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Oral History Number: 422-178
Interviewee: Stan Nicholson, Colleen Nicholson
Interviewer: Kit Johnston
Date of Interview: October 19, 2006
Project: Upper Swan Valley Oral History Project

Kit Johnston: I am Kit Johnston, and this is an interview with Stan and Colleen Nicholson in Seeley Lake [Montana] on October 19, 2006.

My project is basically just putting together a collection of interviews on what places people in this community are in...the Swan Valley, but Seeley Lake also. This is the only interview I have set up in Seeley Lake. Just to kind of try to identify what sense of place is here and what that means to people here. I guess we can start with how long you've lived in Seeley Lake.

Stan Nicholson: Sixteen winters. I say that so people remember, but 16 years. I used to work full-time here, and we came back in 1990.

KJ: And you were born in Missoula?

SN: Yes.

KJ: Why did you decide to move back to Seeley Lake?

SN: Because when we were away those 32 years, many times in the summer we would come to visit with my parents—we had a cabin on Placid Lake. Starting in about 1964 or '65, we would come to a Placid Lake for two weeks or three weeks, and then we started hiking in the Missions and a little bit in the Bob Marshall [Bob Marshall Wilderness Area], but mostly in the Missions. So we bought property here on the Double Arrow Ranch in 1982, and we selected the site so we could see the Missions. We didn't care about being on the lake. We just wanted to be kind of living in a forest setting and be able to have a good view of the Mission Mountains, so that's how we selected this specific place. Took us ten days to find it, driving up and down the valley.

KJ: But you knew you wanted to be in this valley?

SN: We knew we wanted to be back in Montana, and then it became this valley because of our contact with the valley. Then it became this place so we could see the Missions.

KJ: Do you have family in this area?

SN: I do now. I have two brothers—a twin brother who lives in Great Falls and an older brother who lives in Missoula. Of course, when we first came, my mother and dad were still here, and Colleen's, well, her parents lived in Missoula, so, yes, we had family in the area.

KJ: Did you raise your children here?

SN: No, only give them good lessons by hiking in the mountains, and we spent ten weeks together building this house.

KJ: Where were they raised?

SN: Well, many places, but I guess the first time...They were born, the first one in Durham, when I was at Duke, Durham, North Carolina. Second one at Fort Meade in Maryland, when I was in the army. Third one, Williamsburg when I was teaching at William and Mary.

KJ: Wow, so really all over.

SN: That's where they were born. When they were all under about four, we went to Nigeria, and then to Colombia, and then to Brazil,. Shelly (?) was born in Brazil. They were kind of raised, I guess, for seven years in Bethesda, Maryland.

KJ: Was that work that brought you to all of those places?

SN: Right. Finally, we went to Maine, Colby College, and Shelly went to high school in Colby but the boys were all in college by that time. So they were raised on the East Coast, basically. Bethesda and Maine during their high school years. They all went to school...Bruce went to Colby, Brian went to Reed, Reed College, Sean went to Dartmouth, and Shelly went to Tufts. They kind of ended up where they went to school. Brian married a girl from Bethesda, well actually, Rockville, Maryland, and so they kind of live where they grew up. They'd like to be out here, hard to make a living.

KJ: Yeah. You grew up in Missoula?

SN: Right.

KJ: Do you feel a different connection to this land up here than you do to Missoula?

SN: Oh, yes! Oh, yes. I like Missoula, and have quite a few high school friends and a few college friends, and some people like Dan Kemmis that I've met since, but I like living in a forest. I like living in a small town. I'll tell you why later on. Each little town is different. Condon in the Swan Valley would be different from Seeley Lake, which would be different from Ovando, and on and on. I learned that in spades when I was doing these 12 community study groups in Montana. I started out in Missoula, and I did one in Missoula and Billings and Helena and Great Falls and Lewistown and Havre and Seeley Lake and Hamilton and Thompson Falls. Each one of these communities is quite different one from the other. Missoula is very different from any other city in Montana, and Seeley Lake is probably pretty unique as well.

KJ: Can you think of anything that makes this place particularly special to you? Why do you call this home, and why did you choose this to be your home?

SN: Other than being where it is—it's located in a forest with this great view that makes it special—It turns out that this little subdivision, actually, it's quite a large subdivision, the Double Arrow Ranch—

KJ: So, we're on the ranch now?

SN: Right. When you were looking out in front you were looking at the ranch, it's over 3,000 acres. Think of five square miles. Now there're 840 residential lots here, the average size is four acres. I don't know if acres mean anything to you.

KJ: I don't know, I'm not particularly good with that, but, I mean...

SN: Well think of maybe, oh, four acres being six football fields or something like that. It's a big...and that's why you can only see one house. The other reason you can only see one house, there are only 460 of them here, so it's over half-built. It's an interesting little subdivision. It's not a subdivision with trees. It's a bunch of houses in a forest. The subdivision itself—the association, which I was on the board for ten years and president for eight—is very active, very progressive. Maintaining the roads, thinning the trees, making sure that the houses are sort of tucked back and out of sight. That's been fun to work with—to make sure that your immediate community is kind of what you want, not what happens.

KJ: Do you feel like you're rooted to this area around Seeley Lake and Swan Valley or—

SN: More Seeley Lake. I am on the board seat, so I go up several times a year to go to board meetings, but I feel very much rooted part of Seeley Lake and, somewhat, in Missoula. One connection was the association and the immediate neighborhood. Another sort of organization, I helped create the community foundation of Seeley Lake. We have a community foundation that's raised 350,000 dollars in six years.

KJ: For?

SN: For grants and projects, for lighting for the performing arts events, money for the YMCA program, money to help extend the parking lot in back of the community hall. The most recent thing—have you seen the playground in Seeley Lake?

KJ: No.

SN: Well, I'll show you the playground on a DVD. Seeley Lake just built a playground. Have you seen the one next to the carousel, called the Dragon Hollow?

KJ: A carousel in Seeley Lake?

SN: Missoula.

KJ: The playground next to the carousel?

SN: You know where the carousel is, down by the river?

KJ: Yes. Isn't it to the...

SN: West.

KJ: Yes, I do know what you're talking about.

SN: We just built one like that in five days in June, and that was our most recent project. We'll show you that DVD because it was like, "Whoa!" It could tell you more about Seeley Lake than I could ever tell you.

There's several projects that I feel connected to. One is the community foundation. One is the association here. Another one is the Clearwater Resource Council [CRC], it's like SEC [Swan Ecosystem Center], but it's for the Clearwater.

KJ: Your rootedness is more social and has to do with community. Is that what—

SN: I think so.

KJ: Okay. You mentioned a couple communities that you're involved in and associations. Can you think of any more. The—

SN: Other connections?

KJ: —community foundation. Are there other groups that you think of that are strong communities that you're a part of?

SN: I've done some work for the elementary school, particularly on their finance committee. I've know the principals and the clerk, Sally Johnson (?). I've worked with them some on some just ad-hoc projects about setting the budgets for the school and that kind of thing. Worked a little bit in the elementary school when they needed some couple—Colleen and I worked with the fourth graders, who are now graduated from high school—tutoring. [laughs] Just going in one day a week and helping kids read or work on a computer. I feel some connections to the elementary school, particularly. Then there's another group in Missoula that I'm on their board—chairman of the board—it's an investment bank for small businesses, so it's investing and training start-up businesses. It's a very good group, and it's the only one like it in Montana,

so I feel a connection there. That's my closest connection to a group in Missoula. Except we go to Costco twice a month or once a month. [laughs]

KJ: You're a Costco member? That's a good community.

Colleen Nicholson: Well, we see people from Seeley Lake there.

SN: But, basically, we live and socialize and do our thing in Seeley Lake. By that I mean, we shop here—we really shop at the Dollar Market—and we go to the restaurants. We play golf—Colleen more than I do—enjoy the golfing, socializing there. Love the Little Bird. Have you been to the Little Bird?

KJ: No.

SN: It's a neat little antique shop, café, restaurant.

KJ: Within these communities that you built, that you feel that you're a part of, do you feel that other community members are rooted here, and if you do you feel that awareness, does that make your community stronger?

SN: I'll give you two answers. The first one is that it's a very transient community. Probably 40 percent of the people that live here now didn't live here eight years ago. The overview is that we're building homes at a rate of 45, 50 a year, and so half of the homes in the valley—1,500 homes and cabins—have been built in the last 10, 20 years. On one level there's a lot of coming and going. A lot of the people that are building homes are part-time residents—it's a second home. About a third, or a little over the third, of the people on the Double Arrow Ranch are part-time residents. In a sense, it's a turning-over, growing community, and it's still small. I mean, in terms of permanent residents, it's 2,000 people. But it's growing. School enrollments are actually going down, so the people that are coming are older. Not over 65 usually, but 40 to 60. On one level, there's a lot of new people, okay? We're here 16 years; we're beginning to feel like veterans, old-timers. But the other answer is that people feel a very strong, almost kind of a dreamlike, way about living here. When I talk to someone, first meet someone, I say, "Well, how did you come to Seeley Lake? What's your connection? What happened?" They'll tell stories, and it'll be they liked fishing and they just happened to come here and they looked around and they found this land. They just bind and they just love it. Everyone has a different story. They drove up by the Bow [Elbow Lake] and down past Salmon Lake, and "when I saw Salmon Lake, I knew this is where I wanted to be." People feel a very strong attachment to the valley and to Western Montana. Even from the very beginning, you don't have to be here a year or 15 or 30 to feel that, had a lot of people express that. So, on the one hand, we're kind of all newcomer, or a lot of newcomers. On the other hand, there's a very strong bond.

KJ: That's interesting. You've lived here quite a while, I guess, and you don't feel that the newcomers are less rooted here, or are less invested?

SN: No. I say this differently than most people that I talk to. People say, "Oh, this place is growing. We could just ruin this place."

I said, "You know what? This is a much more interesting place now than it was 16 years ago."

They say, "Oh, Stan, how can you say that?"

I say, "Well, you're here, and you're here." [laughs] The sort of things that I do are frequently with people who have come since I did. I'll give you a couple of examples. John Hoffler (?) and Carolyn Nell (?) in the [unintelligible] Brockler company [?]-it's a nonprofit environmental group that does mapping, GIS mapping. They came about five or six years ago and built a home across the valley. They made it possible for us to do—Clearwater Valley and the Swan Valley—to do a fire plan because of their skills and what they can do. They went on from there to do a whole landscape assessment, which we did with CRC. If you look at the people, who are the people in the CRC, well, most of them have come since I did. So they're attached and they're skillful, and they're committed to the community of making it better. They're the ones that say, "Well, I'm afraid there's going to be too many people around here,"

I say, "Don't worry about it" because it's quality more than quantity. A lot of them get involved. Some of them are part-time and it's hard to get them involved, but the ones that are full-time residents that are new are pretty active.

KJ: You've mentioned that a lot of these communities that you're involved in. Why is it important for you to be involved in this community and to be on the board that funds the playground? Why is that important?

SN: Well, Colleen said that my twin brother and my older brother and I never got over being in Key Club. You know what Key Club is?

KJ: [laughs] My high school had a Key Club!

SN: Okay. She said, "Didn't you get that out of your system in Key Club?" I guess I didn't, so I like to work on projects and work with other people. My twin brother just joined the school board in Great Falls, and my older brother's on the city council in Missoula. [laughs] It runs in the family, that's why Colleen put it that way.

KJ: I guess we'll move on to the section of questions I have on spirituality. Whether or not you feel spiritually connected to this land. If there's something about this place that draws you to it, about the landscape and whether this is a spiritual feeling.

SN: It's a hard question for me because I don't consider myself very spiritual, except like Edward Abbey, or something like that, or [Aldo] Leopold, or [Wallace] Stegner, or Kemmis. So,

in sort of an intellectual sense, I feel that feeling. I love the mountains. Don't fish or hunt anymore, but I just like to walk in the mountains. I love to walk around here.

KJ: But you wouldn't describe that love as spiritual to you?

SN: I don't know. I mean, ask Colleen. I'm not a very spiritual person, at least not in the formal sense of the word.

KJ: Do you feel that the relationship that you do have with the land, like when you love to go to the mountains and walk around, do you feel that since you've moved here it's changed or grown stronger?

SN: Oh, yes. I grew up...Dad was a logger down in the Bitterroot Valley. I can remember living in a tent in the summer of 1941. So I grew up in the forest in some ways, and Dad would go hunting and we'd go out. Since I've come here, it's a whole different level. I used to go to Sunday school when we weren't killing small animals...we got a dispensation for hunting. [laughs] I said, "Wait a minute, how did we square this?"

But when I came here, my dad would say, "Well, why do you want to go up in the Missions?" I mean, this is the end of the world for him—cabin he built with his sons in Placid Lake.

We would say, "Oh no, Dad, there's more to it." So we would go up in the Missions and explore around here. Then just taking care of this forest. We've probably cut 2,000 trees off these 11 acres. Can't you tell that we've sort of—

KJ: Yes.

SN: Any rate, just taking care of these 11 acres has been, one, a lot of work, but also a lot of fun. Heating the house with wood is another example. We finally got a propane heater this year, and we're just...Was today the first time we used it? You're here on the inaugural day for the propane heater.

CN: But we still have the wood stove.

KJ: So, why did you switch to propane?

SN: So we could go away more. That's part of it, because when you heat the house with wood with relatively no back-up heat, when the temperature drops below 20 you have to stay around or the pipes freeze. That's one reason. Another, we had a wood stove when we were living in Maine, and so we heated that house with wood. Then we have done it here, and it's just part of the deal. If you're going to cut down a lot of trees to open up the forest, you got to do something with the wood. You can sell the trees to the mill, but there's a lot left, so that's one way to take care of the...to recycle.

KJ: Yes, as long as you have the resources there and a local resource.

SN: Oh, yeah. The valley's full of firewood.

KJ: Can you think of any human relationships you have that might strengthen your relationship with the land? Is that clear to you?

SN: Not really, but I'll think about it, or you can try to put it a different way.

KJ: Okay. I have fond memories of being certain places with people and that makes that place more meaningful for me.

SN: I guess in terms of the example I gave of building the house. When we had our four children and a lot of their friends, we had as many as 16 or 18 people here a day working on this house. When Bruce's college friends would come, we'd say, "Well, we'll put you on the roof crew." we were up there in August putting on a steel roof. We didn't charge extra for the tanning salon, but they were up there in 90-degree weather, sweating away, working. We did that for ten weeks. It's really quite unusual, nowadays, for a family to get together on something like that. That's an experience with the family and some of their friends and some of our friends that came out.

Similar experiences in hiking, and I think being with people on those excursions or the house-building adventure, sort of certainly makes the relationship stronger. You can remember particular places on the trail where somebody said, "Ooh, what are we doing up here?" Or camping in a special place with a good friend, or with Shelly.

KJ: Shelly is your daughter?

SN: Yes.

KJ: It sounds like you spend a lot of time outdoors hiking. You used to hunt?

SN: Way back. Last time I went hunting was 1958. I've gone with my nephew, who hunts, on a couple of occasions. He was a timber buyer for Pyramid Lumber, and then he's now a stock broker, but he was a great hunter. He'd say, "Come on, Stan. Let's go up that mountain. We're going to check out the mulies [mule deer]." Off we'd go. This was ten years ago or so. I used to hunt, and I like to just get out and walk around, so I have a pretty close feel for the land and liking it.

KJ: Are there other activities you do, outdoorsy activities?

SN: Well, I chase a golf ball [laughs] a little bit. Mow the lawn three times a year.

KJ: But you still hike a lot?

SN: I didn't hike this year. I have Parkinson's disease, and so I can't hike as well as I used to. I get emotional, so you'll have to excuse me.

KJ: Oh, no, yeah. Do you think that all that time you spent outdoors—hunting with your friend, or camping with your dad—did you learn a lot from that, from being outdoors?

SN: Well, you develop camping skills. I don't know whether you've camped a lot or not.

KJ: [unintelligible]

SN: A little or a lot?

KJ: A little bit. I've definitely developed way more skills in these last two months up here than I ever have growing up.

SN: That's one thing. Being able to be a skilled camper, it just doesn't happen. One of the reasons I like to hike with my children is because they all became very skilled at camping, which means you hit this campsite, and people fan out and they know what to do. When they're picking up they know how to break camp, they know how to cook. When they walk through the woods, they don't make any noise so you see more. I remember going on camping trips for orientation groups at Colby College, I think about four times, five times. We'd take the freshmen out with student leaders. I would observe people on their first camping trips, they'd say, "Whoa, this is a whole different thing." I guess, yes, I learned a lot about camping and reading maps and planning trips and that kind of thing. I became a birdwatcher. I don't bother with shore birds, but I know a lot about the western perching birds and the...not as much about the hawks.

KJ: What is a shore bird?

SN: Well, like ducks and plovers and all kinds of things that live on the shore of the water. But I learned a lot about birds. Birds mean a lot to me. When I saw the first bluebird come back in the spring, I say, "Ooh!" They did this...Suzanne Vernon, too, her microphone. She used to write it for the *Pathfinder* before she was doing what she does now. I would read her articles, and they'd be about the bluebird or something like that.

KJ: Do you feel like knowing about wildlife is an important part of becoming rooted to a place?

SN: I think so, yeah.

[Break in audio]

KJ: So, it just started recording now.

You don't garden because—

SN: Because the animals. The season's too short. We could garden in Missoula, and we're at 4,800 feet. Missoula's 3,300, the lake is 4,000, so we're too high and too many animals around, and we're not going to fence the place just to garden.

KJ: You just don't want a fence?

SN: No. Well, first of all, we're not allowed to on the subdivision. A little garden fence we could do, but it seems so artificial and so...I would like to garden, and I have in other place and enjoy it, but not here.

KJ: It sounds like you do have a lot of knowledge about this land with your [unintelligible]. Do you know much natural history at all about plants? Do you do plants and stuff?

SN: No, and I don't know really a lot about it. The sort of formals...what's it called when you classify animals and plants? What's that called?

KJ: Like in their families?

SN: Taxology [taxonomy] or—

CN: But you know about weeds and flowers.

SN: I know about noxious weeds—

CN: Wildflowers.

SN: Yeah, wildflowers quite a bit, but I don't do it formally. This is our dog McKenzie.

[speaks to dog]

KJ: Hey!

SN: Hey, Mac.

KJ: You're a good dog! You're a quiet dog. When we came up, he didn't bark.

SN: No, he's a very social dog, he likes people. He likes dogs even better though. He doesn't see many.

KJ: Is there a dog park at Seeley?

SN: No. No. We take Mac out every day.

KJ: I guess when they have the great outdoors. They don't need a dog park.

SN: We put him on a leash, so he's...because he probably would chase deer or bear, lions. We see a lot of wildlife up here. Did you see the deer when you came up? There were three of them. Three of them right below the house when you drove up?

KJ: Oh, no, we saw some further down the road a ways. They were leaping like crazy. Leaping around. Well, there's that area down there where it's been pretty opened up, and there were big brush piles and they were just leaping around the brush piles.

SN: Well, that's good. Yeah, that's a piece of the state forest, and that's called a regeneration project. We're trying to keep the big ones and get the regeneration of the same species rather than lodgepole or the fir. They want to get tamarack and "p" pine [Ponderosa pine] back.

KJ: Is that something that the subdivision board—

SN: We didn't, but they asked us about it. The subdivision board is encouraging landowners to thin their property.

KJ: Getting back to this, do you feel like—

SN: I don't want to distract you too much from your [unintelligible]. You want to get through that... [laughs]

KJ: Do you feel like your community activity and your rootedness that we've talked about, do you feel a sense of pride when you think of that?

SN: Oh, yeah! You bet! [laughs] Yeah! I think this is a great little community. My career has taken me from international things and international education to thinking about national policies when I was at Washington working at Brookings. Then state-level issues in government when I came back to Montana and working out of Missoula trying to think about how you get the region around Missoula to work more effectively. It's a lot more fun in Seeley Lake. These other levels are kind of 'Good god, can this president screw it up any worse?' It's things I used to care a lot about and do some things with are in sad shape, I just sort of think, 'I'll read about it, but I don't want to commit myself to that.' In Seeley Lake, you can make a commitment to something and things happen. It's like running a business, a successful business. You can control it, you can make a difference. That's enjoyable.

KJ: The feeling of pride that you get, it is kind of a hard thing to describe pride, but are you proud of it like you would be proud...Are you proud of the effects that you see that you can make?

SN: Yeah.

KJ: To you, is that personal, or is it pride for the whole community that came together?

SN: Well, both. I don't know what you know about SEC, but I'll tell you a little story about three organizations here. The Blackfoot Challenge, do you know anything about it?

KJ: Yeah, we talked to...Bryce, what was his name? Greg?

SN: Greg Newdecker (?). The Blackfoot Challenge started with ranchers really concerned about keeping the ranches intact, improving the water and the stream size, and getting after noxious weeds. Started working together about 20 years ago, 25 years ago, and they formed the Blackfoot Challenge about '92, something like that, so they're 14-15 years old. They began their projects, whether we're actually working together in the community had to do with improving the pastures and the stream, and allocating the water, and dealing with the fishermen, and all that kind of thing. Then, not long ago, five years, they had an opportunity to work with the nature conservancy and acquire 88,000 acres of Plum Creek land. SEC got started about eight or nine years ago when the Forest Service was going to shut down this office and the buildings there. SEC organized itself to really take over environmental education tasks, and from that they got into analysis of the valley, and then mapping. Then they came to the question, "Well, how do you deal with Plum Creek and the sale of their lands?"

Here, the CRC, which is much—it's three and a half years old—started out by doing a fire plan I told you about. Then moved on to how do you thin properties and how do you develop programs to subsidize private landowners, encourage them to get out there and do their properties. I think we brought in over 300,000 dollars to do that. Then we started a committee, which was the Land Use Committee, and that prepared the landscape assessment. That's being used now with the county commissioners to zone the valley. So our approach to dealing with Plum Creek is to increase the regulatory matters. But all three of these organizations are now deeply engaged in how you deal with the change of land ownership when Plum Creek owns, in our valley, it's 35 percent of the valley. Each of these organizations have sort of come to work on the same issue, but they came at it from very different perspectives.

What was the question? [laughs]

KJ: I mean, this is great, too, but—

SN: Well, it may not be.

KJ: I think we were...the question was about pride—

SN: Pride in organization. Let me just give you a couple examples. The Clearwater drainage is part of the Blackfoot, whereas the Swan goes up into the Flathead then down in the Clark Fork, but this is part of the Blackfoot. The 10,000 acres right out there and up to the top of the hill and over to where you turn off the road to Placid Lake, which is about a third bigger than the ranch right next to it, was acquired as part of the Blackfoot Challenge programs. So 10,000 out of those 88,000 acres are right there. That's huge. What SEC is talking about doing, you know, is buying a section or half a section and sort of working at it a little bit at a time over here. This was sort of dropped in our laps, so let's do something up here with the other 70,000 acres that Plum Creek owns. Being able to work with people and they say, "Well, what can you do?" Well, you can understand what the situation is, and you can stand up and be an informed citizen and you go to meetings. You look at a map, you can teach yourself what's happening. I think you can...I get a lot of pride just doing that, help myself first then helping people learn what the situation is.

I ran a meeting two weeks ago. We've been working on the Clearwater Resource Council mostly on the natural resources. Where the elk migration routes, where it links. What's the condition of the water? What's the situation with the forest? Just not the federal part, but the whole thing. So we said, "When are we going to get to the people? People are the problem. Let's start learning about the people." That session that night was on where are the homes and cabins in our 250,000-acre valley. We got data from the county property tax office, which knows that there are 15, probably 1,600 homes or cabins in the valley. I wrote an article for the *Pathfinder*, and we invited people to come and we sent emails out. There were 30 people there. We had a map and said, "Basically, the situation is 88 percent of this valley has been managed for timber harvest, either federal or private. Eight percent of the valley is owned by people, like this subdivision. Four percent of the valley—half of that eight—is actually occupied by homes." So this valley is really not occupied by human settlement. Furthermore, two-thirds of those 1,500 homes, over 1,000 of those homes, are right here in the center. So we don't have residential sprawl like they do in the Bitterroot or the Flathead Valley. The pattern of homeownership and development is really quite desirable from the point of view of let's keep people kind of close together, not spread out, from the point of view of protecting them from wildfire or having roads or other utilities. You don't have to string them all out.

Now, why is this important? Because it says, "Well, maybe that's what we got to do for the future. We ought to keep that pattern." We'll strengthen the center. We got to get adequate water system in here and a sewer system in so we can keep expanding, building at the center without spilling over the whole valley. Then let's define the neighborhoods. We defined the neighborhoods, mapped them, described them—neighborhood by neighborhood—and the people at the end of it thought, 'That's great. Let's learn more about what the people are up to here now that we've got the elk all figured out.' [laughs] The next thing would be, 'What kind of community is this? Who are we?' We're growing, why are we growing, and so what? Are the

people involved engaged? If they're not, can they be more? And so on. I take great pride in being able to help do that, and that's what Clearwater Resource Council is dedicated to doing.

KJ: With the question of 'who are we in this community,' how do you approach that? Has that turned out to be an interesting question?

SN: Oh, yeah. [laughs] Oh, yeah. I wrote an article from the *Business Quarterly* ten years ago about the Seeley Lake from a logging camp to a thriving community, but it was really about the economy. When did this store come in? What do people do? How important is the timber industry? Threatening to update that, and this time around it won't be so much about the economy but it'll be more about the community. What do I mean by that?

You could describe the economy as, traditionally, it was a timber-based economy with a sawmill—actually, there were several sawmills here—logging, and recreation with the cabins on the lakes. Then people said, "Yeah, but there's tourism." There's some tourism, but really not much tourism in the sense that people come for a day or two or stay five instead of...They stay all summer or a month, while they're part-time residents. The new thing in the economy is, basically, the building of homes. That's what's made this a more diverse economy, and it's been able to support the development of services downtown. We have seven churches, seven bars, and lots of services, and increasingly more of them. A medical center now. So I started thinking about not so much the economy, but the collection of what we do. There were a whole bunch of projects. If you'd been here ten years ago and you came back today, you wouldn't recognize the place. There's a wider highway. There's a walking trail on the side. People are sort of paving the parking lots, putting flowers up, banners up. They've opened up the downtown a little bit. There's now a playground. If you count up all of the things that have happened in the last ten years in terms of improving the water system, doing the study on the sewer, there are something like 60 projects that have been completed. There've been a whole clutch of new organizations created: the YMCA program for kids; the community foundation that we talked about; the CRC that we talked about; the food bank; Alpine Artisans, which is a neat group that Colleen's involved with; added the performing arts series. If you think about what's going on here, it's not so much the economy, it's the community activity that I think's really interesting. That doesn't just happen. There's something special about that being able to take place.

That would be very different from what the story in Ovando or the story in Condon. Those communities are, one's ranching and the other is timber and retired people, but there isn't much there in terms of commercial activity or businesses. Here it's a much more diverse community with 140 people working in the mill, maybe 50 people employed in the schools, and 100 construction workers. Then two at the Paws are Up [The Resort at Paws Up], and 20 real estate agents, and 16 people in the bank, and 22 in the store. It's still small, but it's a more diversified sort of community and economy. And it's growing and it's improving. Now, it's going to hit some pretty severe challenges coming up, but I guess I have some confidence that we can organize to sort of meet some of those challenges and not just say, 'oh, well, I guess that's the end of the valley.'

KJ: Do you think that the growth that you're talking about could change this community so much that what makes the community so strong now—

SN: Would ruin the community? Yes.

KJ: Yes, it would fall apart.

SN: Yes. I think the best example of that would be, let's say, if when you drove down you went by Lake Alva and then you went by Lake Inez, and between them there's a road that goes off to Marshall Lake. Plum Creek owns 50 sections of land in a block—30,000 acres. Plum Creek, from time to time, talks about building a destination resort with a ski slope. You know about destination resorts—ski slopes, golf course, condominiums, the whole lot? You know about the Tamaracks Resort out of McCall, Idaho?

KJ: No.

SN: I only bring that up because it was described to me in the construction phase. We have 100 construction workers here building 50 homes a year, and a garage here, and a remodel there, and all that kind of stuff. Four hundred fifty people are working on Tamaracks Resort. Would quintuple the construction force just during the building period, which might be five, six years. That would double or triple the school enrollments in Seeley Lake, assuming half of the construction workers have families, which they probably don't, but maybe. Where would they live? We don't have any vacancies in town. All of the people that are working construction are employed, they've said, "We'll bring 450 jobs." Yeah, you'll bring 450 people to do them, too because they're not here. There's an example of how all of this progress could sort of get out of hand, and it would be very detrimental to the community. But I can imagine how that might happen...not that exactly, but you might figure out how to design a destination resort and construct it so it might be a positive force. I don't know how to do that yet, but I know who to call to find out. [laughs] The Urban Land Institute in Washington, apparently studies these kinds of things.

KJ: In Washington state or D.C.?

SN: Washington, D.C. Darn.

KJ: I'm from Washington. My heart's getting a little—

SN: Okay, well, we could probably find something in Washington would be useful.

KJ: Before we wrap up—I don't want to take too much of your time—you talked a lot about your home. When I first came in, you said because you're studying place, this is where it is.

SN: "Look around." [laughs] "What do you think?"

KJ: Clearly you're proud of your home. You did talk about it, about how your family coming together to build this home rooted you with the land. Do you feel like building a home established pride in this landscape?

SN: Oh, yeah! [laughs] Oh, yeah! You see, this was a big deal. We spent ten days wandering up and down the valley with a real estate agent trying to find the place. The reason it took so long is because we knew this used to be a dude ranch, and we didn't want to be on a dude ranch. Finally, the real estate agent said, "Well, Stan, just swallow your pride. I've got a lot I want to show you on the Double Arrow." When we drove down that road, like you did, and pulled out on the road and we could see this view, we said, "My god!" but it took ten days.

CN: More than ten days. Several summers we looked.

SN: Well, mostly that one summer, I think, when we were driving around with Jeff. Then it took about three years to do the plans, thinking about it I thought, "Well—

KJ: How many years?

SN: Three. As I say, "We'll get the kids involved and the family." Do you know what Lincoln Logs are?

KJ: Yeah.

SN: Okay, well, it'd be like Lincoln Logs. "Give me an eight, give me a 12 by 16," and so we would have manufactured, standardized logs. Turned out that the real estate agent was pushing a company down in the Bitterroot that made those. The next summer I talked to a friend that owns the mill, and he said, "Well, you don't want to do that. You should have custom round logs." I looked at that style, and then we came on these hand-hewn logs with complex dovetail corners with all of this hewing and post-and-beam effect. Found a builder over at [unintelligible] valley and wrote the contract with him. But I had designed the home, and took all of that time to figure out what kind of log, what style, the design, the contractor. Then when we got here, it was ten weeks of intense construction activity, and then the family leaves. I spend a couple of weeks picking up the pieces, literally, collecting all the ends of the boards and whatnot. We came back two years later—when I was 54—and just said, "Well, I'm going to Montana." I spent the first year putting down the tile, putting down this floor, doing some of the finish work, finishing the bathroom upstairs, and just playing with the house, and sort of letting it set. I guess, two, three years later Colleen started breaking branches on the trees around here and said, "Let's thin this out." We've been at that for ten years. So, yes, this house has meant a huge amount. It is the center of why we're here. One of the reasons why we're here, and it's really part of the story. If we'd have just landed here and said, "Oh, that's a nice house, let's go buy that," it would've been a whole different deal.

KJ: When you first started planning it, was it always designed to eventually be a full-time residence?

SN: I think so. I can't remember—

CN: Eventually. We ended up coming earlier than we might have. We knew we wanted to move here.

SN: Well, can you imagine having this home setting, and you're living in Maine? Can you imagine what that did?

KJ: Well, it's really beautiful. So, who ended up doing the milling for it? Did you say?

SN: They did it over in Post Creek, which is near St. Ignatius.

KJ: Was the timber local, do you know?

SN: These were made out of white pine, came out of northern Idaho, standing dead trees. Some of these run 30 feet long, 32 feet long, and they're 8 inches by 12 inches, so it comes out to a pretty big tree. All the floor joists, these, the rafters are fir, and they were cut out local but milled and fashioned over at the log yard.

KJ: Was that an important thing for you to have some local wood in your home?

SN: Yeah. The balusters—those are the uprights on the front of the deck there, you can see—those are all out of western larch. The trim is all out of western cedar, so yes, the type of wood and what it looks like and how it works is important to me. Stand up and push on that white stripe.

KJ: Ooh, it's soft.

SN: How about that?

KJ: Why is that?

SN: Because it's made out of an artificial material of acrylic. What did you think it was?

KJ: When I looked at it, or when I touched it?

SN: When you looked at it.

KJ: I thought...well, I don't know, maybe it was—

CN: More like white cement—

KJ: Yeah, I was going to say like cement.

SN: That's the way they used to do it. They'd make it out of cement or a type of cement, and it would break. Now, why would it break?

KJ: Because it got—

SN: Old and tired?

KJ: Yeah, or more wet or dry or something.

SN: The house moves.

KJ: Oh, and this moves with it! [laughs] Good, yeah. It feels I landed on Play-Doh or something.

SN: And it is, and there's one on the other side that's like that, and there's a space in between. It's part of the heating system, part of the heat retention and cooling system. We heat the house with six cords of wood, and it's a 2,300 square foot home. Because it's open, heat moves around. So the heating system and the structure of the logs and the design of the logs, you think about those things when you build a home. When you get it all done and it works, that's neat. The only thing that doesn't work is that snow comes off on that [unintelligible] right there and piles up on the front door, so it's a lot of work for Colleen to clear that all off. [laughs] But, yeah, the house is definitely a real part of this experience. The builder thought so too. He put the house in his ads. We're still on his website as one of his options.

KJ: Yeah, it's a beautiful home.

SN: We'll show you a couple...Are you about to your last question? I want to show you a couple of things.

KJ: The final question is what advice would you give newcomers to this valley? Or to Seeley Lake?

SN: I guess the best experience is to select your lot carefully, don't build your house immediately because there's a lot of things you should think about and enjoy in designing it. Get advice from your neighbors and people about where to put the road and where to locate the house because there's a lot of mistakes around here. Build your own home if you can. Select a contractor, participate in it as much as you can. Thin your property. Get involved in the community organizations, pick two or three, so it's the full experience, it's not sort of you're

just perched here. Shop at the local market. Get a Costco card. [laughs] Then look out for the visitors. We've had a lot of visitors. People like to come here.

CN: They do, but I was thinking of that. Of our friends who've come here and like to visit, I think most of them probably don't picture themselves living here. They really do think it's too remoted. This sort of atmosphere has to appeal to you. Some people stay all winter and they think the winters are too long and hard. We think the winters are the most beautiful part of the season, but—

[End of Interview]