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Oral History Number: 099-022, 023
Interviewee: William R. "Bud" Moore
Interviewer: Edd Nentwig
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Project: Fur Trappers Oral History Project

Edd Nentwig: Today we're in the home of Bud Moore in Condon, Montana. We're gonna interview Bud about his trapping life. Test 1, 2. It's working good. The old needle is working there.

William "Bud" Moore: Is it picking me up here all right?

EN: Yeah.

WM: Do you have to play it back to tell or can you go ahead?

EN: We can go ahead.

We'll start where everything starts and we'll start with your early life. One of the questions that I kind of thought of on the way up here that would be good to start off with was what was your first remembrance and experience with trapping? What was the basis of it? Was it your getting involved or was it family life or how did you begin?

WM: Some of my earliest memories have to do with trapping because my dad was kind of a transient logger and a farmer. He worked as a tenant farmer mostly for other people, and he supplemented the cash that we had with furs. Sometimes fur was the most important part of the whole thing.

EN: Whereabouts did most of this take place?

WM: The Bitterroot Valley. I was born in Florence, Montana, on October 19, 1917. My dad at that time was logging in the Bitterroot Valley, and he was working as a teamster bringing logs in the Eight Mile. They were logging the Eight Mile drainage out, and he was hauling logs across the valley to the railroad siding at Florence. He had rented an empty, or vacant, section house. It was at that time a row of section houses right along the railroad track there in Florence. My folks lived in this section house, and that's where I was born right in Florence, Montana. I can remember then living down near the mouth of Lolo Creek on a place there. We worked for a man named Charlie Dean(?), and that's where I kind of first began to remember the trapping. My dad always had traps out; he caught otters. I remember even catching an otter. That was a big thing then; there weren't many, but he caught some. And coyote, he's a very good coyote trapper. We always had furs from the time it primed in the fall until it went bad in the spring; he always had traps out somewhere or another.

That's what kind of got me going, and there's another thing, Edd, that was important in those days. To me the most important people—at least I thought so—were the mountain folks, the mountain men. There were quite a few of them around in those days that went back into the mountains and trapped in the winter and prospected in the summer and lived their nearly full-time life in the mountain. These people liked our place; they liked my dad and my mom. They kind of gravitated there when they'd come out of the hills they would often stay a day or two at our place. Of course they were to me, growing up, they were magnets. I couldn't hear enough of their stories, and some of them were pretty good storytellers too. From that I generated a desire to back into the big wilderness. You have to keep in mind then that all of the country west of the Bitterroot there were no roads or anything. It was just big, wild country. Now there are some roads like Highway 12 goes clear across it. In their CC [Civilian Conservation Corps] days, roads were built, penetrated in, still a lot of wild country there. But it was all wild then. These guys—well, it was God's country to them. A lot of them called it that, which is an old cliché I know, but to them it was really and truly God's country.

EN: How did your father begin to trap? Did he ever talk to you about that?

WM: No, I don't really know. I think it was probably…I think he probably began after he got into Montana. He was born in, I believe, Ontario [Canada], and his family migrated to Michigan when he was five years old. He stayed there—they were homesteading there in Michigan—and he didn't get along very good with his father. Most of the Moore boys left home quite young, and my dad went up on the north shore Lake Superior and worked as a barn boy when he was very young in the logging camp. Then he followed, as many loggers did from that country, when they logged off that country, they came west. I don't know all the details of his coming west, but he ended up coming to the Bitterroot Valley, logging, as a logger. I think it was when he got to the Bitterroot Valley, and quite possibly after he got married, that he started to trap. There he was stable enough, and in a place where he could start putting together trapping with the other things he did.

He always wanted—one of the things that was interesting to me—he always talked about he wanted to go back in the back-country too. But he never could put it together because he had a big family. There were nine of us, and he couldn't just walk away from that and go back alone in the mountains for long periods of time. So his trapping was essentially around the farmsteads where we lived, and he would have spur lines maybe back in the mountains. For example up in the Lolo Creek drainage, he had a spur line right up on the Lolo Peak. That's the big peak you can see from Missoula. That's where I learned to trap, really learned to trap there. By the time we got up there, I was big enough to follow him on snowshoes. I remember when I first went with him I didn't have any snowshoes, but his trail would be packed enough so that I could walk and it'd hold me up. He'd go along with the snowshoes on. That's where I kind of began to get a hold of it as far as the trapping goes.

I remember somewhere back there—I was probably six years old or so—come Christmas time, he bought—I found them under the Christmas tree bought by my dad—three traps. It was an

aught, a one and a number ten double-string trap and a good hand-ax. That told me something. He was saying you're ready to go out and set a few on your own, which I did of course.

EN: Did you start that season?

WM: Yeah, I started then. Then when I started grade school—I started grade school when I was seven years old—I strung traps on the way to school. We'd go in the morning too early, it'd be dark in the morning, but coming home at night I could tend the traps. Usually the school got out around 33 or so, and I'd have four miles from where we lived to the school. Well I had traps along the creek and foothills, and if I hurried I could tend a few traps and get back home by dark. That's where it started, right in there.

EN: Was one of your first reasons you started trapping was that the love of the life of a trapper and your acquaintances with these guys that stopped by or was it to supplement your income?

WM: It certainly wasn't to supplement income because to me at the time I started trapping I didn't understand really that money was necessary. We had so little of it ourselves that in the whole family we just had enough to buy a few clothes and eat and kind of half live off the land. It wasn't economics at all. I think the people that told the stories and my dad himself communicated something. It was partly that, but I think the basic thing was is that there was a kind of magic, a kind of mystery in going out and getting something off the land. I think the flavor of the land probably had really more to do with it than anything else. That's what motivated my dad.

I remember one time I went with him up on the trap line, way up under Lolo Peak. I was pretty small—I can just barely remember—and…and I was walking in the snowshoe trail without snowshoes. We got way up there. A lot of times when I'd go with him I'd start to break through as I got up in the high country and I couldn't go on so I'd have to wait and we'd build a fire, and I'd wait while he went on. But this time I got clear to almost the end of the upper line, just to the next to the last set. I was breaking through so much that he said—I'll tell you what he said, "I'll go on up to the last set." It was kind of up in a steep place. He went up there and he caught a big martin, and he come back with a big, beautiful male martin. It's the only one we got that day so then we walked on out, come on down and got down almost to the farmstead maybe half a mile away. There was a little dry slope there, sunny slope, and it was in the afternoon so we sat down together. He took this martin out of the packsack, and he looked at him and he talked about what a beautiful creature he was. It was easy to see that the going out and harvesting this bounty from the earth was really the important thing. Course I didn't know that then, but I got something there that that's what it really comes down to. The interaction with the resources and the life out there is pretty tremendous. I think that's what drew me more than anything else, not only into trapping but into several fields of land management work as well. It had a lot to do.

Then some of the old timers had this same thing. It's like Skookam Bill's picture, Bill Woodman, who's hanging there on the wall. I used to go about this same time and stay with "Skook". "Skook" was in those days a kind of…Oh, he was accepted real fine in the community but looked upon generally as ne'er-do-well sort of a guy. He spent all of his time in the mountains. If he was around today, he would be a prophet. People would be following…He'd be a messiah; people would be following him around trying to learn what he knew. But in those days the cut of the population was to be secure and have things and raise big families and work hard and participate in the communities and all this. Well, Skook was an outcast in that. He lived in the mountains almost continuously, and he trapped when he needed to, not always. He wasn't a trapper necessarily by profession. When he needed the money he'd go trap fur, and he'd look for gold and things in the summer. Wherever he ended up in the fall, if he didn't already find a cabin, he'd build one. There were several cabins around the Bitterroot Mountains over there, built by Skook where he'd just decide maybe to winter. He was a free spirit, and I used to go and stay with him. He liked me and I liked him. I'd stay with Skook, and one of the things I can remember that was so impressive to me, he was a great hunter and a crack shot. He had [unintelligible] big mule deer head, always biggest mule deer head. Had them nailed up all over his cabin. I'd go in there bug-eyed. They were all big enough to hang a big ol' 45-70 [rifle] across the rack and wouldn't stick out a heck of a lot. [laughs]

Ol' Skook was loaded with the mystique of the woods, and so it was that kind of association that got me into the woods. I think the trapping is just part of it, Edd. It's not…I don't think I can look back on my life and say that the trapping was real dominate. There were times when it was, but it was a part of this whole integrated association with the natural land. That's where the heart of the matter is so the trapping, the firefighting, the prospecting—which I did quite a bit of—even the logging—all these things—the hunting, the guiding they were all opportunities to associate with something that's just a little bigger than any one of them. That's the way I see it.

EN: How did you start with techniques? Did your dad basically teach you your trapping techniques and sets and things like that?

WM: Yeah. He was not a good teacher. He was kind of a sink-or-swim teacher in everything he did. But he was a good critic. I remember one time when I'd taken these three traps, and there were bobcats go through once in a while, not very often but they was a set. He told me about this place, and I knew that every once in a while cats and coyotes came—that there was a big fur there—trying to keep the snow out. So I made a set there, made a good set too. But then I didn't tend it very well. It got wet and froze. One day my dad come by there, and there'd been a big bobcat walked all over it and the trap didn't go off. Course he told me real straight that if you're gonna put them out you better tend up. He was kind of severe in that way. So I learned a lot from him. Going with him and watching him I learned a lot. Then as I went on, I associated with many good mountain trappers. Mostly mountain trappers, Edd, most all of my early trapping there wasn't much of this muskrat, beaver stuff. In fact beaver season was closed in

those days. They had trapped so many beaver in the state of Montana that the state was closed, and the only place you could trap beaver anyway would be on damage permit.

EN: Were most of these fellas you associated with, were they kind of like Skookam Bill?

WM: Yeah, yeah. They were all older fellas, and it's kind of interesting. Some of them…I guess I can say that I didn't know the generation of people that went into the mountains after Lewis and Clark, but I knew the people that knew the generation that come in after Lewis and Clark. They were a little like Skookam, yeah they were, and most of them were hooked on the mountain for one reason or another.

In later years I found out that a lot of them got into the mountains for different reasons. For example, Fred Schott was a well-educated man from back in the Midwest somewhere, come from a wealthy family, and he showed up out here about the turn of the century back long before I was born in the mountains. It was later that it kinda come out that he fell in love with some girl somewhere, and she jilted him finally, and he just couldn't take it. He took to the mountains.

Frank Smith, one of the top mountain men of the time in there, a fine trapper, both him and Fred Schott were gentleman trappers. They were mild-mannered people, small men but tough on the trail. Just like ghosts in the mountains you know? Quiet, not only in the mountains but out amongst people. They didn't say much, never drank, just gentlemen all the way through. But they were excellent trappers and excellent mountain men and any way you want to put it, hunters and so on. Frank, it turns up in later years, had a daughter. Nobody…you thought he just come out of the wilds, but here years later a little thing come along that somewhere there was a daughter in Frank's background.

Frank Kube came from Germany. He got in trouble over there somehow. This all came out in later years, and Frank Kube drowned in the Lochsa country trying to get his fur out. But he was in trouble over there so he left his native Germany and showed up in the Bitterroot Mountains. A lot of the people came like that; they were looking for something different in their life, looking for a place to start over, find some wild country where they could get back and do it themselves.

EN: What do you think was the main drawing of that Lolo drainage that the big wild over the hump there? Was it the reputation or was it kind of an undercurrent reputation that these type people heard of it? How do you think they came about there?

WM: Yeah, I think so. See, it had its reputation the idea of the big backcountry over the hills in the Bitterroot—of course cropped very early—the Bitterroot was settled along first in the 1850s, started getting in there. Of course there was a major Indian route went through the road to the buffalo, was the major trail. In the early days they called them roads, but they were trails of course, went through up the Lolo Fork and over into the Lochsa and came down and came

out on the prairie, the Clearwater prairie. This was the road to the buffalo for the Nez Perce, ancient trail. Not only was it road to the buffalo for the Nez Perce, but it was a road to the salmon, the sea-water salmon for the Indian tribes in the Bitterroot Valley. They would go over after salmon; the Nez Perce would come over after buffalo. So the trail went through there, there was a route went through long before the white men showed up in the valley. So there was a kind of a context from over the hill, and then another reason the country over there was very rich fur country. There was lots of fur, not the beaver and muskrats type, because [unintelligible] boulder streams but lots of martin and lynx and fishers and wolverines and ermines and mink and bobcats and coyotes. There was lots of that kind of fur over in the country. So as the beaver and the more conventional water fur were exploited, out of the valley which was done quite quickly as you know. In 20 years, they caught most of them, the big fur push by what we call the mountain men so well-known by the historians.

Well when that was done, it was a kind of natural thing for trappers to begin to go over into that wild country, and like all the rest of the West, the trappers there were the pathfinders. They went in first and then they were pretty much followed by prospectors and of course some trappers were trappers and prospectors too at that stage of the game. I think it was just a backdoor—the Bitterroot Valley and other valleys in Montana settled up—here's a backdoor over the hill of what I suppose in those days would think of it extending clear down and [unintelligible] across the Salmon River, you'd probably be talking about ten million acres or more. Just a giant chunk of country. That's what over the hill was so the people—even back in the diaries of Major Owen there at Stevensville, in his journals he refers to that land quite a bit over there. He went through there on that old road to the buffalo several times himself. He got lost [unintelligible] very poor woodsman, Major Owen was. He made his own liquor and probably had a little of that along to level up the mountains. [laughs] Maybe that got him out too. But he went through there many times, and so there's kind of a flavor of the oldtimers from the Bitterroot Valley of looking over the hill to explore the country, find gold, trap furs.

EN: What was your first year's catch like?

WM: You mean over in the Lochsa?

EN: No when you first…

WM: Oh, when I first started trapping, I trapped the trap-line that my dad…After I got out of grade school, that was the big hangup, getting out of grade school, 'cause I couldn't do too much but trap back and forth to school along as I had to go to school, but in due time I got rid of that at about age 12. Right after that then, by that time my dad was getting a little older and I took over the trap-line right there on the Lolo Peak where he used to go up. I trapped that, and went down into the South Fork some, South Fork of Lolo. I had a cabin up there, my own cabin up in that Willow Creek drainage. It seems to me that I would catch annually there, oh the catch out of that drainage would go something like this: maybe 10 or 12 martin, from three to…I think I got eight lynx one winter—just kind of varied, lynx would vary. I'd get a few mink up

in there and down on the creeks adjacent to there and maybe half a dozen. There wasn't' that much water really. Maybe 25, 30, 40 weasels, possibly 10 coyotes, rarely a bobcat although once in a while I'd come across the Lolo Valley, usually at the request of the ranchers there, some bobcat would be killing chickens. Over on the opposite in the rocks there were bobcats, and I'd go over there once in awhile and catch a bobcat or two.

EN: When you were at home and still going to grade school, was your fur catch throwed in with your father's catch?

WM: Yeah, yeah. Even after that year when I first trapped up in…Even afterwards, as long as I stayed at home, that's what we did. I didn't have any really independent fur catch. I'd bring it home, and as I remember a time or two when I had the cabin up in Willow Creek, he would come up sometimes to see how I was doing, see if I was alright. If I had any fur in the cabin, he'd take it home. He marketed all the fur. Course in those days, there were a lot of buyers came into the country to pick up furs. They was the Silver [Henry Silver], the Silver…one outfit that traveled a lot was a man named Silver, a Jewish family named Silver that used to come up to the Lolo Fork for a couple of reasons: one to buy fur and the other, they liked my dad's whiskey and he was one that made the finest moonshine whiskey in the Prohibition day. So they'd come up and buy that and buy the furs quite a bit. Their descendants are the big Broadway store in Missoula now. I don't know who owns the big Broadway now, but it wasn't too far back until you could find the son of Silver, old Silver working there.

EN: How did you go about your fur handling? Was that your father's teachings on proper fur…?

WM: Yeah, almost entirely, and it was awfully good because I'd gone over the years, I've met with a lot of trappers and by golly it's pretty hard to beat what he taught. He knew how to take care of fur pretty well.

EN: Did he ever comment how he learned?

WM: No, he never did. No, I don't think. He never commented on how he learned trapping either. In fact, he never commented a lot about his past. We only learned where he was born and something about his past here in the last five years, quite by accident. We got on that trail.

EN: As you were trapping there in grade school, did you upgrade and buy new equipment with your fur or you bought more traps?

WM: Usually when I was in grade school and shortly after, as long as I was pooling my fur with my dad's and kind of a keeping the family, my dad bought most of the traps and stuff. We would decide that I needed a few more traps plus or minus, and he'd buy them out of something. It all kind of went into a general fund like our taxes do, then was allocated out sort of on the basis of discussion. I sometimes used to think I was getting the short end of the stick, but it was a big family. [laughs] Then of course like all families, there'd come a time when it was

time to break away. I finally did that and went out and trapped on my own. After that I was on my own.

EN: About what time did you decide to break away?

WM: It was about, I guess when I broke pretty clean from the folks at home, must have been about 16, 17 something like that. Then I went over into the Lochsa. I had kind of broken away a little before that but we were still pretty close. But I remember one time, I'd always wanted to go over the hill and have a big trapline in the real wild country, and one year I was trapping up there on the Lolo Peak in the South Fork and I came down home for Christmas and there was a man there, a young fella there, named Orin Van Hoose. Orin's around the country somewhere now, I don't know where but I know he's around. Him and his brother had bought a trapline over in the Lochsa called the Wendover Trapline. I had gone with his brother and taken him to the home cabin. I knew how to get there. I didn't know the country that he trapped, but before he bought the line I'd taken him down to the home cabin. Well, Orin had an unfortunate fire in his own cabin and it was along just before Christmas. All he saved was his snowshoes and his furs. He had quite a few furs caught. So he just put them on his back and he hiked out of the mountains to our farmstead. There he was for Christmas. He was disgusted, discouraged, and he wanted to sell out. He said that he'd sell the trapline as is, where is, everything as he left it for $150. So I told him that I'd pay him $150. I had to sell some fur to do it, but I had quite a bit of fur. I paid him $150for this trapline, and I pulled my traps up in the Lolo drain, and I went to Missoula and bought a toboggan—eight-foot I guess or so toboggan—big toboggan. Remember buying it at Montgomery Ward. I got all my gear together that I could, and my dad right after Christmas took me up to Lolo Hot Springs. He could drive that far, then I struck out with my traps and my rifles and a little grub all on this toboggan, headed west over Lolo Pass and down the other side. This was one of those years when it was kind of like this, there was no snow. It was very cold, but there was practically no snow. I remember there when I went over Lolo Pass there wasn't more than about two feet of snow and dry, beautiful weather. When I got down about two days down the other side, this honeymoon all ended and it started to snow. That's when I began to learn about the weight and the intensity of snow storms coming up from the Pacific Coast up the northside of the mountain and dumping there. I learned why the rivers are bigger and there's more water and everything else on that side of the mountain because it snowed and it turned out to be one of the biggest snow years in a long time. We had…It wasn't very long we had eight feet of snow on the river. It was—

[Break in audio]

WM: I had to find the cabins and kind of get the lay of the land. I didn't know the country, and with all this snow piling down it was just a pretty tough job. So I came out that year in March I think, something like that. But the next year I was ready. I built a new home cabin where Orins's had burned down, and I bought out Jay Turner, another trapline down west and put the whole thing together. I had, I believe, seven cabins and a tent camp and about 90 miles to go on, and I

was tough and I could go you know. So that year I piled up more fur than anybody had in a long time, and I caught lots of fur every winter after that.

EN: When you were speaking earlier of your cabin up on Mill Creek, did you build that cabin?

WM: No, that was an old prospector cabin built by a man we called Uncle Bob Anderson. The mine was eventually abandoned up there. In fact, my dad even had a claim for awhile, and they left, so we kind of kept the old cabin together there and stayed in it. Lot of us, not only me but the rest of the kids in the family used to go up there. It was kind of a growing up place. In fact, Janet and I in more recent years went up there. The roof had all fallen in, but the old doorframe was there with our names carved on it in the '20s. We were always going to go back and get the doorframe, but somehow I kind of hated to take it. You hate the lift the artifact from a place even though you might be the only one who has any value in it. Then I think the Mill Creek fire burnt all that up. They had a fire about three, four years ago, a bad fire burnt that whole country in there. I think the cabin burnt too.

EN: What prompted you to go up and start trapping out of that cabin as a base?

WM: It was because that was the trapline. I had taken over my dad's old trapline, and he used to go from the homestead right on past it. He never stopped there; in fact, he had a weasel set right under the porch, good place for weasels. We wanted or I wanted to have a place of my own. It's kind of like the young fellas here in the Swan, two of them that were over here last night are trying to go it on their own somehow. They've got a shack and they're living, but when they're hungry they go back to the home base and get a meal or two. They're not quite there yet you know. I think every young fella has to go through that. That's the way I did. I went up to Uncle Bob's cabin and set up my own situation and began to trap.

EN: Did any of the other kids in your family trap?

WM: No, not at all. That's kind of an interesting question, but I don't believe a single one of them did despite all the trapping and all of that going around them. They went with me, some in fact quite a bit. They'd go on the trapline with me, but none of them ever picked up a trap to my knowledge and went out on his own, not to any degree at all. That's interesting isn't it?

EN: Yeah.

WM: Something happened that they went different ways than I…I went to the wilderness; they didn't go to the wilderness quite so much.

EN: They followed the thing you were speaking of earlier, the times where society and social…

WM: Yeah, something like that. They went to all walks of life, and it might be that my age and everything, I was just about right for the wilderness trapline sort of thing.

EN: Were you the youngest or the medium?

WM: I was the oldest.

EN: You were the oldest of the children.

WM: Oldest of nine.

EN: When you were over there in the Lochsa with eight feet of snow all by your lonesome, you were all about 17, 18 years old?

WM: Yeah, around that.

EN: Were you a little lonely some days?

WM: Not much. The only time…I did get lonesome was in the fall. See, I trapped in that Lochsa, I think it was six winters I run this long line. The times when I would get lonesome…I was so wrapped up in this, Edd, that it was just a mission to go into those mountains and have cabins and run traplines. It was just so damned exciting to me that I didn't get lonesome except they'd come a time in the fall. Now you can visualize at the time I was in there, there was a little narrow dirt road had been built down to the power ranger station. That got there in 1928, and I started trapping there in the fall, started trapping that long line in the fall 1935 I think. So it would seven years that the road was built to the power station. So what the Forest Service would do…They were in there; they were kind of the central hub of the country. There was no towns of course or anything. Then the hunters and outfitters and guides would be in there. In fact I'd guide a little once in awhile. Not much, but once in awhile one of them'd talk me into guidin' for them. So they'd pull out long about the first of November, late October, before the pass snowed in why they'd all go. Up until…While they were there, there was quite a bit of activity. When they'd go, I was alone. There'd be a kind of an emptiness come on for just a day or two. Then it was all over. There's never really no reason...I've never…I don't think I've even been lonesome a day in my life in the wild country because there's so much life that I was interested in. Maybe it was just that I was kind of a little squirrelly out on the side. That's what a lot of people, especially my peers, thought because it's kind of interesting at a time when most of the young folks were trying to go from the rural area to the cities more or at best trying to hang on to the rural area and perpetuate like father like son on the ranch or something. I went the other way. I didn't have any desire whatsoever to go to town. Why I don't know. I don't know why except this call of the land is the only thing I can put my finger on. So while they went one way, I went the other. That's kind of an interesting thing to me just why all that happened.

EN: Do you think it was your associations with the Skookam Bills and their storytelling and their lives.

WM: I think so. Yeah, and I admired them. I figured they were the most important people in the world. There's no doubt in my mind. They were real people. They knew how to set a trap and shoot a buck right off hand, right through the head at 100 yards. [laughs]

EN: What do you mean by real people?

WM: They were down-to-earth. They love the land and they were down-to-earth, and in some ways the people at that time—the ranchers were of course down-to-earth—but the people were getting kind of removed from it. They wanted something artificial. They thought…The same thing goes on today right here in the Swan Valley. The youth of the Swan Valley are extremely urban oriented. It's hard for them to see the wonders of the Bob Marshall Wilderness or the excitement of catching a bobcat over there in Rumble Creek. They want to go to town when they get…This is still here, that same kind of different. And right here in this valley, there's a few youngsters, not very many, damn few, but there are few that see this other side. They want to go over into the Bob and trap for winter, and they want to do some of this stuff. They probably will…Well, some of them already have, Mike for example.

EN: Do they show up on your doorstep?

WM: Oh yes, they sure do. [laughs]

EN: The storyteller.

WM: I'm the storyteller. [laughs]

EN: When you were in the Lochsa, your trapline you said was about 75 or 90 miles. What drainages or what creeks did you work a lot over there?

WM: See my home cabin was down the mouth of Wendover Creek on the Wendover Bar. In those days all down the Lochsa River, they called the flats bars. This don't mean a bar where you heist them, but the sandbars sort of thing. Always said bar, and on the Wendover Bar's where I had my cabin. Then I would come up towards the Powell Ranger Station and then go up Papoose Creek, up to Papoose Saddle, on over into the Crooked Fork—drainage called Fox Creek—then I would go from there west up through the Lost Lake drainage and down into Cayuse Creek. I had one of my favorite cabins in the Cayuse Creek. There I followed the Lolo Divide, that's that big divide that they rode to the buffalo goes down, and it's the big divide between the Lochsa River and the north fork of the Clearwater. I would go down that for a good many miles. I had a cabin at a place called Indian Post Office and another at a place called Saddle Camp. I only used the one at Saddle Camp intermittently. Then I would drop down off of this big divide to the Lochsa River. I would come down Indian Post Office Creek because the country west of there was pretty well burned, big fires had burned it. So I would come down Indian Post Office Creek, and then I had cabins on the river. There was a cabin at the mouth of

Indian Post Office Creek, one at the Burned Cedar Bar which is near the mouth of present day Warm Springs Creek, and then back home to the main cabin.

EN: How long would your circle take you to make?

WM: I used to lay out about nine days at the very worst. I figured that I didn't want any more than take me nine days to go around at the very worst stuff this time. But I'd usually make that in four to six because I'd go by cabins when the going was good. I wouldn't stop; I'd just keep going. So I could probably say that on an average, I'd probably get around once every six, seven days throughout the winter. Then I used to have a lot of fun in the spring. As I got finished in the high country, I'd pull my traps up there, then I'd just have the three cabins on the river. Well the river was just loaded with wildlife. There was coyotes and otters and elk piled up everywhere. The elk would come down and there were thousands of them in that country in those days and big snows would just keep driving them down. By, say, February they were all down on the bottom everywhere. No deer much because the coyotes would kill any of them. By the first of the year they were all coyote bait. Then it would be so nice on the river that I'd spend a couple of weeks just going up and down the river and making a few special sets for coyotes and otter and shooting coyotes. I used to shoot a lot of them on the river, and shooting otters too. I shot…I learned from Jay Turner how to shoot otter.

EN: How is that?

WM: The way you do that, old Jay taught me. First of all, you don't fool around with any little .22 or anything like that. Jay used his .30-06, and that's what I used. The Lochsa winter will, in a typical winter, get fairly well frozen over so you snowshoe right up the ice. Big snows'll pile up on the ice. Instead of following the trail along the back up and down the point, you come right over the ice. You get kind of expert at dodging the slush and all this. But it freezes over and then they'll be maybe an open riffle every mile or so. Real cold winter, maybe a riffle a mile, a big hole with an open riffle at the head. This is where the otters hang out. They go down in those open places and they'll fish for fish. So you'll be snowshoeing up the river and you'll see a black spot up on the river. It's an otter up there; he's fishing. What you do, you watch him and when he dives—you learn pretty soon how long it takes him to catch a fish—so you go straight toward him as fast as you can go. The key is to be before he comes up, you want to be stopped and stand there just like a post. So he'll come up with a fish, maybe eat the fish like a seal, roll around in the snow then dive for another one. Then you go again. You finally get up close enough to him so when you shoot him you can get to the hole before he goes under, floats under the ice. Now he's got to be at the upper end of the hole so that…There's several factors there. You gotta be at the upper end of the hole so that he floats down [and] you got time to run and intercept him at the lower end. You gotta hit him right through the head with a high-powered rifle because if there's an ounce of life in him, he'll dive. He's always right on the edge. You never see them far enough away that…Oh, I've shot a couple that laid right on the ice, but this is pretty rare. They're usually right on the edge, and they'll fall in the water. But if you shoot him through the head with a high-powered rifle it'll just stiffen him and he'll…Just like

that, and he drops in the water and he floats. You run then, and you run right up and by the time you get there to intercept him…Because if he goes under that ice and it's a mile down to the next hole, you're never going to see him again. It's kind of an interesting game. On the river I made a hook in the blacksmith shop for hooking otters. I put it on the end of my snowshoe pole because sometimes when you run up there, that riffle's fairly wide and he'd be over here and it's hard to get a hold of him without endangering yourself going in. So I'd hook them out then, hook big old otter out on the ice. Pretty interesting.

EN: How did you meet Jay Turner?

WM: I met Jay down there. I'd heard of Jay before. Now, Jay wasn't one of these that come out over the pass and down to our place. I'd never seen Jay at our place. But Jay was a native of an early-day homestead family down on the Idaho side of the Clearwater, down around Kooskia, is where Jay came from. Jay came into the Lochsa country as a boy up over the Lolo trail with the first ranger that was ever there. He came in 1910. The first ranger came in 1909. He was an old-timer in the country, and I'd heard about him. But the first time I ever saw him was when I went over the pass and down—I was telling you—with the toboggan. Because the home cabin was burned out, I went on the river, down the river another 12, 13 miles to the Burned Cedar Bar cabin. At that time, that was a boundary line between the line I had bought and Jay's line. He went on down the river. I met Jay in due time at my cabin. I remember he come in behind me and he picked up a mink in one of my traps up the river. He brought it down and he skinned it and left, hung it in the cabin. He quick dried it over the stove then he turned it fur side out and left it. I'd been taught by my dad to leave mink flesh side up, but Jay was doing it fur side up. So sooner or later I met Jay at the cabin, and I said, "What'd you turn that mink up fur side?"

"Well that's the way you're supposed to do it," he said.

I said, "Well that ain't the way I've heard. But you guys know what you're doing." Then later 'ol Jay and I were out at Hallowell's Northern Fur Company selling furs, so we asked Hallowell how he'd rather have them, and he said, "I'd rather have them flesh side out." So even a kid knows something sometimes. [laughs]

EN: Where was this fur company at Hanover?

WM: The Northern Fur Company was situated in a small room in the back of what was Dragstedt's Store. You know Dragstedt just went out of business. A man named Hallowell who was a fine fur buyer, he had this Northern Fur Company. Somewhere along the line, I can't remember the exact time, Hallowell and many other fur buyers around the state were knocked out of business because he was involved in a beaver black market. See, the beaver was closed all over Montana, and they caught up with a whole bunch of them. Hallowell was one that went out of business because of it. They put him out of business. But he was a fine man to sell to. I

never tried to sell him any beaver because I never caught any in that country. It was closed there too.

EN: Did you and Jay layover in this cabin that was kind of on the boundary side?

WM: Yeah, I can't remember us ever staying there together, but that winter Jay got to talking. He wanted to buy the Erickson line which was the big trapline up in the upper end of the Lochsa. Andrew Erickson—old--time Swede, that had trapped it for many years, real fine old fella, hard-nosed, opinionated, but priceless—he and Andrew had trapped together once before, but him and Andrew fell out. They couldn't get along. So Jay went down the river and established this trapline down the river. He was gonna buy Andrew out so he wanted to sell his trapline to me and I paid him $150, just the same as I'd paid for the Wendell line. Then I put the two together so then it was just Jay and me in the whole country for quite a long time.

EN: Did you ever partner up?

WM: No I never did.

EN: How come?

WM: Gosh, I don't really know except that it just seemed to me that I was getting along so fine by myself. I never had any urge to, and in retrospect I'm glad I didn't because there is a few things about partnering up that I know now that I didn't know then. One of the most important ones is—I practice it now too—is that it's great to go into the woods with somebody. I enjoy that, I really do even with a family, a party. I hike now with my grandchildren and my boy pretty near every summer. But if you want to really soak up the woods, go by yourself. Then you have time. Instead of spending your time interacting with somebody else, you're spending it interacting with the wildness of that place. So that's really when you get a hold of it.

EN: Was that a pretty common trait amongst the trappers of that era?

WM: Yeah, most of them were loners. There were many of them tried pairing up though, but it never lasted except the one…There was one pair of trappers. They were later fellas, but there was a pair of fellas named, one of them was Dutch Tromp (?) and Ernie Welsh, that trapped together. They didn't trap in the wilderness much until almost the time that I was coming out they started coming into the wilderness more. But they trapped around, buddied up, and trapped around the Missoula area. I remember one winter they went up, made a fantastic catch of martin in the Rattlesnake. In those days martin were sought after and there was a trap wherever there was martin. But that Rattlesnake country'd been overlooked somehow. Ernie and Dutch went up in there, and they got 25 or 30 which was a lot of martin for those days. But those two stuck together as long as they trapped. The only pair of people that I know of that teamed up and stayed together.

EN: In the summer and in the spring, what did you do after you stopped trapping? What was your…

WM: What I would do, I'd come out around the first of March, and I [unintelligible] market my furs and spend some time out here. There was all kinds of people, young people my age, that were out of work and stuff. I socked some of my money in the bank and spend a little playing around a bit. Then every spring I'd get sick. I got so I almost dreaded to come out because living back there alone in a natural environment, I didn't have any resistance to the…I was there almost year round with the Forest Service in the summer. Why the diseases, the cold, the flu, and all of the crud that's going around the city, I couldn't cope with it. I'd be there just about a week, and I had to have my fun the first week because I knew I was gonna go through two weeks of pretty near dying. I'd catch everything. So the time I'd get healed up from that, I'd go back in the spring usually because I loved that Lochsa valley down in there in the waterside. The salmon were there, and lots of big fish. You know, big fellas. I'd catch a few of those, cook fish and make bunkum, make my scent for the next year, and repair my cabins, chase the bears out. The bears were always coming out and trying to get into the cabin. Then kind of be ready so when the first Forest Service job opened, I'd get a chance to go to work. They were real good in the Forest Service. They usually give me a job pretty early because I was the only resident. I was, I guess I could pretty much say, I was the only full-time resident or near full-time resident of the country. Probably the only person that really grew up in that country.

EN: When you say bunkum, what is bunkum?

WM: Bunkum is a concoction made by stuffing fish in jars and letting it cook in the sun all summer long. I used to climb up big trees and hang it up high because the bears'd try to find it. They'd work on it till they'd break my bottles.

EN: Who taught you how to make that?

WM: I think I got that from my dad. That was a universal martin bait, still is. Well, I say it still is; it really isn't because there aren't very many people know how to make it. But you make it by rotting down fish, and those big sea-run steelheads were some of the finest because they were so full of oil. You'd have a lot of fish oil. After they'd cook all summer, all of the bones would settle to the bottom of the jar and the top one-third would be just pure oil and real smelly. So you'd pour that off, that's the base for your thing, for your scent, and then we'd usually use oil of anise, little bit of oil of anise, and a little bit of beaver castor if we could get it. But straight bunkum itself, just straight fish oil is awfully good for martin. The oil wouldn't freeze. It'd be oily enough that it would thicken up but you could still smell it even at 20, 30 below.

EN: Did you learn most of your animal traits when you were still at home with your dad or did you kind of attend a school when you were on your own to learn more about animals and better your trapping?

WM: I think that was a continuous process. I learned a lot from my dad. Then I learned an awful lot from observations as I went along. Where the martins go and don't go, the kind of timber types they're in. I was steeped enough in that just involved enough so it just sort of grew gradually.

EN: How about your harvest ethics? Did you adopt those early or did you learn those, have a learning process of those too?

WM: What do you mean by harvest ethics?

EN: Let's say the approach, the mental approach when you were gonna lay out a line and harvest how many animals you're gonna harvest and things like that.

WM: I think there were several things happening there. For example when I first started to trap up in the Lolo Creek drainage, it was just one spur line up under Lolo Peak. I don't think there was any real ethics involved. The country was so big and all that you could run a spur line like that and trap it real hard all winter and you didn't have to worry much. It'd be about the same amount of fur there the next year. In the Lochsa it was somewhat the same except that there were some ethics practiced by those early-day longline trappers that I tended to follow. For example Andrew Erickson on his trapline, he had a philosophy that you lay out your trapline in a great loop with your cabin based appropriately. Then you never spur line inside of this loop because—he reasoned this way—if the fur comes out they have to cross your trapline and you got a chance at them. If they don't come out, they're your breeding stock. If you're gonna put out spur lines, spur out like spokes from a wagon wheel hub and that way you're not cutting down your breeding stock and you're getting a chance at some fur that you wouldn't otherwise get. That was one philosophy that fit pretty well on Andrew's old line—the one Jay eventually bought—and on mine. It worked real good.

There was another one though used…Wes Fales was one of several that used this other one. He was a trapper that come from Hamilton over into the Bitterroot before the turn of the century, come over into the Lochsa country. He'd go up Roaring Lion Creek and cross into East Moose and down Blodgett. He trapped a lot of the country on the Idaho side. What Wes Fales would do, he'd trap—the country was big enough then—so he'd have two traplines. He'd trap one winter in there and then he trapped over in the [pauses] Sapphire Mountains over Skalkaho and some of that country in there. He'd let it rest a winter. That worked pretty well, and you can see why it would work in there because in the Bitterroot Valley, you're familiar with some of those canyons, you would have a long, narrow strip of type in those canyons. It's kind of limited, boxed in by cliffs on the sides and the movement of animals like martin from one canyon to the other is somewhat restricted. So you're trapping a kind of a local population. What he would do is just let them build up a year, and then he'd go back after them again.

So those ethics were brought home to me quite early. But in all the years, the six winters that I trapped in the Lochsa, I followed Andrew's "don't spur line inside." My catch never varied;

there was always plenty of fur. The country was that big. It'd vary some but it was mostly all on winter condition. If it was the kind of winter with lots of deep**,** blue snow continuously, very little settling, the fur had trouble traveling. I'd catch less. Then you'd get a winter with a few thaws, pack it down, get fluffy snow, they'd run, why I'd catch more.

EN: What was your average catch on your line there?

WM: I suppose 65 or 70 martins and probably a 175, 200 ermine. Maybe 30, 40 mink and half a dozen fox, 15, 20 coyotes, five to ten otters, three, four lynx, and once in awhile a bobcat, not very often. Badger too. That was about something like…I remember of the six winters I trapped all winter, my least growth was $1,100. My best year was $2,300. One of those years—I don't remember just which one—was I came out one spring and I bought a brand-new Chevrolet sport coupe for $840 so that'd give you some idea of the dollar in those days.

EN: We're about out of tape so we'll stop and get a rest.

[Break in audio]

EN: We'll begin this tape…We left off at the last tape, you were commenting about the economical value of your furs and how you'd purchased a car with probably half of your catch so the dollar value was pretty high. When you wrapped up a trapping season and you prepared to come down out of the mountains or to sell your furs, what was kind of the procedure that you followed to do that?

WM: Sometimes I'd come home, and sometimes Jay Turner and I would come together to sell our furs. There was a couple of procedures. If we had a good catch of mink in the fall trapping, then I would come out and Jay would too at Christmas time and sell them. Because with mink then as they are now, they're more valuable long about Christmas, first of the year, early January. Then the markets fell on mink pretty fast. So it paid us to make a trip out for Christmas if we had lots of mink. I can remember Jay and I coming out together to do that one time and we crossed Lolo Pass got down the Lolo Hot Springs and found the temperature to be 49 below zero. That's one of the coldest days I'd ever spent out. It was real cold.

Anyway, other than that, in the spring I would come out with the furs, and most of the time I sold them right in Missoula. They would go then on the various exchanges. The fur dealers would buy them and send them on to various exchanges. We would go usually, I would go or Jay and I would go if we happened to come out together, down to about three different fur companies in Missoula. There was the Northern Fur Company which was one of the finest, and then there was Mr. Silver who was a forerunner of the big Broadway. He dealt in furs and junk and all sorts of things. Then there was another fur barn named Bear (?), Mr. Bear, down there in Missoula. These were the three. Then of course there was Lawrence Humble in Hamilton. Lawrence would buy our furs, bid on our furs, once in awhile. Generally there was kind of a gentleman's agreement. We would usually go to Hallowell Northern Fur Company Fur, and he'd

tell us real straight what he'd pay. He'd say, "Here's what I pay," and he usually sold on the Seattle Fur Exchange. He said, "Here's what I can get on the fur exchange, and I'll have to clean them up. Put them through the drums and do this." He'd usually figure a profit of about $2 a martin. He was real honest. He'd say, "Now, you go out and contact these other buyers, but don't quote what I…all I ask is don't quote to them what I've offered you." So we would do that, and more often than not, we'd come back to Hallowell and sell them there. The one time Hallowell took my furs and sold them on the fur exchange with the agreement of giving me what we'd get with a two dollar martin profit to him. He just took them over there with that in mind. He was real good. He used to try to get word to me in the Lochsa if he was afraid the market was going to go down. Sometimes those old rounded phone lines over Lolo Pass would hold together enough so that in the winter I would come up to Powell Ranger Station and I could call out. I remember more than once, I'd find a message for me to get ahold of Hallowell because he was worried that the market was gonna go down. He knew I had fur piled up in the cabin that he thought I better get it out of there. So we had that kind of thing going with the fur buyers.

I'd like to relate one incident to show you how the fur buying goes sometimes. This had to do with Mr. Silver whom I don't want to degrade at all. I respect him very much and respect his family and all, and we had a lot of fun together. But he was a hard-driven bargainer, and one time…This was the first year that I was in the Lochsa, the year that Jay had bought out the Erickson trapline. Somehow or another—although that was a long trapline—Andrew Erickson had trapped it real hard the winter before he sold it to Jay. So Jay didn't have many martin. He trapped all winter, and I think he had 44, something like that. I had been trapping on the combined line down the river, and I had about 80-plus a lot of other stuff. So when we come to Missoula, we went to Hallowell, and Hallowell give us a price which I can't remember. But then Jay said, "Let's go over to Silver." Well Jay was the experienced man, I was the kid going along. So when we went over to Silver's, why Mr. Silver was very…he was buttering up Jay pretty much because he knew Jay had been trapping several years back there and he'd have a good catch. He was buttering up Jay and kind of ignoring me. I was the kid. He knew me as the trapper that he'd bought a few furs from up in the Lolo drainage once in awhile when he'd go out in the country to buy furs. So finally after a few drinks and Mr. Silver bought our dinner, or our lunch it would be midday deal—he finally come down to say, "Jay, how many you got?"

Jay said, "I don't have very many, only 44." But he said, "Bud here's got 80 or more plus a lot of other stuff, some lynx and stuff."

Old Silver looked around and all of a sudden he realized…He turned to me and he said, "Jay," he said, "You know how long I know this boy?" He said, "Since he was just so high." [laughs] Then we started negotiating some more. As it turned out, we sold to Hallowell that time anyway. But that was the first time I came in with a big catch. Of course I was glad to have Jay because I didn't…They could have taken me a little although I'm sure Hallowell wouldn't have. But it would have been easy for me to get off on the wrong foot if I hadn't had old Jay to coach me through that marketing business.

EN: Did you pack your furs up and walk down to the Hot Springs?

WM: Oh yeah. What I would do, Edd, I would dry my furs in all my line cabins with exception of my tent camp. Mostly where I had a tent camp, I'd skin them and roll them and let them freeze and pack them to where I had a cabin. Then as the winter went on, I'd work them around to the home cabin so that by the time I was ready to go out, I'd have all my furs at the home cabin. Then I'd bale them up there, wrap them up—it'd be like a bale of hay—and wrap them all up so they wouldn't get wet no matter the storm. Have a good, water-proof cover over my pack then I'd strike out for Lolo Hot Springs. I had a pick-up out there that I stored there at Lolo Hot Springs. I'd come out there and go from there to town.

EN: Did you and Jay have a predetermined date when you'd meet there?

WM: We didn't always meet in the spring. Jay would often go out a little earlier than I would. We tried to get together sometimes to go out when we'd go out at Christmas time. We did that more than one time. Jay and I would meet once in awhile. He'd leave a note once in awhile, "Come down to my cabin." See our line and these big circles, we passed each other about six miles apart. Jay being a little more social creature than I was, he'd come down to my cabin once in awhile and say, "I'm going to be back to brushy or somewhere at a certain day. Maybe we can get together." Maybe just for a talk. So we'd do that once in awhile. I can remember Jay, he'd be so hungry to talk that when I'd see him coming, I could see him talking long before I could hear him. Then after he'd leave, why he'd still be talking when he went out of range. I don't know how long he kept talking, [laughs] but he'd do it. He was a great guy.

EN: About how old was he about this time?

WM: Oh, Jay must have been in his '40s when I was over there. He's still alive, I think. Last I knew, Jay Turner, I saw him about five years ago in Spokane. Gosh, he was 15 or 16 in 1910. So that would be '81…See he's way up there. He's pretty near 100. He was a small, wiry man and just a great guy to be out in the mountains with.

EN: What was the fur trend about then? What furs were the most appealing to the market?

WM: The money was in the martins and the mink. Unlike now, the martins for example are rather low on the totem pole—economic price. But in those days the martins were the sought-after ones. That's one reason I didn't catch more…Well, lynx were good too, but I could have caught a lot more coyotes and otter and things by running my traplines differently. I think you who know how to trap, you know that a martin line you can run a long line and tend it infrequently and you don't lose fur and it's not inhumane because your animals don't live very long in the trap. When you start setting very many traps for big animals or water animals, you gotta be there often. That's why we didn't catch so many of them. There was lots of that kind of fur, but most of us trapping in that country, we were after the martin primarily. We laid out

long lines for martin, then everything else we caught was kind of incidental to that. Little bonuses here and there along. You'd see a chance to pick up a coyote or lynx or something like that.

EN: When you laid your line out, what type of preparation? Did you use the same sets year after year?

WM: Yeah, well, not entirely but where I was traveling the same line, I'd use the same set up in the martin country at least. Not necessarily down on the river, but down on the river I would. Then as the snow got deeper, you'd move the sets up the trees. You'd set on the trees for the martin. Sometimes on that Lolo trail, the sets would be 18, 20 feet up in the air by spring. Hard to get your traps down in the fall to start over again.

EN: What were your primary types of sets you used for martin trapping?

WM: I used mostly notches and peg sets. Notches in the basins, and peg sets on the ridges where the notches are apt to blow full of snow. The peg sets a little more effective there.

EN: Did you get ready, say, a couple of weeks before the season? You'd pack your gear in there and lay the line out and get ready?

WM: Yeah, it'd take about a month for me to get my cabins outfitted and a reasonable amount of wood cut and bait distributed and all that. It got kind of interesting, especially…We've talked a lot about most all this activity was spawned in Montana but done in Idaho so there is a relationship. There's another interesting relationship. There used to be a grocery store at Lolo, combination grocery and post office. An old-time resident there named Ray Hughes(?) ran this store and post office. I would take list…I would make a list for each cabin, what I wanted, and take it to Ray Hughes and ask him to box it up for me for packing on horses and mule. He would put these orders together and box them up, wooden crates. Of course you couldn't find wooden crates now. But he'd box it all up nice and tight so I could cart it up and pack it on a mule, mark on the boxes which cabin. He knew when he put it together that if he muffed it, I'd be out of it all winter. He never failed. I'd never even break the boxes; I'd just take them to the cabin, put them in. So it was a real good service.

EN: You'd come down there to his store and pick them up before season?

WM: Yeah, I'd order it, bring in my list, list for each cabin then he'd put it together and charge me. It seemed to me it used to cost me somewheres around $200 to get myself going. My groceries and all that for 200 dollar investment. I'd have to buy a few traps, maybe a pair of [unintelligible] rubbers, a pair of snowshoes and my grub about $200 every fall, and I'd be ready to go. I'd have to get a couple hundred dollars before I was in the black, and usually I used to worry a little about that. But I can't remember a single time when I wasn't in the black after the first round. I always made her right there. [laughs]

EN: What was the management attitude back then? Those were pretty early days I know for any Fish and Game management, but what was going on management-wise about that time?

WM: I think from my point of view, looking at it as I saw it, it was mostly law enforcement and protection. That was the management attitude. The Fish and Game departments were law enforcement, predator control oriented. See in those days, they didn't even have the biologists, professionally trained biologists hadn't even come to the Fish and Game Department. That came later. I could tell you a big story there about how they came and all, but that came later and I'm very familiar with how that took place in Idaho not so much in Montana. But the management aspects would have to come—if you're talking about habitat management and all of that—the management aspects would have had to come from the Forest Service because that was all national forest back in there. I don't think they had any real habitat management thing because the country was all wild and they were in the frame of mind that they were protecting it for more intensive use of some kind later on. In other words they were protecting the timber and all of that and keep fire from burning it up because they knew it would be use, but they didn't know when or what for. The Fish and Game Department however had set season. Beaver for example was closed in Idaho as it was in Montana. They had seasons established. I think the martin season in Idaho there opened November 15, went through the first of March. So there was that kind of management, that kind of control on it.

EN: Was the trappers…Did they self-police themselves, their ranks?

WM: I suppose you could say that. There was kind of an unwritten code among the trappers in that back country that you did not trespass on another trapper's domain. But that was further enforced by the Forest Service because I think it's clear that in order to survive and trap in those days in that kind of a wilderness, you had to have shelters, cabins of some sort. In order to get those for commercial purposes, that's what trapping was considered, and a very important commercial purpose in those days, you had to go to the Forest Service and get a special use permit to build your cabin. I remember they charged $5 a year for the first three permits. After that, they were two and a half apiece. The more cabins you had, the less you paid per cabin. So they would give you a permit to build a cabin at the spot of your choosing unless they had some argument which they never had to my knowledge. You were permitted to use that cabin only for trapping purposes. Further, you had to use it so many days per year for trapping purposes. This prevented someone from getting a bunch of permits and holding on to territory without harvesting the resources. The Forest Service had that control; and of course once given a permit, why, they wouldn't sell another trapper a permit for the same area. The traplines in those days were bought and sold. I bought, as I've already said, I bought two and put the two together. Trappers what they really sold was the cabins, the permits, the right to use it, and the equipment. So they were bought and sold.

EN: There weren't any title, just gentleman's agreement?

WM: I sold traplines a couple of times for trappers after I quit trapping and was working for the Forest Service. I'd just take their money and scrawl out a bill of sale and so-and-so on the back of envelope or a piece of paper, "So-and-so paid so much for the trapline." Then I go to the appropriate Forest Services officer and ask him to transfer the names of the permits to so-and-so. That's all there was to it.

EN: How big were your trapping cabins usually? What were they like?

WM: My home cabin was designed just like this one only it was small of course. I think it was 14 by 16 inside, and it had a porch on. Most of the main trapping cabins in that country had a porch to put wood under and to hang your fur under when you come inside because you didn't want to get your fur very hot. So the first thing you'd do is hang your fur up under the porch and wrap it up in a tarp so some varmint couldn't get it. Then you'd build a fire while you kept your furs cold. My main cabin and all my cabins on the river…Well, the one I built that… my main cabin on the Wendover Bar was about 14 by 16. I packed a good wood, plank floor down there in it and made a good split-cedar shake roof. It was a fine cabin. Then the Burned Cedar Bar was one built before my time out of cedar, and so was the Indian Post Office cabin. Jay Turner built that one. Both those cabins were built in big cedar flats that you could split out, punch them. They're made of logs, but floors and cupboards and everything, you just split out, punch and just created sawed boards.

Then the line cabins were smaller. Some of them were built in the same style, some of the old ones I used were built a little differently. But they were smaller, usually eight by ten—the ones I built. I built them about like that, and some were even smaller. Kind of like, Earl Malone who trapped in there, I asked him one time how big that trap cabin was he used at Hidden Lake because it had burned down before I got there. "Oh", he said, "it was about like all the line cabins. You could sit on the bunk and reach everything in the place." They were pretty small some of them.

EN: When you'd lay in your staples that you bought from the fella at the grocery store, did you hunt in the fall before trapping to get your meat and things like that?

WM: Yeah, I used to try to kill some game in the high country particularly and distribute it to the cabins, distribute game to my cabins before the game left the high country to go down. Then I killed probably one elk on the river in the fall. Then along about January or so, I might be running short of meat and I might kill another elk on the river. Of course the law required you to only take one or allowed you to only take one. But it was kind of commonly understood in those days that for those us who were surviving there full-time, there was nobody quarreled with, even the Forest Service or the Game Department never quarreled with me shooting an elk in January to be carried on through. They knew the trappers were not exploiting the elk or anything like that.

EN: Did you ever have any troubles with break-ins in your cabins?

WM: No. [laughs] There was nobody to break in.

EN: Did bears or wolverines?

WM: Yes, bears a lot. They tore up cabins pretty bad. There was lots of bears in that country especially in the spring. I never had any trouble in the fall myself, but it was always touch and go to get your supplies into those cabins late enough so the bears were probably hibernated or not around and yet not so late that you got snowed in and couldn't pack them in there. You had to kind of play a fine line there all the time.

EN: What happened when a fella trespassed on another fella's trapline?

WM: I don't know of any. All the time in my actual experience I never had anybody actually that, but I know before I came in there there was one incident that was interesting.

Bert Wendover who was an old-time trapper in there, Bert went in there when he was a fairly young man because the doctors only give him five years to live and he wanted to spend it back in the wilderness. Not too long ago he died down here in the rest-home at the age of…What was he, Jan? One-hundred and six?

Jan: Yes.

WM: One-hundred and four, something. Somebody misjudged along the way. But there was another fella named Bill Winis(?), a sailor. It was Bill Winis that built this Burned Cedar Bar cabin. He was from the Navy and he brought one of the first women. Not much history of women in that wilderness, but he had a wife and he brought her in there. She lasted one winter with him then the next winter she come in and tried it and they split the partnership. She couldn't take another winter. But Winis and Wendover always argued, getting into big fights over their boundaries. Finally Wendover made some threats to Winis, and Winis took exception to it. They came out in the spring, they were gonna thrash it out. Winis called up Ed MacKay, who was then the ranger, and said, "I want you to come down to the Atlantic Bar because Wendover's wanting to take me apart. I want you down there to witness this." Ed said he went down, and sure enough Wendover's there and Winis come in. Wendover, he was a pretty spirited, strong man, but he didn't have the savvy to Winis and Winis was a lot younger. Ed said that Winis just hit Wendover one clout, and he said it was all over. This Winis had boxing experience, and he said that was the end of that feud.

But there's another one I thought of as I talked here, and that's the Bill Bell-Erickson brawl. Bill Bell was trapping—this again was before I went in to trap—in the Crooked Fork, and Andrew Erickson had a cabin at Lolo Pass. He too trapped…He went over into the Crooked Fork and put his fur line over there. The Ericksons, both Andrew and Carl, were sort of territory hungry.

Actually they came into the country and run out guys like Frank Smith and Fred Schott who were more mild people. They were good people, but they were bold people these Ericksons and they wouldn't hesitate to push you out of the way. Well, Bill Bell of course was a legendary ranger in there and nobody pushed him very far. When Bell saw that Erickson had a spur line into his territory, he just went and knocked all Erickson's tails down and sprung his sets and left note and told him to get the hell out. Erickson did, he didn't go back up there, but this stuck in his craw. He finally run into somebody that didn't back off. So this all came to a head at Lolo Hot Spring I think probably about 1932 or 33. They got down there, drinking some of Gerber's hooch and Erickson took Bell on. They wrecked the lobby of the hotel—they had a big hotel there—they just wrecked it. Erickson couldn't handle Bell at all, and Bell hit him so many times that Erickson finally started trying to pick up furniture and wipe Bell out with it. Hell, he just couldn't do it; Bell just cut him to pieces. That was the last big brawl I know of on the trap lines over there.

EN: The lines down there at Lolo Hot Springs, was that kind of a common meeting place?

WM: Yeah, that was where they all come…in that country, Edd, there were probably about three important gateways, two real important gateways to that back country. One was Lolo Hot Springs Montana, that of course being that hot springs and all, that was settled way back in I think the 1880s. A little resort sprang up there, and they had there moonshine liquor in Prohibition and they had women. The trappers come out there to get women and liquor. They could even market their furs; they'd even help them market their furs. It was a pretty complete place there, and it was a jumping off place for the back country. Then another gateway was Kooskia, Idaho on the other side. People come up into that big country up the Clearwater. I know when I was back in there, it was so far to Kooskia that you hardly knew Kooskia existed. Never talk about going out to Lewistown, Idaho, or any of the big towns. Always out to Kooskia that way.

Then, of course to bring this back to the Bitterroot Valley, the towns of Hamilton, Victor and Darby were trapping centers. They entered the Lochsa country a lot up those west-side Bitterroot canyon and trapped over in there. That's where Wes Fales, one of the early day trappers, trapped. That's where this legend of Lapland originated. It was in about 1920, well prior to 1920 that trappers from the Bitterroot would go up those drainages and over into Idaho and trap without any restrictions except of course they had to buy an Idaho license. They established trap lines as Wes Fales and others did. They'd go up a drainage, over into Idaho, circle around, and come back down another drainage maybe. Like Blodgett and Lost Horse and all of those.

In 1920 the Legislature of Idaho got concerned about the future of the elk particularly because people were killing elk and selling the teeth. They thought they might go like the buffalo so they established a bunch of game preserves around in Idaho. One of them they established—one of the largest—was the Selway Game Preserve right over the hill from Hamilton, Victor and all that. When they did that these trappers weren't allowed to trap in the game preserve, but they

didn't put much faith. They didn't listen much to that. So they went over anyhow. This is where in the vocabulary of the poachers—they became poachers of course—in the vocabulary of the poachers that was Lapland. They just—

[Break in audio]

WM: The Idaho Fish and Game enforcement people and the Forest Service over there couldn't condone the poaching so they went after the trappers that were poaching over in Lapland. That's a big fascinating story that's really never been recorded. They went at that for the pretty near20 years Lapland existed. People went back and forth across there, and many stories, good ones, exciting stories about how they chased each other and the things they pulled on each other and all of that.

EN: What would be one, to your mind, you could recall that would…

WM: I can think of several. Probably one of the better ones had to do with two trappers who were trapping up Blodgett Canyon and going over into the Lochsa, Lapland, down the Big Sand Lake out by Elk Summit and clear into the Grey Peak Range. I'm not sure, Edd, I'm a little reluctant to disclose the names of these on this tape. I know their names and know them well…At the appropriate time, but some of them fellas are still alive and I don't want to embarrass them with the fact that they poached. I know they don't care, but still it's kind of a journalistic ethic here so I won't give their names.

Anyway, they'd been up in there, and this was right after World War I and the furs were high. They'd been trapping all over up in there. Finally two law enforcement officers, a game warden from Idaho, Andy Hjort, and a Forest Service official, who I think was at the time assistant supervisor of the Selway National Forest named Jack Clack. By the way he originated and spent a lot of time here in the Flathead. They decided to go in and get these poachers. One of the poachers was out to Hamilton for some reason or another. They heard—somebody passed him word—that these guys were down at the hotel outfitting to go in and get them. So he goes down to the hotel and they listen and these fellas were putting their backpack outfit in the lobby. They had all this stuff out. He listened long enough to learn what they were going to do. They found out they were going to go up Blodgett just to the foot of the pass the first day, then the next day they'd go over the pass and down to Big Sand Lake and then the third day they'd go to Elk Summit. Somewhere in there they anticipated intercepting the poachers, track them down or something.

When they found that out, why this one poacher, while one took the other up to the mouth of the canyon as far as they could drive it. This one set out, and he went all the way to Elk Summit nonstop that night. He went straight through because his buddy was over in the Elk Summit ranger station using the ranger station as a headquarters, and he didn't want him caught. He got there just at breakfast time. That was during the night. They turned around and snowshoed back to the Big Sand Lake cabin. That was the same day Hjort and Clack came up to the foot of

the pass. They're over in the head of Blodgett and these guys are at Big Sand Lake cabin. They'd killed a moose there at Big Sand Lake cabin so they took that down. It was snowing, stormy weather. Took it down buried it in the snow, tromped all down with the snowshoes and let it snow under. The next morning they took their furs and they started up toward Blodgett Pass.

Now this is the day that Hjort and Clack come over the pass down to Big Sand Lake so they had to pass somewhere. The Big Sand drainage is for about four miles above the lake or so, five, is a big, wide, spruce-filled bottom. It's probably half a mile wide all the way up through there, and the trail comes down all down one side kind of the north side of the drainage. These fellas when they left the Big Sand Lake cabin, they went over tight on the south side; and figured if they were real quiet they'd break trail up on that south side and Clack and Hjort'd be coming down the north side and they'd pass. They went on up and on up and on up, and finally they got to where it narrowed in. A big snow slide there, and still Clack and Hjort hadn't come down. They knew they couldn't pass above there because it's a narrow canyon. They'd meet them and the jig would be up so they stood there.

These fellas both told me their story. They thought they'd freeze to death. They stood in the timber where they could look out where these guys had to cross. Finally they heard them coming. They said they were talking; they could hear them coming and talking down the mountain. They come snowshoeing along. Old Jack had a stocking cap on with a big long tail and a thing on it. They were yakkin' and so they stood and these guys from across the open snow slide and down into the timber on down. They give them time enough to get well down and then they hightailed her boy up. Got in their trail and over the pass and down into Montana, and they were home free with their fur.

Well that's one anecdote. There are hundreds of them similar in nature or quite different.

One time Ranger Bill Bell went in and caught one of the fellas in the station. They snowshoed clear out of there, over Lolo Pass, into Missoula. Bell brought the charges, and they were both staying in the same hotel but of course being gentlemen they didn't lock anybody up. They were just gonna have a court hearing. Damned if the poacher didn't go into Bell's room and take the furs he was holding as evidence so he never had any evidence. He lost his evidence. [laughs] Things like that happened a lot. That story of Lapland is one that should be documented much more fully than we can do it here with names and anecdotes. I'm going to do some of that in the writing of this Lochsa story. I had a chapter that I call "Lapland and the Fur Poacher," but it deserves a book itself really. You could go way beyond, but I'll do with this chapter. A fine piece of trapping, government regulation, enforcement history.

EN: When we spoke earlier you were saying that you didn't know the fellas that followed Lewis and Clark, but you knew the fellas that knew the fellas. Did they—like Skookam Bill and that generation—did they relate stories to you about those other people?

WM: Not too much, no. No, only that you can go back. Those fellas really…They knew...Like Lawrence Humble. I've done a lot of research on that country about the…to try to find out who were the first trappers and all of this. Take Lawrence Humble for example. There's a man…He remembers a man when he was a small lad named Frank Meeks. I don't know if he's any relation to Joe Meeks or not, but Frank Meeks, Lawrence says, was the earliest trapper he knows in that country. He was a fairly old man when Lawrence was pretty small, just a teenager. Frank used to say to him, "Nobody trapped where I trapped before." He trapped back in that Big Sand Lake country up Blodgett and back through there. You can go to the book—I'm having trouble remembering—that series of books written by the early pioneer over there in the Clark Fork Valley, Gold Creek. What the heck's his name? I've got the books upstairs. Anyway, they were some of the first people to settle in the Deerlodge Valley and down through there. Their logs, their books show their logs and their diaries. Meeks come through, some of the first people coming through, their name was Meeks. I think maybe intense research maybe you could tie all this together. That's what I mean by the fact that these people knew people who were probably the first after Lewis and Clark.

EN: There's a kind of a general thought by some that the mountain men—well not the mountain men. [pauses] Yeah the mountain men trapper—let's say that was after Lewis and Clark—the big fur expeditions for beaver mainly stayed down in the river bottoms and the valleys and things like that. Then when civilization followed into that that some of these people went various directions. Some of them were the people that ended up over into the Bitterroot Valley and up into these areas. Do you think that could be some of these early people that they were talking about was these mountain men that was fleeing society somewhere?

WM: Yeah, I think so. I think they are; they're some of the same people. It's real hard to pin this all down. For example another one of the earliest ones, Jay Turner remembers this fella kind of like Lawrence remembers me—was a man they called the Russian. He come in from the Clearwater side. He used to pack up his stuff right in the streets of Kooskia, and he come in from there on the Clearwater side and back in that country, long before say Wes Fales and those fellas. Wes Fales and Earl Malone and Fay Burrell, those guys were, oh, 1910 and all. Wes Fales was in the 1890s. You get back in the 1890s, 1880s, Pete Thompson, get back 1889 Pete Thompson back in there. There are others that you can get way back to about there. Then it gets all kind of dusky and you know there was something going on because you find old cabins. For example, We Fales built his cabin on Big Sand Lake in 1899; and just up the creek one mile and about a half mile up a side creek there's another old cabin that's much older than Wes Fales cabin was. It was there when he built his. So you see. It's hard to get it all put together.

EN: Those early fellas didn't leave much in their passing in way of landmarks and things?

WM: Not much, no.

EN: Would you find their trap trails very often?

WM: Yeah I found old trails and if you know what to look for you can find one of the real giveaways to identify a cabin is high stumps. You're going through the forest, and you find stumps cut off up 10, 12 feet, you know that's gotta be somebody on top of the snow. Chances are it was a trapper, and there were very many of them cut off you can figure he chopped wood for a cabin someplace. If you look around you'd usually find a ruin when you do that. I've found several old cabins that way.

EN: You say you trapped in the Lochsa for six years, what terminated your trapping?

WM: It was mostly World War II. I came out of the Lochsa. Just before World War II, I sold out actually. But the war was eminent, and we knew we were going to be involved in it. So I sold my trapline out to Frank Bustard who was another friend of mine and one of the finest, top mountain men. You have a photo of him I think. So Frank bought my trap line and went in and trapped one or two years. I came on out and kind of prepared to go on into the service. I did go then into the Marine Corps. After that I never got back to trapping myself until my boy grew up, started growing up, and I started him trapping then. Guess it would along in the '50s. [pauses] Yeah, in the '50s, the early '50s. He could trap a little bit, but I never got back at it myself until after I left the Forest Services here in 1974. I picked up a few old traps and started in again, and you kind of know the rest of the story.

EN: How did you feel when you left the Lochsa that last day to go down to get ready to go to the military?

WM: I was hard for me to leave the Lochsa. It really was. It was home; it was truly home to me, that country. It still is in a way. If I hadn't…If there would have been a chance to go over there and buy up a little piece of land and build a little place like I've done here, I would have done it. But it's all government land over in that country. You can't do it. There was never any homesteading or anything so there's no private land other than the real old land grant involved in that country. So I left it with…It wasn't easy to leave. It was just like leaving home.

I left it two or three different times. I went back after World WarII, when I left before the war I figured that might be the end of it. But I lucked out and I went back as a forest ranger after World WarII. Then I left it again to go on to other assignments in the Forest Service. I spent a great deal of my life there. All of my life pretty much from a youth to almost middle age I spent there in those Bitterroot Mountains.

EN: After you sold out to Frank you say you only trapped a couple years. What was the reason for that?

WM: That was pretty much the war too. I think Frank only trapped one year come to think of it. Then he went in the Seabees. He trapped then he come out and went in the Seabees. Trapping, like hunting and everything else, everybody went to war finally, pretty much so there wasn't hardly anything like that went on, at least not in that country.

Then of course the whole thing changed too. One time I felt that I'd trap forever. I just felt that this was my life. I've got a good trap line in the Lochsa, I've got a good home cabin, and what else is there. I just felt I'd continue on. But then of course the country changed, the customs changed, you can't even build a cabin in the National Forest anymore. So I changed with it; in fact a little ahead of it. I guess I was a little ahead of the change [unintelligible] kind of anticipated things were breaking ways like you do. So it's been a tremendous, been a good thing to pick up a few traps here now in the later years and go out and do it.

There's some real importance in that. I felt long before 1974 when I started trapping again, that fur bearers and the creatures that make up their food chain and their habitats were getting a short shrift in forest management. In fact they were considered not at all. I used to, when I was in the Forest Service, argue that such things as thinning projects, forestry thinning, ought to be done with Canadian lynx in mind and snowshoe hares as well as commercial timber. Design a mosaic that would expect all of these things. But people never took me very seriously. Then it seemed to me that there needed to be a constituency for the public voice, a citizen's voice. That's what you have to have to get things done in government. So my trapping has been as much oriented to making me credible enough with trappers so I can talk to them and say, "Look, this is what we need to do to help perpetuate fur bearers and their habitat." I couldn't say that if I didn't set a trap every once in awhile because I wouldn't be credible with you guys. You gotta be a trapper to do that. That's one of the reasons I got back into trapping besides just plain liking to do it.

EN: What's happened to the Lochsa since you closed out and went to the Second World War?

WM: When I went to the Second World War, the Lochsa was pretty much a wild country similar to what it was when I was a youth looking over the hill except that there had been a few roads built in CCC days and there was a road into the ranger station. When I left it to go to the war, that's about the way it was. Of course now since the war, when I went back as ranger, we got that big spruce bark beetle infestation in there. I was ranger at the time and decided to control all the beetles by logging out and taking wood out to the sawmill. So in the process of that I had a lot to do with laying a basic transportation system in the Lochsa outside the wilderness of course. I vigorously defended the wilderness; at the same time, tried to lay a reasonable transportation system in the rest of the land so we could harvest the timber and do it.

I was in charge of the district when we started doing all this, from just about a complete wild country to starting to do something about logging. Then of course I left it and never got back to it until in the '60s, late '60s. Now there's a highway goes down through one of my old cabins, Lewis and Clark Highway, U.S. 12 went over the top of it. Right smack, it's right underneath and others were alongside of it. My home cabin site is now a large public campground and the little meadow where the cabin sat there's a campfire, group campfire ring, where you can set around. They've got some benches, and you can have a fire and have 20, 30 people sitting

round the fire. One of those kind of places. I feel good about that; that's a good use for it to evolve to. I could go on.

There's roads in Papoose, and all of those drainages that were pretty wild at one time, very wild.

EN: The face changed quite a bit then.

WM: Oh yes, a lot. [laughs]

EN: Now that you're living here in Condon, you've attained somewhat of a…not a complete recluse, but you've got an atmosphere that would reflect upon your early days, in a lot of people's minds, where are out away from a lot of traffic and you have direct access to the wilderness out your back door. Your trapping activity is in there. Are you pretty content with that?

WM: Yes, that's the reason that I'm here is because I'm in love with these mountains, especially the wild one. I want to live in them as long as I can so that's why we're here. The Swan Valley is in many ways somewhat similar to the Lochsa country especially in its moisture fall and snowfall and heavy brush and almost rainforest type of country. It's quite similar. I enjoy being here as I know Janet does, and we want to stay in that. Of course in coming here to this more, this semi-secluded place we haven't retired from the human race either as you know. We'll never do that. We'll always be active in worth-while causes that have to do with good land care including trapping and other things as long as we have the strength to do it. No one person can do only so much, you have to kind of limit what you can do, but we'll do what we can.

EN: How do you view your trapping today? Has it changed as far as the frame of mind that you trap in? What are you thinking about when you're trapping animals and how do you feel about where those furs and the methods and things like that?

WM: I trap today with a great deal more experience in the world than I did way back then. Now when I set a trap, I'm very concerned and I'm very aware of the management implications of taking something, an animal, out of the system. I'm extremely aware of that because I have enough experience to understand the breadth of what I'm doing. Also there are so many of us around now, so many people, that it's obvious to me and I think about this when I trap, you can see the limitations of everything. You know that there's only so much timber, there's only so much wild country, and I've been in most of it in the Northwest in one or another. There is no frontier anymore. I keep thinking in terms of how to mesh what I do in with the values of others and the needs of the land and the needs of the resources. Meshing it with the values of others is one of the important things.

We used to set traps in the wilderness, spring when we quit in the winter, and go back and expect them to be there. We'd rest them, and we never packed traps around much, just left

them where you…Well, it obvious you can't do that anymore. Now you have to set so to catch the animal you have to set to kill him humanely. You have to set so you don't offend somebody else that's out for a different purpose. You have to set so a trap thief can't find it. There's all these things, and probably several more that I haven't thought of here. You have to set so you don't take to many out of that unlimited, or limited, habitat. All these things must go through a trapper's mind now if he's aware. I'm not saying that the young trapper can possibly be aware of all this. It takes awhile to learn these things.

EN: If you were a young trapper today starting out like you did when you were a youngster, given the conditions of today, you lived in a pretty prime area and a pretty prime time, today like you just spoke things are a lot different. How do you see your future as a trapper?

WM: I'd see it as a part-time thing, I certainly wouldn't see it as a full-time thing. I didn't do that even in the early days. The very nature of trapping doesn't make it a full-time thing because it's a winter-time activity you gotta fill-in in the summer. I'd see it as a part-time occupation, and I'd see it as a management-oriented occupation where I could help keep coyotes in check to prevent deer and livestock loss. I could keep populations of muskrats and things kind of in balance. That's what I'd like to do. I think the truth of the matter is we've got a long ways to go to achieve these things because there's so many trappers trapping on top of each other in some areas. I must say though that right here in the Swan Valley, we talk about and we worry about all of these trappers but I've had nothing but beautiful results here as far as trappers intruding on the area I trap. There's been a little of that, but it's been mostly from people coming from far away, driving through the country. Been real good.

But if I was doing it again today and I was young, I'd head right over those passes and I'd have a line in the Bob Marshall you wouldn't believe. I'd be stringing steel over in that wilderness. That's where I'd be doing it.

EN: Do you think that gentleman's code of conduct is still alive in the Swan?

WM: I think so; although Butch says sometimes it's just because I'm an old guy and they have more respect for me than they do some others. But I don't quite buy on to that. I don't think Butch for example has had all that much trouble either. The one thing you have to do though—it's partly the trapper's responsibility to do this—you have to be visible on your trapline. I got out sometimes and trap a little bit when I'd maybe be better off not to, but I want to be visible because I want to let people know I trap here. The word gets out and it stays out that I'm poking around this brush and I'm trapping it. Where if a trapper doesn't do that, why pretty soon somebody else will say, "Nobody trapping here. I'll just move in."

EN: We're about out of tape here so with that we'll end this and have a coffee break and maybe we can resume another day.

WM: Okay. [laughs]

[End of Interview]