. [laughs] I have to be careful what I say. I say "the old ladies' club" but that's not quite true.

WL: Every other week they do that.

ML: Yeah, yeah. Everybody just buys their own lunch, and it's very...you just come. You pay for your lunch, and you leave.

WL: Have you heard anything how June is?

SV: I haven't been up there.

ML: I could tell you, but Mary Phillips isn't doing very—

[Break in audio]

WL: —you 160 acres, and they'd bet you...no, they'd bet you 160 acres that they could starve you to death. [laughs] And they did. They did most of it, an awful lot of them left here.

ML: But they really looked forward, I think, to having their own place.

WL: Well, another thing. It's a lot like the country where my dad and mother from, the old country in Norway and Sweden, and that's what they thought. "Just imagine, we're getting 160 acres for nothing." [laughs]

SV: Not quite nothing.

WL: A lot of them pulled out. They didn't—

ML: Well, they weren't all from the old country either.

WL: Oh, no, no.

ML: You see, a lot of them were from—

WL: Oh, there was some Finlanders.

ML: Yeah, well, they stayed, a lot of them.

WL: Yeah, most of them stayed. And they were real hard-working people.

ML: And they liked milking cows. That was the other thing, both Warner's mother and his dad liked the farming. They liked what they did.

[End of Interview]