

INTERVIEW WITH RUDY KOCH  
BY KATHLEEN ROSENLEAF LAYNE  
NOVEMBER 22, 1993 AT 3 PM

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KATHY: Dad I would like to start out with asking you a few questions. The first one being; Where were you born?

DAD: Sumatra, Montana

KATHY: Where is Sumatra?

DAD: On the old Milwaukee rail-road, approximately halfway between Forsyth and Round-Up, Montana.

KATHY: How many siblings did you have in your family and where are you?

DAD: Actually my mother had 15 children. I was the seventh son. She had ten sons and five daughters, however, the oldest died nine months after birth. The two youngest died at birth. So, we grew up with just twelve. I said just twelve in our family, for, oh probably, as I recall, until my older sister got married and she was gone for five years, and her husband died and she moved back home. At that time she had five sons. So, we grew up with seventeen people, plus mother and dad in our house-hold, practically for the duration of the time I was home.

KATHY: Seventeen! What was your families background, your Mother and Fathers? Were they originally from Montana or where were they from?

DAD: My Dad was born in Alsace Lorraine. He came to this country when he was nine years old and settled in Minnesota. They settled in a German community. He met mother who was born in Davenport Iowa, met in Minnesota, that's where they were married and that's where they settled in this German community for sometime before they moved to - Dad moved here to homestead at the time. That seemed to be the thing to do at the time, to move West, homestead and make lots of money on the farm.

KATHY: About what year did he move to Montana?

DAD: About 1914, that was before I was born.

KATHY: Oh, I hope so, you were the seventh son. What was your mothers' maiden name?

DAD: Hassler

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KATHY: What nationality is that?

DAD: Well, German but ah, somewhere along the line some Swede got mixed up there, in her family. Swede or Dane, I forget which it was, but she was German, Danish, and Swiss. My Dad was actually French.

KATHY: Where did you say your dad was from?

DAD: Alsace Lorraine, at the time he was born it was part of France. I'm sorry, I said when he came over here, when he was nine. He completed school over there so he must have been 15 when he came to this country, because he went to school for eight years over there and when he started school he spoke French in school but before he came over, Germany took over Alsace Lorraine and he had to speak German. So, when he came to this country he spoke both French and German but they settled in this German community so they dropped the French and they were speaking German. My oldest brother and sister could not speak English when they started school.

KATHY: Because that was the language that was spoken at home?

DAD: That's the language that was spoken at home and in that community.

KATHY: Oh.

DAD: It was German.

KATHY: You said that your family came here to homestead--

DAD: Yes.

KATHY: and they settled in Sumatra ?

DAD: Well, it was north of Sumatra and they called it Blacktail Springs. We homesteaded 260 acres of land.

KATHY: OK, I, What do you mean? You were granted 260 acres or you -

DAD: No, no, that's the Homestead Act. You go out, it's like staking a claim, only if you went out and started, you homesteaded. The government gave you 260 acres of land, if you stayed on it and improved it and farmed on it and after so long working

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it, it became yours.

KATHY: And how long did your family stay in Sumatra?

DAD: Lets see, 1914 until about 41 and then my folks retired and my brother took the ranch for a number of years and then he moved off and someone bought it.

KATHY: What was it like as a child for you on a homestead? What were your duties? What were you expected to do or how did you fell about it?

DAD: Oh, we always had chores to do. We had to do a -- we had to make sure that at night we had plenty of coal and wood in the house, and that water was carried in, in buckets. At that time they had coal range stoves in the kitchen. The reservoir was a tank on the side of the stove, where it kept the water warm for washing dishes and so on. And, we had to make sure the reservoir was filled and the two buckets of water for drinking and cooking were filled. And, especially in winter time we had to make sure that we had plenty of coal to keep the fires going and the house warm. And, then of course, we had to milk. We milked ten to fifteen cows a day. Twice a day. So, we had our own milk and butter and we raised chickens. We had our own eggs. And, of course, raising cows and milking cows, you have calves and you had calves to feed and take care of and you have the barn to clean.

KATHY: When did you go to school?

DAD: During the day. These are all chores in the morning and night.

KATHY: When did your chores start then?

DAD: Chores would start probably about 6:00 in the morning. Two would go out and milk the cows and bring in the milk and feed the calves and turn out the cows and clean the barns and then you went to school.

KATHY: What time did you have to be in school?

DAD: We didn't have to be there until 9:00. We walked to school, it was only about a half a mile, I think. The school -- We were really fortunate, the school was pretty close. It was a one room school house with eight grades.

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KATHY: How many students?

DAD: Oh, it ranged from about ten to, oh, I think, at one time we had about 30 there in school.

KATHY: And these were just homesteaders around the area?

DAD: Yeah.

KATHY: What as far as food supplies, groceries, things like that? It sounded like you were pretty self sufficient but where would you get supplies that you didn't have?

DAD: Sumatra.

KATHY: In Sumatra. So you lived outside of Sumatra?

DAD: Ten Miles.

KATHY: Now, is Sumatra very big?

DAD: No, ah, it was quite a shipping terminal at the - during my early boyhood and school years. They shipped a lot of cattle out of a Sumatra at that time. They had a big shipping yard, stock yard they called it. It was sort of a terminal for cattle and the grain growers. There were 2 grain elevators in the town. We had a hotel and a couple of restaurant and a drug store, a general merchandise store and a bank. And at one time we even had a paper. They had two garages. For that size, it was a fair size community. They had quite a large high school and a couple of grade schools in town. The high school had a boarding room for students that came from all around the county and other counties. And, they boarded and roomed right in the rooming house. They had matrons who, that, took care, cooked for those. And they just paid so much a month, because, there weren't many established high schools around the country, so, they sent them to where - ever there happened to be schools.

KATHY: And there was one in Sumatra?

DAD: Yes.

KATHY: What county is Sumatra in - Rosebud?

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DAD: Rosebud county.

KATHY: And is Sumatra still there?

DAD: There's a post office there yet, but that's all.

KATHY: What happened to Sumatra?

DAD: I don't know, it just dried up and blew away. Everyone left during the drought years and early thirties and all through the thirties. That's when Sumatra just vanished because there were no crops. We had grasshoppers and army worms and they invaded and ate up all the crops. And the army worms would even, they went over the top of the house and would even eat the paint on top of the house.

KATHY: You remember all of that? You were old enough to.

DAD: Oh, Yeah, you couldn't grow anything. In fact, I recall when we tried to get a little corn, either the pests harvested our crop or it was drought and there was no crop to harvest. The only thing that seemed to grow very well was russian thistle, and in a couple of years, that's all we put up to feed our cattle, are russian thistles. But, I do recall that we went out and tried to grow some corn and it wouldn't grow and we went out, pulled up the corn, the corn is about 8 to 10 inches high, and we pulled it out by the roots and harvested that way, so we'd have something to feed our calves.

KATHY: You said, in Sumatra it was a shipping area?

DAD: Cattle. There use to be cattle drives that came down from the Missouri Breaks. I recall, and driving cattle down through our place. And, that would be their last stop before they went on into town. And, they always stopped at our place overnight. We had a spring, Blacktail Spring, so that they could water their cattle and give them a rest and feed them, so that when they went into the stock yards, they were filled and would weigh better. Because they weighed them when they shipped them.

KATHY: So they'd get a better price?

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DAD: So they would get more, well not a better price, but, had more pounds.

KATHY: Oh.

DAD: More pounds to weigh. I recall seeing cowboys out in our pasture at night, when they were herding the cows and I could see the campfires burning out there, when they were staying over night.

KATHY: Did you ever meet any of the cowboys?

DAD: Oh yeah, oh yeah, always. They were always made a point. I mean Dad made sure he invited the owners of the cattle, who were always along. There may have been several who would bring their herds in together and then they, ah, parted them once they got to the stock yards. And, then they would separate them, their herds. They always came and many times they stayed or at least they ate. Dad would not allow strangers to go buy without having them into eat. Many a time, when anyone came by, no matter what time of day or night, he made mother get up and make them something to eat. Even if it was in the middle of the night. I can remember her getting up at 12:00 mid-night and frying eggs and potatoes for people who stopped in. And, of course, people all around there, people, they always knew the place to get a good meal was to go to Kochs'. Of course, I also remember, we always seemed to have a lot of company from town on weekends. Especially, sundays and I always wondered why. And, it always sort of upset me because that made extra work for US. We had to go out and kill the chickens and clean them, because mother always, especially, when we had the spring fires, we had to freeze our Ice Cream and make a big meal for all of these people that came out every sunday to visit. Of course dad didn't mind. He liked to have company, but, we wondered why and then later on, I finally figured out why. Dad also made his own brew. They all came out there for his home brew. And, we always had to wash the bottles, and, that was a heck of a job, washing those bottles. Then of course, we always had lots of ham and eggs and sausage, because we raised our own hogs, butchered our own beef and made our own sausage and smoked our own ham and bacon and sausage. There was plenty of that around! The potatoes, they were sometimes scarce. But, dad figured out a spot to raise our garden stuff. We had a well you could never run dry and we'd leave the windmill running night and day. And in fact, one summer when the drought was so bad, the sheepman around the country didn't even have any water in their reservoir. They hauled water

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day and night from our wells.

KATHY: Oh, my goodness.

DAD: And we had to put an engine on the pump, in order to pump enough water to fill up the - the water tanks, but we would keep the horse tank full and overflowing. And the water would run from the horse tank down into a little pond, that dad had built, and he built this pond. And, the pond he used, we always had a couple of geese and always raised about oh, a , whatever the goose laid. We had a goose and a gander and she'd hatch out a lot of goslings, so we had, a, most of them we gave away. But, we always had a goose for Thanksgiving and a goose for the, a, traditional Christmas goose.

KATHY: Your Christmas egg that big goose egg, for Easter?

DAD: No, we never ate the eggs, goose eggs they were always hatched. And - but, then we irrigated, we cultivated a patch, down below the pond, and in that patch of land we had enough water. And dad irrigated that for our potatoes and our cabbage and our horse radish and our peas and beans. So, we had most of our vegetables every year, because it was irrigated, including the potatoes. So, we were self sufficient, lots of butter, cream and meat and potatoes. We'd ground our own rye flour, for rye bread.

We had a little grinder and a model T Ford engine rigged up to run the grinder. But, the wheat, the regular white flour, we had to buy it, the flour. During the times that we did grow a little wheat, we would take it into the mill and trade it for flour. But we would buy a 100 pounds of flour at a time, bring it out in 100 pound sacks. And, mother baked about ten to fifteen loaves of bread a week, at least, they were big loaves. And for the week-ends she would bake cinnamon rolls and coffee cake. She had another type of bakery, I don't know what you'd call it. I suppose you'd call it raised a donut, but they were sweet. The same dough she used for coffee cake and cinnamon rolls, she use that dough and then put them into little squares and, and deep fry them and they came out sort of like a raised donut. We had a German name for them.

KATHY: What was that?

DAD: Keough.

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KATHY: That's like your German pizza and potatoes with cream?

DAD: Oh yeah, rhom koughan and rhom katoffel.

KATHY: Did your Mom teach you how to cook?

DAD: Oh no, we just, a, well I guess, we knew, watched her enough times that we knew what went into it. But, she taught my sisters how to cook, because they had to help cook and clean. In those days too, you had just kerosine lamps and that was part of the chores of my sisters. Every night, she'd have to, just one sister, Marian, in fact, I was relating that in the eulogy just recently, about, how she had to take all the kerosine lamps and take them out and fill them, and clean them, clean the bulbs. She did that with old newspaper and all kinds of paper. They had to be filled with coal oil, and then you'd have several lamps on the table in the kitchen and that's the light we used.

KATHY: Did you ever have electricity there?

DAD: Oh no, the best lighting we had, we graduated to gasoline lamps. And they were, and that was really a good light, gasoline lamps. Gasoline lamps, they had to be filled with a white gas and pumped full of air. Their like those Kolman lanterns.

KATHY: Oh - okay.

DAD: They were big lamps that you hang up, and they had two mantles, a couple of feet high.

KATHY: How many rooms were in the house?

DAD: (laugh) A kitchen, a dining room and a front room. And then, we had two rooms upstairs, one was for the girls and one was for the boys. There were just two rooms up there and then mom and dad had a bedroom downstairs and that's all that was in the house. In the summer the boys would go out and bunk in the bunk house. We had a bunk house, we had to get a bunk house, because we always had so many strays come and visit us, that we didn't have room to house them. So, we finally got a bunk house. We moved the house up from, well, it was a teacher that lived right below us, and who taught at the school. The school finally built a teacher-ich right up next to the school and this was just, a, we used it as the bunk house and we moved it up to the place and used it as a bunk house. So, we even used that, in the winter time too. I know, I just can't seem to recall, when we were just there alone,

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without someone else from the outside being there who just wanted to come out and live with us. They'd work right along side of my dad. They just enjoyed being out there. They'd work and eat, they were just like part of our family. And, then we had an uncle, who came and lived with us for several years. He had, well it was my grandmothers land. My grandmother had, a, she had, I forget just how it worked out. Two homesteads right together. And, it ended up a couple of my uncles homesteaded those. And, it turned out to be a whole section. So we had a whole section of land right next to us, that we used and farmed, because they were never around there. But, a, one of them came out and was going to farm it for a couple of years. For a couple of years, he tried, and he lived with us while he was farming that. But, we always had that section of land and then there was another section of land. It was the school section, that, we used and leased for pasture, on the other side of us. So, we had access to about, lets see, one, two section, our house section and another house section out west of us. We had my oldest brothers, it was right next to our homestead. He farmed that. It was a homestead, some old German fellow homesteaded that and then left it and my brother worked it for a number of years and he lived with us. He stayed home because it was right next to ours.

KATHY: Well, how many years are between you and your older brother ?

DAD: Uh, oh god, why did you have to ask me that. I don't know, lets see, must have been, I'll say 20 years. I guess.

KATHY: Did the rail road go through Sumatra?

DAD: Oh yeah. That was a busy rail road there.

KATHY: And what was the rail road?

DAD: The Milwaukee.

KATHY: The Milwaukee?

DAD: It doesn't even run anymore, through there. I went to the country school through the sixth grade and then they closed the country school. And we had to go to town to go to school. I started in Sumatra. They didn't have a bus, but they paid us transportation. So, we had to drive back and forth ten miles.

KATHY: What did you drive?

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DAD: An old puddle jumper. See, I went to the seventh and eighth grade - now that was one thing when it comes to education. My dad never believed in any further education than the eighth grade. He said eighth grade was enough education, if your going to farm. And, that's all you needed to go, so, he was totally against any one going to high school. And, after I graduated, from the eighth grade, I had to stay home. I stayed home a year. And then, finally, I practically had to run away to go to high school. I left home and went to town.

KATHY: You lived in town.

DAD: I lived in town and I worked where ever I could, and went to school. Mother was all for it. I mean she would bring food into me. (laugh) So then, of course, Leo, he was still in grade school when I went in. So the two of us lived together in town. I stayed with him, we batched. And, then I graduated from Sumatra. But it was a strange thing after my, I don't know what happened. But, after my mother died, and then, at that time, I had graduated from high school and I was gone working. I worked just doing, oh, I think I was working at a Phillips station in Columbus. And piddled around a year. Then, I started to Eastern Montana and that's when my mother died. And Oh, after she died, my dad had a complete turn around when it came to education. I was the only one that had gone to college. A couple of my brothers and sisters finally got to go to high school but, Leo, my youngest brother was the only one to graduate besides myself. The others never got to graduate. The oldest are Joe and Fred, they were older than us. They got to go to high school because they were hauling us to school, grade school and they got to go to high school for a couple of years, while we were still in grade school. But they never graduated. But, after my mother died, dad insisted I finish school. And, I think, my mother made him promise he would see I'd go because he may not have any more than fifty cents in his pocket but he would give it to me, to make sure I went to school.

KATHY: Is that uh, not only a view of your dad but a view of the times then?

DAD: Well, that's right. School, school wasn't that important then because, oh, there was all kinds of work here if you wanted to do it, plenty of, wherever you wanted to go. The wages weren't much but there were people all over the country that were working for their board and room. I worked, see, a couple of summers, as a sheep herder. Not a sheepherder but a camptender.

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KATHY: Not a shepherder but a what?

DAD: A camptender. That's, a, the one that tends camp. He tends camp, he does the cooking for the shepherder, and he has to move the camp and find the bed grounds. It was during the time when we were having a drought and there wasn't much, there was some water in the reservoir. But, I had to move the camp, oh, twice a day and find a different place and there wasn't much feed either for them for grazing. I had to find a place to camp for the night and then I had to find, move the camp, to the water during the day. To find water for them. And, the camptender has to, if a storm comes up, he has to take care of the sheep at night. And, if a storm came up, he would have to get up with the dog and keep the sheep from scattering, because thunder and lightening could make them nervous and take off. You keep the dog running around them, to keep them bedded down.

KATHY: Did you know any of the shepherders or the-

DAD: Sheepman around there, oh yeah.

KATHY: What were they like? Do you remember?

DAD: Well, shepherders are what you expect of a shepherder. Well, the shepherders some of them were foreigners. I recall that a number of them, the norwegians, seemed to be, we didn't have any of the basques, which are known to be good shepherders. I guess they were considered the ideal shepherder but we didn't have any of those around there. A, we had primarily norwegians or just some of the neighbors or sons of the neighbors, that worked for the sheepmen. But there were a lot of young men that worked for the sheepmen, especially, in the spring. During lambing time, my bothers always got work with one sheepman there. And they, in fact, my, one brother worked for, oh, quite a number of years, for this one sheepman. Always during lambing time and another time, that a, he would work, was during sheering time. When they sheered sheep. Now, Ingomar was the shearing center of the whole area there. That use to be, a, big time there. All the sheepmen from all around there would come in and would set up their shearing sheds. They had the shearing sheds there but they'd set up the shearing machines and shear the sheep. But they needed a lot of help. A, they needed a tamper, they throw the fleece. You needed a tier and a tamper and then a hauler. These sheep bags, these wool bags were huge burlap bags. They were about 10 to 12 feet high and, oh, probably 3 to 4 feet across in diameter and they'd hang them up on this scaffold and then throw the

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fleece up there and then someone would, had to tamp them in there. Get inside the sack and tamp down the fleeces.

KATHY: Ugh!

DAD: That was a hot job. But then, they also had quite a few extra help to wrangle the sheep in the pens, to get them into the shearer and to get them out and then you had to keep them separated from the others. So, that, we always needed extra help at shearing time. And at shearing time, is a time of all the sheep were brought into Ingomar and than they were kept close around town there. But, that's when the, when the sheepherders would come in and celebrate. They'd come in and they'd, well, they'd drink up their wages. They'd draw their wages and drink it up or they'd also, they'd, maybe they'd go down to Billings or Forsyth and visit the red light districts and spend their money and then they'd be broke and then they'd be ready to go out again, for another 6 months. Stay out and that was their life.

KATHY: Now, what about the cattlemen, I mean the cowboys?

DAD: Well they were--

KATHY: What nationalities where they?

DAD: Well they were, well I suppose, I don't know, most of them just seemed to be Americans. There weren't any foreigners. That I recall.

KATHY: Any Hispanics or Blacks?

DAD: No.

KATHY: Mostly Americans?

DAD: Yeah.

KATHY: Did you ever help on any of the cattle drives?

DAD: No, no, I never helped on any of the huge cattle drives. I helped, a, there was a cattle buyer that lived in Sumatra and he would go around the country. Around Sumatra, within oh maybe, 40 or 50 miles and he'd buy cattle from and he'd buy so many cattle from each farmer and rancher. And I use to go and collect those and drive those into town.

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Kathy: So, there was more or less jobs that you could get besides working on your farm at home -

DAD: Oh, yeah.

KATHY: if there were hard times? There were other places you could go to work and-

DAD: That's right.

KATHY: What were wages for working for jobs like with the cattle or the sheep?

DAD: Well, when I was tending, camptending it was \$30. a month.

KATHY: A month?

DAD: A month, yes, and that's about what wages were and that was the going rate. With that you got board and of course you had your room. In the sheep camp. But, that's usually, that's about what it was. Maybe it could have, some places it may have been less, maybe \$20 a month and room and board, but that's all if you wanted to, a, in fact I, a, one of the, a, one place that I worked, we did some harvesting too, for our neighbors. And we harvested crops for our neighbor for 50 cents an acre, with our horses.

KATHY: What years are you talking about?

DAD: I'm talking about the years, a, those years during the thirties when there was a little bit of a crop. And I can't tell you just exactly which years. Most of the years from the thirties and forties were either drought, grasshoppers or we had army worms and there were no crops. But, there, a, there were several years a number of years in there where a, you, a you had a fair crop. You raised a little, not much. In the twenties, I think the best year that I can remember, of course I can just barely remember, it was 27 1927. Everyone had a good crop. In fact the crop was so good that my brother bought a new car.

KATHY: What would you pay for a car then?

DAD: I think he paid, it was about \$450. I believe maybe it was more than that. It wasn't very much. It was a new Chevy Sedan and man was that a classy car. We drove that for a 100 years. It looked like a box sitting on wheels.

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KATHY: What was it like for you in school? What now compared to the way you were taught.

DAD: Well, in grade school if a, if a, we got reprimanded in grade school and a dad found out about it we got the hell beat out of us at home. That's when it come to discipline. You see, My bother john, he was an ornery sun of a gun and stubborn. He never could get along with anyone, in fact I think he chased that one year there in that country school, he caused, he was the reason for at least three teachers to quit. They couldn't take him.

KATHY: Oh my!

DAD: Oh, he, oh he was tough. See he was terrible. He use to chew tobacco and dad didn't know he was chewing his tobacco. Dad always chewed peerless but when Johnny went to school he always had a seat in the back of the school room. He'd be the lost one in and the first one out. And when he came in he would park the wad, is chew, on a little place that he had by the door. He park it there during school and than when he was the first one out he would grab it, and chew when he was out at recess. But he got into a hassall with my brother Tony and so tony was going to get even with him and told dad that he was chewing. So dad was going to fix him. He sat him down in the house, and sat him on a chair and brought out the Peerless and he thought he was going to make him sick. So he made him chew and kept feeding the tobacco to him. Well Johnny was in seventh heaven. He sat, sat there and chewed all day because that what he had been chewing. Dad finally said well if you can chew that stuff you just go ahead and chew it. To this day John still chews.

KATHY: Still chews?

DAD: Chews peerless that's a tough one. Alright, we, it was a, in school we had such short classes. I could hardly recall in the country, we had a, the big old pot belly no it wasn't a pot belly, wee, it was a pot belly stove but it had a jacket on it and a, that's what they used for the heat and a, there was sort of a space behind there- behind the stove. And the teacher use to use that space- well, I suppose, we would call it a time out space these days. If some one was constantly getting in trouble, she would send them back there. Well we had a set of twins in school Leon and Leroy Smith. Well they just loved it back there sot they spent most of their time back there. And in the winter time that was the place to be because that was the warmest spot in the school house. You would only have about 10 minutes for a

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class or 15 maybe. but then you always heard what was going on in the other grades.

KATHY: Ok.

DAD: Everything was going on at the same time.

KATHY: So, how long did you go to school during a day?

DAD: Oh, we went from 9 to 4.

KATHY: To four.

DAD: yeah, Well when it was in the spring and in the fall we would run home once in a while.

KATHY: A half mile.

DAD: Yeah, run home and then back to school. We had an hour for lunch. But in the winter time we always just packed it. And most of the time well, we'd go out, it would be pretty cold we'd, we had a hill pretty close to the school house, where we went sleigh riding, I recall we use to use the teeter tauter. One of the planks of the teeter tauter for a toboggan. A bunch would get on that, use that to slide down that hill and go to beat heck, we'd also use scoop shovels.

KATHY: For sleds?

DAD: For yeah, we'd sit on the scoop and pull the handle up and to tearing down the hill. We broke quite a few fences going through the fences.

KATHY: Ooh!

DAD: If the snow was good and sled you'd go to far and go through a fence. We did have, our neighbors always came to school with a horse in the winter time. With a horse, a team of horses on a sled. It was a home made sled and it had planks for runners. Wit a tongue and we'd push that thing up the hill up to the top of the hill. And one of the neighbor girls was the fastest runner in school so she had to go out in front and hold that tongue up, while the rest of us were in. She'd run down that hill ooh i can't believe we'd do such a thing. I can't believe she's still alive. If she slipped and fallen we'd have killed her.

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KATHY: Oh my god!

DAD: But, we made our own entertainment then. Things were a little different than they are now.

KATHY: What made you want to go to school and not stay at home?

DAD: Well, I suppose, what really, really got to me was that by the time I was graduated from the eighth grade I'd gotten an inkling of what went on in high school. They had the sports that they played and I, and there were other things that I had heard that were going on in high school. And that I hadn't had a chance to do out in the country. Well of course I saw that after I started to school in town. An finished sixth and seventh grade in town. I saw what was going on there and that sort of gave me a little, a desire to go on and participated in school and high school, because I saw what they were doing. So, bit, I when he said no I couldn't go to school I had to stay home. I spent the whole year at home before I said well, I'm going to try it. Mother said: "oh, go ahead. He's going to be mad and he's going to raise all kinds of hell for quite some time, but maybe he'll get over it.":

KATHY: Oh, my.

DAD: So I went to school and stayed.

KATHY: And, when you graduated from high school you decided to go to college?

DAD: Well I went to work and i Worked for a year and I couldn't see any, any future in that work at all. So, I well, I, and that was getting close it seemed to me that a, that was just about the time, that was just before World War II. And it looked like we might be involved in the war. And I was also hearing that if you had some schooling maybe you could choose what you wanted to do in the service. And it looked to me like that was a sure thin that we'd have to go to the service. So, I thought now if I got started in college maybe I'd have a chance to choose what I wanted and I thought it was going to work out that way. And i, when I went to start college another kid and I we went and passed the test for pilot training and we joined. we volunteered and joined. we'd passed the test and they allowed us to continue school but I didn't get to finish and then they called us. They called us in and we went in and went down to Texas. And that's when, by the time they called us in they didn't need any pilots

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they had plenty of them. What they needed was gunners and radio operators so they just weeded us all out.

KATHY: So, what did you do?

DAD: Well, they sent us to gunnery school and radio school.

KATHY: And what did you do?

DAD: I went to, well if you went to radio school, you went to radio school first and then you had to go to gunnery school, because if you were a radio operator you still had to know how to operate the armament on the plane. To I went to radio school in Sioux Falls and then after graduating from there I went to gunnery school in Hadington, Texas. Then got transferred to a, for overseas training, got transferred to Tonapa, Nevada. And, then from there we got assigned to the Air Force. And, the 4th Air Force was sort of a back up for all of the Air Force overseas. Whenever they needed a replacement they'd take them out of the 4th Air Force. But, the 4th Air Force at that time, all they were doing at that time, was patrolling the Pacific coast and that's what we did. Was patrol the Pacific coast for sums. For enemy subs.

KATHY: Mm.

DAD: But, the only problem there was that we never got any of the new planes. We always got the planes that came back from overseas. They were shot to pieces and-

KATHY: That would be a little scary!

DAD: They could barely fly. In fact, it was so often that we could never complete, a complete flight in patrolling we'd have to land. Have an emergency landing some where along the line.

KATHY: Oh, my gosh!

DAD: Because there was always something going out on them. An engine would conk out or a generator would conk out, I don't think we had, in the whole base there, I don't think they had over two or three planes that had heaters in them, and everyone was fighting to get those planes that had heaters. You'd freeze to death in those darn things. Oh, gosh they were cold!

KATHY: I'll bet. So, how long were you in the Air Force then?

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DAD: Two and a half years.

KATHY: And, then what did you do after you got out of the Air Force?

DAD: Then I came home. Well, I left the Air Force because, I left on a medical. I guess, I don't know what it was. But, somehow or other this flying and the change in temperature, I guess was too much. I got rheumatic fever. When they finally, well we were just getting ready to go overseas. It was at the last physical. The Dr. found it in the heart. I mean it had already done its damage.

KATHY: To the heart?

DAD: It had gone on too long. Yeah, and he put me aside and he put me in the hospital for six months. And, then kicked me out.

KATHY: For six months?

DAD: Oh yeah, gosh, my whole body was just swollen. My hands, I couldn't move my arms, my legs.

KATHY: And, then they sent you home?

DAD: Then I, then I went back to Eastern and finished. Graduated from there and then I went to the University. By that time I realized I couldn't do what I had thought I wanted to do. I don't know if I would have done it or not, but, I had wanted to go into forestry. But, it was too physical and the next best thing the Counselor said "try teaching".

KATHY: So actually, you tried teaching because of the counselor suggested it?

DAD: Yes.

KATHY: Are you glad you chose teaching?

DAD: Well, I have no regrets. I enjoyed every minute of it while I was teaching. I have no regrets what so ever. It wasn't so good after I got out of teaching and was in administration. I didn't mind it as long as I had close contact with the kids. And to begin with I had a lot of close contact with the kids and administration, because I made it a point to visit classes and, a, talk to kids and work with teachers and so on. But then later on,

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then I started having problems with the higher administrators who were stabbing me in the back. Then it wasn't so nice.

KATHY: Where was your first teaching position?

DAD: Sidney.

KATHY: Sidney, Montana? And, what grade did you teach?

DAD: I taught the sixth grade.

KATHY: The sixth grade, and what was that like in those, in that--

DAD: Well, in those days you had, you had a pretty good, a , backing from parents, in fact I had never had any problem with any of the parents. And I, I had a couple of rough kids in school. One of them I had to physically handle a number of times. And there was never any repercussions from the parents and I had the backing from the principle. The principle said "you bet, he needs it". But I ran into a lot of, a things that,, It seems strange that those things really existed. I had a little girl at school that came. The poor little thing. She, She came with a dress on that was dirty. She kept wearing that same dress day after day and then one day she apparently wasn't going out to recess and I said " what's the Matter, aren't you going out and she said, " I can't. I said, " what's the matter aren't you going out to recess?" And she said, "I can't." I said, and why not?" And, she said, " my dress is torn."

KATHY: Oh, you pinned it up?

DAD: A, she wouldn't go out and she had a huge, a bell tear in her dress so I pinned it up and she went home and she came back to school the next day with the same dress and the same pins in it. And, that poor little girl, it wasn't much later that we found lice in her hair. And in order to cure the lice at that time, it seemed like, I don't know, they suggested kerosine. And, we use to, when she'd come to school we use to give her a shampoo with kerosine. The poor dear, but a, she took it, went on. Finally, we had her all, had no lice, had her all cleared up and she was appreciative because she was going crazy with the lice.

KATHY: I'll bet! Did you have--

DAD: But, the bad part of it is I got it.

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KATHY: You got the lice from her? Ohh, no!

DAD: And I had to really work on this.

KATHY: That would be miserable.

DAD: Oh, it was!

KATHY: Well how many students were in you class there?

DAD: I had, uh, I thin I had 28.

KATHY: Now what kind of a, a, Sidney was that a very big town, I mean did, what type, kind of, did rural children come in or was it -

DAD: Oh yeah, there were a lot of busses, because down in Sidney that's a very rich valley down around there. ^And, its a very rich farming district. At that time and later on, that became a very rich oil country.

KATHY: And, what time period are we talking about, about what years?

DAD: I started teaching in 48.

KATHY: OK.

DAD: And, I thought there two years and then I came up here.

KATHY: So you came from Sidney to Butte?

DAD: I came here in 50.

KATHY: Why did you come to Butte?

DAD: I don't know. It was and accident. I wasn't going to, I didn't sign the contract to go back to Sidney because I felt that I wanted to Move. Although, it wasn't to bad down there. The only problem down there was with the teachers. In that community they didn't allow teachers to go into any place where they served liquor. And the only dinning places they had they served liquor, you know your supper clubs. and, you weren't suppose to be seen going into any of those places.

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KATHY: Well, where would go eat?

DAD: You eat in one of those regular old restaurants or you eat at home. They were, a you didn't have too much freedom. You know your personal life. They watched you and if you were seen going into one of those places, like I was see and called in and told about it. And I thought "oh gee, I don't want my life controlled like that." So that why I didn't sign the contract again. In so far as the school was concerned, it was fine. Ah, so then I went, oh I took a vacation. I drive out to Washington and went down highway 101 all the way to Mexico. And all over. And I didn't bother to look for a job until I got back. I got back in about the middle of August and I had No job. So then I took off from Billings and I made the circuit and I stopped at every place along the way. I stopped in Laurel, Columbus and Livingston and Butte, and Anaconda and Missoula. Up to Kallispell and then I came down the high line and I stopped at all the places along there. And, when I got back, I just stopped and talked with all the superintendents of all these places and when I got back to Billings, the only place I had a call from was here. So I returned the call and he said, well, to report to work if I wanted the job.

KATHY: So you got the job and where did you teach?

DAD: The Harrison school.

KATHY: The Harrison school?

DAD: Combination grade.

KATHY: What grades?

DAD: Fifth and sixth, and I taught there, the fifth and sixth. And then, Miss McNichols was the principal and I didn't hit it off to well with her. And I always went up to the Boarder to work in the summer. And when I came back and found my assignment was the seventh and eighth and I was thinking of going back to the fifth and sixth, I got a little upset but I had no other thing I could do so I took the seventh and eighth but then I transferred the next year and moved over to the McKinley. However, she always praised me and told everyone I was doing a good job. Well, yeah, I just didn't like the way she did it. So I went over there and I had a tougher principal over there.

KATHY: Who was that?

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DAD: A. What the heck was her name. The and her sister got in a wreck and I hauled her sister home. i didn't know, who it was. Oh darn, what was her name? Will he ended up, finally, it was only because of her that I got a principalship because I had applied several times and I was the only one qualified at that time for a principals job. But, they gave it to someone else. See at that time is when they were changing the qualifications. Well I had my masters and I had my administrative certificates and no one in the system had those.

KATHY: Well how did they give it to somebody else then?

DAD: At that time it wasn't what you knew it was who you knew.

KATHY: Who you knew ?

DAD: In fact, the person who got my first pass up , he came and told me he said "your not going to get the job Rudy." I said "oh" he said "no, you are not doing what you have to do in this town." I said " what's that" he said" you have to go and cow tow to the board members and go visit each one of them and implore them." I said, " no, if they want to talk to me I have my application in, if they want to interview me I'm ready and willing to be interviewed, anytime but I cannot bring myself to cow towing and begging."" Well," He said " your not going to get it. My dad is a good friend of several of the board members and I'm going to get the job." I said "OK if that's the way it is." And he got the job.

KATHY: Mm, my goodness, So it's a lot of politics huh.

DAD: So, he had to go later and get, well in fact the Superintendent. I was suppose to, I was as much as appointed to the job when Haney left. The board members, the chairman of the board called me before I left, to go up to the boarder and asked me if I would take the superintendents job. And I said, "Well how much time do I have to think it over", and he said, "twenty minutes." I thought it over twenty minutes and I said "ok", and then he said, " you'll have to turn in your application, it's only a formality, it's all said and done." And, so, then I did that and I left. And Margaret Leary was going to notify me. Well I , and she also informed me it was assured you got the job, And so, when I went up there I told them I'd be quitting in July because I had to go. I had to go back and take the job. Well, i didn't hear and I didn't hear and so i finally called margaret and she said things have taken a turn. Some one got upset because about their

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not following their usually chain of command here. It always had been, gone from coaching to Principle of the High School, from principle of the high school to superintendent of schools and that was Chuck Davis. And it was Mrs. Davis who raised all the hell. He didn't even have his Administrative Certificate.

KATHY: HOW CAN THEY? HOW DID THEY GET AWAY WITH THAT?

DAD: Well they did, and he had to go back and get his certificate after he got the job.

KATHY: So, there was a lot of under the table dealing, huh?

DAD: I don't know wither there's so much of that anymore but there was a lot of it when I first got here. In fact there was so much of that they weren't going to, they didn't think I would last here because they were not hiring out of town people. You had to be a native.

KATHY: So, Butte was more or less a closed system in its self then?

DAD: Your right. It was. It was a closed system, and I , I don't know how, in fact I had problems when I first came here and it was sad. Because I was a union man. In fact when i went to college I a, wrote a term paper on unions for the Labor Econ, and I wrote a term paper. In fact I got in , into trouble down in Sidney because i was labor. And I , because they were going to make me join the MFT.

KATHY: Which is what?

DAD: Not the MFT the MEA. The Montana Education Association. See that's the other one and I was saying what about the other one the AFT the American Federation of Teachers. Oh, That was a Bad Word down there.

KATHY: Why?

DAD: It's a union and they never called themselves a union. The MEA and NEA they're a union.

KATHY: It was an Association?

DAD: They're called a union, but I got in trouble down there because I said I didn't want to join the MEA and the superinten-

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dent said, "WELL, YOUR GOING TO JOIN," I said, I thought you didn't hat to, that's why your not a union, that's why you don't have to join it." "YOU HAVE TO JOIN IT." "Well, your just like a union." Well, and I wasn't going to go to their convention they had in Billings and I went and stood up at their convention and said something about the AFT -- They darn near road me out of town on a rail. But when I came here I was busy trying to get my feet on the ground teaching out there at the Harrison school. And Helen Weber who was the traveling agent for the Union, she came out there and - I had no idea that this was going on. All they had to do was ask me but she came into my classroom when I'm teaching a class and interrupted me teaching and said, "Why weren't you at the meeting last night?" And I said, "What Meeting?" The union meeting and you were suppose to be there to be initiated." I said "I didn't know anything about it." "Well you better be there next time or else." And I said, "now come on out of my classroom." And I took er out. I was mad, I was fuming. I said, "there's a time and a place to discuss these things and it's not in my classroom when I'm teaching." Well, you'll find out you won't stick around here long." Well that just turned me off. I said, "to hell with you." So I wouldn't join.

KATHY: Oh, no!

DAD: Well, it caused a big stink around here for the whole year and the superintendent finally came in and said, "Rudy why," he says "don't you just let bygones be bygones and just join it." He said, "I can't fire you, your doing to good of a job." I said, "well if you have to fire me go ahead, that's fine." He said, "I can't do that." He said, "oh, come on lighten up." I said, "I just didn't like the way they approached me and I;m not that kind of a guy and there's a time and place for those things to be discussed and it's not in my class room." "Your right, I don't blame you at all your were, that's right, but please." And that was at the end of the year and he said, "sign up for next year so I won't have to let you go."

KATHY: Did you sign up?

DAD: Yeah, Quigley!

KATHY: Oh, that's the teacher.

DAD: The Principal.

KATHY: The principal

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DAD: That's the one over at Harrison and she's the one who's highly responsible for getting me a principalship. She got hurt in the wreck and they needed someone to take over the building. Well, first they had the music teacher action, and then they said they had to assign someone so they finally assigned me at the teachers salary.

KATHY: A principal at a teachers salary; y. Oh, my goodness?

DAD: So, the next year Quigley was coming back, Quigley was coming back and there was an opening. She sat down and wrote a letter to the board and said if you don't hire that man for the principalship you're making the biggest mistake you've ever made. My school ran just beautiful while I was gone. He took, he took wonderful care of my school.

DAD: I got it.

KATHY: Where?

DAD: Out at the Franklin, but then I closed it with an earthquake.

KATHY: What earthquake?

DAD: The one over there at, a, Quake Lake.

KATHY: Yellowstone, Quake Lake?

DAD: Yeah, Yeah, it wrecked the Franklin school and they had to close it.

KATHY: What did you do then?

DAD: I went to the Madison.

KATHY: As principal?

DAD: Yeah, And I was principal for a couple of years. That's when this superintendent's fiasco came about and it upset me so after I found out what was going on I went to California for a year.

KATHY: You taught in California?

DAD: Yes.

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KATHY: How was it there compared to Montana?

DAD: I taught in Santa Barbara. Oh, boy it was terrible, the kids ran the school there. They hanged the principle, an effigy, when I came to school one morning there he was hanging, off of a pole sticking out of the school. The kids they, they uh, dared you. One girl I had in class said, "look my dad is a board member, and you, and I can get you fired if you don't give me, if you don't pass me this quarter." I said, "that's fine with me, you go right ahead. I don't care to much for this place anyway." I also got into trouble because I wasn't going to pass their star football player. He was a great big colored boy and oh, he was big, and their star football player. I had him in class. I didn't mind if he didn't do anything, at least he would try, but he was always interrupting and making trouble in the class and he wouldn't do anything. So, I told him I'm going to flunk you, and he said, "well, you can't flunk me Mr. Koch, and I said, " Yes I can. So I got called in. They said you better give him a passing grade. We need him if he flunks he can't play football. I said, Well, All I ask of him is to show that he is at least trying. His not going to come into my class room and cause a ruckus so that I can't teach and expect to pass. Well, well you better just better forget about it and pass him. I said, "no I won't" and apparently they called him in and told him, he had better straighten up in my room. Son one day, it was just shortly after that. It was after class I noticed he was being pretty good in class and he said to, "Mr. Koch, can I see you after class", I said, " Yeah, sure", I was scared to death, he was a great big bruiser, and I thought maybe he was going to knock the heck out of me. And, so all the kids, all went out and he stayed and came up to me. And I couldn't believe it, he got down on his knees and he said, Please, Mr. Koch, would you please help me pass this course." I said I'd do anything I can if you will try to do something in here. He said " I'll do anything you want sur. I said ok, you just do that. I had the best fellah you ever saw and if anyone cut up or anything boy, they had to talk to him. And oh man, he kept that class in order and he worked his head off. But, he worked his head off but, I thought for sure I was really going to be killed.

KATHY: Well when did you come back to work here then?

DAD: The next year.

KATHY: And what did you come back as?

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DAD: As a teacher at Junior high. Two years there and then I applied for, at that time they wanted someone to do the testing in the grade school. So I applied for the job and I got it and from there on it went from testing to--I was then put in charge of the counselors. I was hired as an elementary counselor, but it was nothing more than a tester to them. I had to test all the school by myself, do all the testing.

KATHY: How many students?

DAD: I don't know.

KATHY: Approximately, in the grade schools then?

DAD: I don't know. In the grade schools, I don't know, must have been. I have no idea. I can't even guess, maybe, a thousand.

KATHY: You had to do that in what time frame?

DAD: Well, I had to do one set of tests at the beginning of the year and then another set of tests at the end of the year. I had to do all of the achievement testing and I had to do all of the mental aptitude testing. And, then I had to do all of the individual testing that had to be done for individuals that were referred, those that were being referred to special Ed and so on. They had to be tested. Then, then I graduated from that to getting some help. We got more counselors the next year. Elementary counselors. I don't think they have any now. We got up to about, what did I have, five, six, or seven elementary counselors. And, I had 2 social workers. Two or three social workers. I had an Indian social worker. All she did was work with the Indians. And, then they had special reading teachers. There were about six of those. And, I had all of those for one year and then I got the music teachers and the nurses. And, then they gave me all of the special Ed.

KATHY: You were in charge of all of this?

DAD: When I started teaching in Sidney it was the same. I had lunch duty, I had recess duty and hall duty. That was all part of the job. And, you had to stay on the job until at least 4:00. So, now I think, I don't know for sure, I haven't been in school for quite some time. Even when I taught here that was part of those duties and that was part of the job. You spent your time working with kids, wither it was on the playground or after school or whatever. You never thought to much about having to be called

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back to meetings, that was part of what you had to do. And, when I was in administration, I belonged to all different organizations that had to do with special education, And, I spent hour and hours going to meetings. In fact, i didn't have to much home life for a while. I was at meetings most of the time, as you recall, going here and there and all concerned with special education and the developmentally disabled. But, now I think that, well I shouldn't that, Teachers are to concerned about spending a little time at their job. I think they would have a better report with parents if they did spend a little time. We were always attending PTA meetings. We always felt that was part of it. Now, I don't think you see any teachers attending a PTA meeting. That, it all helps to know the parents and be able to talk to them so that they know you and know how feel about this. I have always felt that some of our teachers are not much more than clock watchers and babysitters. And, I don't feel that's right! The kids need to be led and motivated to do things and your up there to do that. And, you should do it. I realize that they have a harder job now, because of discipline, because the parents are down their throats, if they do something. I mean, It use to be that the parents always took the teachers and backed the teachers. And, If the kid did something they caught it twice. But, now if you do, as soon as you do anything, with the kids, to try to discipline them, the parents are right up on you to and are going to get you fired for touching a kid. I think that's gone to far the other way. Much to far the other way. If your going to have anything taught at all in schools you have to have someone behind you that will back up what you want to do. I'm not saying you should beat the heck out of kids or anything like that, but there are times when they need more discipline than your able to give them. And, that's not right! A, if your in charge of a group of people you have to be able to manage those people and see that you also, have to gain their respect. I don't mean you want to be buddy, buddy or anything but you have to gain their respect so that they will respect you and work for you and do things for you. I don't know I just don't feel that we have the caliber that we use to have.

KATHY: Do you think that just the changing times and attitudes?

DAD: That has a lot to do with it. I know that kid now, that, are much smarter than they use to be, because they learn a lot on TV. But, that's not all bad and that's not all good. There's a lot of bad that comes from that, because, they have learned much on TV that is not good at all. But, they have also learned a lot of good on TV. There are a lot of good programs, and it has helped.

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Now some of the things they learn on TV, we use to have to try and teach them that in class. And, it's not as easy, it's also a matter of kids. Kids, Kids anymore want to be entertained.

KATHY: Their not coming to school to learn they're coming to school to be entertained?

DAD: No, their coming to be entertained because they're being entertained at home. And, no matter what, it seems like, all parents are doing anymore is trying to entertain their kids to make them happy. Well, keeping them happy is not always entertainment. They need a swat or two every now and then. So, there's a lot more to be learned today too. And, I realize it's a tough job. But, I don't feel it's any tougher than it was before. Oh, there's just that some, may people, are not interested in, in fact to me, it's really been upsetting to me at times, when I've run into teachers who hate kids. And, that's upsetting!

KATHY: Why are they there?

DAD: Yeah, mm, now part of that I blame onto our teaching organizations and our training institutions. They are allowing many people to go out and teach who should not. And, they have control of that. A lot of Control of that and thy should not allow it. Now, it seems anymore, who goes into, well it always has been like that. Anyone who goes in and wants to teach can.

We, Rudy Koch and Kathleen (Reinhof) Layne  
(Person Interviewed) (Interviewer)  
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Rudy Koch  
(Person Interviewed)

Kathleen Layne  
(Interviewer)

11/22/93  
(Date)

Butte, Montana  
(City & State)