

OUR ELK FALLS ADVENTURES

OR

**THERE MUST HAVE BEEN
A BETTER WAY**

by

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I always wanted to live in the mountains of Colorado ever since I was a small child living in Denver.

My father, Robert Bruce Parker, was a surveyor for the Moffatt Tunnel in about 1898 to 1900. After that he worked for both the Colorado and Southern, and Rio Grande railroads until he retired in the 1960s. Our family took many trips into the mountains, both by car and the railroads. My two brothers built and owned a cabin on Bear Mountain near Evergreen for many years. We all spent happy times there and I loved doing that. That is when I really got the yen to live in the mountains.

When Jim and I were dating he was a Denver fireman working 24 hours on the job and 24 hours off. I was a beauty operator with Mondays off. Every other Monday we both had the same day free, so I would pack a lunch, Jim would pick me up at my home, and we would spend the day in the mountains somewhere. At noon the picnic areas were mostly empty and we could pick any table for our lunch. On one of those days we drove to Elk Falls, climbed Lions Head and got lost going down.

We were married at noon on Monday, December 1, 1941. We had a short honeymoon, four or five days at a cabin in Elk Falls. It is now owned by Mrs. Madsen.

On Sunday, December 7th, Pearl Harbor was bombed and World War II began. Jim knew he would have to serve his country because he had been notified that his status was 1A. He chose to serve in the U.S. Navy and on March 13, 1942, he boarded a train to San Diego and the Naval Training station. Our daughter Judy was born in November. Our country went through a terrible war for those four years. After the war was over, Jim returned from the South Pacific where he was stationed for three years. He went back to his job on the Denver Fire Department and served there for 32 years, during which time our other two daughters, Janice and Linda, were born. Janice passed away at two years in 1950.

In February of 1950 we were able to buy the shell of a cabin in Elk Falls. It had windows but no doors, a tar paper roof with almost no tar paper on it, and logs on most of the outside walls. On the inside only the framework was standing dividing the rooms, and a bird had a nest on a two-by-four above the windows. The cabin sat on a lot 100' by 100'. It belonged to a man whose name was Frank Hall, and he was the brother-in-law of Al Hardey, who was the

original owner of Mrs. Madsen's cabin. His job was transferring him away from Colorado, and he wanted to sell the cabin. His asking price was \$1,200, but we didn't have that much. Jim, during the time he was on board ship and having cut the hair of his shipmates for 50 cents a head, offered to buy the cabin for \$500 cash. This was the amount he had earned in the Navy, not his salary. Frank accepted it, so we had bought a piece of the mountains. Not a very big piece, but at least a start. It was some years later when Mr. Berg, who owned most of the Elk Falls property, had it surveyed. We discovered that our cabin was not sitting on the piece of property we bought. He was willing to trade so we finally had our cabin on our own property.

Through the years we worked on our cabin as time and money allowed. It was fun and we all enjoyed many weekends and vacations there. On Sundays when we were at the cabin we drove down to Pine and attended the services at the little community church there.

One day, when our daughters were still living at home, Judy belonged to a Young Peoples group at our church. They were going to have a Halloween party. It was Judy's turn to be in charge of it. I had a collection of party ideas and she chose one called a Funny Bone Halloween Party. It suggested using bones to hang on the walls with cute rhymes. We had a regular path to the Falls, part of which was an animal trail above our cabin. All four of us were walking along the path when we saw an elk or deer carcass with bleached bones. Just the thing for her party! So all four of us picked up as many bones as we could carry and lugged them back to the cabin. The party was a great success! They were supposed to be the bones of a person named Skinny Joe!

Our two daughters grew up. Judy married and Linda found an apartment and moved away from home. Jim felt that 32 years on the job was enough, so he retired.

During the Labor Day weekend of September 4th of 1972, we put up for sale our house in Denver and moved into our cabin in Elk Falls. Thinking that it would be safer, we listed the house but did not have a "For Sale" sign put on the property. Also, we left our furniture in the house, believing it would sell better furnished. However, we were not selling our furniture, but in anticipation that our new home in Elk Falls would be built shortly and we would then move the furniture to it. Anyway, we had no room in the cabin for it as the cabin was already furnished.

At last I had the fulfillment of my dreams. I was 54 and had waited about 40 years for this. Jim was 57 and not ready to really retire from all work, so he immediately went to work for Mike Morelli who owned the hardware and lumber yard in Aspen Park. He also sold propane gas. Jim became his bookkeeper since the current one was retiring. Jim started there the day after Labor Day and was to work 5-½ days a week. That first week was so lonely for me. Always before we were a family there and I was never alone. However, the

weather was lovely, and I hiked around by myself and really enjoyed the outdoors.

When we first came up to our cabin before moving in 1972 there were just six cabins in Elk Falls, and when we moved there were six more homes that had been build, some of them just summer or vacation homes.

To continue my story, that fall the days were warm and beautiful, the aspen trees were so pretty with their bright yellow leaves. We had deer and elk on our property as well as a lot of foxes and rabbits and other animals and birds. We even got a glimpse of an ermine and one day a bobcat. I was so happy, thinking it would be a lot of fun living there while our permanent home was being built. We had contacted builders, John Tekler and his son Mike. John lives on Foxton Road. The architect had our plans and we were ready for the construction to begin.

The weather was beautiful, with warm days and cool nights. I thought, "This is really going to be a fun time here, watching our home being built and enjoying the beauties all around us." We had been given permission by Elmer Berg to go where we wanted, to fish in Elk Creek. We took advantage of that privilege. We hiked up Box Canyon to the top, climbed Lions Head and Cathedral rocks, caught nice trout in the creek and picniced on a table with benches that was in the picnic area at that time. We had great fun and never littered in any way. We also climbed to the top of the Falls on one side to the beaver ponds and where the upper ranch is now.

We had no piped water into the cabin. Our well had been drilled the previous summer and was situated up the hill about 200' from the cabin. Jim attached a hose that came down from the well to the side door of the cabin. We had bought a used Maytag washing machine and we had one rinse tub on a stand. The rinse tub took eight buckets of water to fill, and the washer needed seven buckets. The bad part of it was that the water had to be turned on and off at the well, so I would go up the hill, turn it on, and then run back down and try to get to the cabin before the water got there. I never did get there first. Then I had to fill the bucket and run in and empty it, fill it again and so on until the 15 buckets had filled the machine and rinse tub. Of course, the water was running all the time, so by that time there was quite a bit of water on the ground. I had to hurry back up the hill and shut the water off. After that I went back and prepared to wash. However, the water was very cold, too cold. From Mike Morelli's hardware Jim brought home a stock tank water heater. It was a little electric heater used for heating a big tank that horses and cows drink from. It took an hour or two to heat my wash water to lukewarm, but that is when I started to wash. I found that some days after spending all that time, when the wash was ready to hang outdoors (no dryer at that time) the sky had clouded up and it was ready to rain. So we bought a rack and put it up in the enclosed porch so I could dry my clothes inside. We had a portable clothesline at that

time, outdoors. Even on cold days, I hung my clothes outdoors, and they froze dry. It froze my fingers, too!

We had the privilege of having Andy and Bessie Beye as caretakers of the ranch, hired by Mr. Berg. They first came to Elk Falls in 1946 and lived with their two boys, Bill and Dickie, in the tiny cabin just above the lodge. Andy came to replace Jack Stilwell, the previous caretaker, who lived in an old log cabin at the west gate to Elk Falls. There was no gate at that time, and the old log cabin was replaced later by the nice home that is there now. After Stilwells left, Andy and Bessie and their boys moved into the caretaker's house. Bessie was cooking at the lodge and working in the dining room there.

Andy was a good caretaker, very watchful of who drove into Elk Falls. We used to blink our lights when we drove to his house at night so he knew it was us. One night he didn't see our signal, and he got into his car and followed us clear to the cabin to find out who we were. He was so good to get his tractor out and plow the road open to our place when it snowed. There were no homes beyond Waller's place. After we moved into our home he plowed to our driveway. That tractor blade got clear down to the ground and because of that we didn't have ice left to slide on down the hill.

We enjoyed that fall so much, up until a couple of days after Halloween. Then it began to snow. The snow made everything pretty but it caused us many problems. For one thing, it seemed to snow about every three or four days all winter long. I don't think it ever melted completely off the ground. Our lane to the cabin was almost straight up from the road. It was just two ruts, impossible to use a snow shovel. So I used my straw broom and swept the lane as best I could so that Jim could get his truck up to the cabin. He had to put chains on at the ranch to get it up the hill sometimes.

We were ready for the builders to start building our new home when we first moved to the cabin, but there was a delay in getting the plans to the builder, so he and his son were not able to start building until I think it was early in December. By that time there was quite a bit of snow on the ground. Also, John and Mike were building Mike and his new wife's home in Pine Junction, so they didn't work steadily on our house. That's why it took six months to build it, and the weather was a factor.

That winter it was bitterly cold and below zero quite often. We had a furnace in the cabin for which we were thankful, but there was no insulation in the walls. We felt like we were heating the outdoors because the snow melted off the roof and left snow only where the roof was around the edge.

Our poor cars had to sit out in the weather since we had no garage. We had a Ford truck and a station wagon. How thankful we were that in 1960 electricity came to Elk Falls. Jim put an engine heater in the truck and two light bulbs in the station wagon. Then he covered both hoods with tarps. We

had to remove all that when we wanted to use each car and then put it back on. The cars got awfully dirty, couldn't wash them with the hose. I remember a couple of times I picked up snow in my bare hands and wiped it on the sides of the station wagon to get some of the dirt off.

Our bathroom was outdoors in the outhouse, 30 or 40 feet from the cabin. It was also in the next county. The cabin was in Park County, so we'd say, "Guess I'll go into Jefferson County," when we went to the outhouse. Later the county line was moved to where it is now. The outhouse was built by the Works Progress Administration, commonly called WPA, and the year it was built was 1940. That was when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was President. It is well built and air conditioned, with openings around the top. We didn't need that during that winter! Needless to say, we didn't spend much time in it, and we frequently had to sweep our way to it because it snowed so much and so often.

The rinse tub that I used for my wash days was also used for our baths. We heated water in our teakettle on our gas and coal combination stove in the kitchen and took our baths there where it was warm. We learned to conserve water while living in the cabin. It is surprising how clean a person can get in just a little water. Once in a while we drove down to Buffalo Creek on Saturday night to a home my sister and brother-in-law rented while building their home there. They lived in a home that had a bath tub and shower (pure luxury, we thought). My sister, Bertha Anderson, lent me her fancy shower cap, and put bath salts in the water for me, and it was like heaven! It was 13 miles to their house down there. One night when we went down for our bath and shower, the temperature was -17 degrees. My bath never felt so good, but then we had to put our coats on and drive back in the cold. Brrr! I surely enjoyed our electric blanket on those cold nights. Sometimes, the only way I felt warm was under that blanket at night.

There was a small grocery on Conifer Road when we moved to Elk Falls. It was called "Conifer Finer Foods" and was situated about where the Aspen Park Paint store is now. It was the only grocery in our area. We bought some foods there and went to Evergreen Grocery for most of our groceries. It was located at the corner of Hwy. 74 and Meadow Drive. A rug company moved there later. There was a good-sized drug store next to the grocery and that December we did our Christmas shopping one night for gifts for our family. The temperature was -10. There was no North Evergreen at the time with stores and businesses.

We had Christmas Day family gathering in 1972 at our cabin. It was crowded but fun. It probably was a white one. It seemed like all the other days were that winter.

After Christmas my snow boots sprung leaks. I needed them every time I went outdoors to bring in wood or to go to the outhouse. We used to walk around Aspen Lane Circle quite often, and that's when I discovered the leaks. I

think I froze the tips of my big toes then. We went to Denver to buy some more boots, but all the stores had put out their spring clothes and the boots were gone. However, I did find a pair at one store that had two inch heels! Not the best for the mountains, but I bought them anyway. I had been putting the ones that leaked over the registers between trips outside, but they were never dry inside.

When we had to go to town at night for an appointment or some other reason, I would drive our station wagon down to the lumber yard when Jim got off work at 5 or 5:30. We parked either the station wagon or his truck in Mary Beeson's driveway and took one car to town and back. Mary's house was somewhat remodeled and made into a restaurant in the last few years. It is now Madwell's Restaurant. When we came back to Aspen Park to pick up the other car, sometimes it was awfully cold and took some time to warm up the car. Mary was a good friend and gave us permission to park at her house.

In February our house in Denver sold, and we needed to get our furniture moved out very soon. We had friends in Buffalo Creek, Doc Hofferth and his wife. They were caretakers at the Gulf and Western Summer Camp there. Since it was winter time the cabins were not in use, and they gave us permission to store things in one of them until May 1 when they needed to clean the cabins for the summer. We didn't want to store our good furniture in that Buffalo Creek cabin because it was not clean and there were mice in it. So we loaded up some of the old not so good stuff from our cabin on our truck and hauled it down to Buffalo Creek. Then we solicited the help of my sister and husband, the Ray Andersons, to help us move our furniture from Denver to the cabin. Ray had a truck, we had one, and the station wagon and we thought we could get everything into the three vehicles. We had to move on a Saturday afternoon after work. So Jim and I drove down and started to load our truck and station wagon. The weather looked threatening and during the afternoon started to snow. It probably started earlier in Elk Falls. In spite of that, we got our vehicles loaded and covered. Ray and Bertha came later because they had to pick up a dolly, since their truck was heavier and the men would load our refrigerator and other appliances that were heavy. Inside our station wagon with the back seat flat we had loaded dresser drawers and other smaller articles. It was dark and snowing heavily when we started out, the men each driving a truck. I drove the wagon and Bertha rode with me. I drove behind the men. Ray was first in his truck, then Jim. The snow continued all the way up from south Denver. I think by the time we reached Elk Falls it was 10 to 12" deep and still snowing heavily. As we were driving up Juniper Road to Circle Drive, Ray's truck got stuck in the snow. He was able to put a chain on one back wheel and that was enough to get the truck going again and all three vehicles reached the cabin. Bertha's part was to pray for our safety and success in getting to the cabin. That was what we needed, that is for sure.

Unloading took some time, especially getting the heavy appliances up the slippery porch steps. Finally, it was accomplished and then Ray and Bertha had

to drive the 13 miles home to Buffalo Creek. It was 2 a.m. when they finally started down the hill.

By May 1 we had to move our cabin furniture out of the Buffalo Creek cabin. When we drove down there to get it there was deep snow on the driveway and even up to the door of the cabin. We had to load the furniture in those conditions. Needless to say, when everything was loaded into the cabin, it was really full. I tried to arrange things neatly, but we really had a path through with furniture on each side. We had to live that way for a little over one month.

Around May 1st we put up a hummingbird feeder and had quite a few birds that came to visit there, also a feeder for other birds. When we first lived in our new home a year or two later we had so many humming birds at the feeder we kept adding more feeders. Ended up with five big feeders and used 50 lbs of sugar that season - four months. I felt almost that I couldn't go anywhere as the hummers would run out of food, they emptied the feeders so quickly.

We were scheduled to move into our new home by June 1, 1973, but at the very end of May we had a heavy wet snow storm. It was 3' deep. When we woke up to a bright sunny morning and walked up the path to our new home, we discovered the whole front deck on the 2nd floor fallen to the ground. The builders didn't have the permanent supports under it, and the weight of the snow made it give way. That delayed us moving for about one week. After the deck was put back we moved our bed into the living room. We didn't have our carpeting laid yet, but wanted to at least sleep there.

After living in our cabin for nine months and experiencing life without so many conveniences I can't describe the wonderful feeling I had when we finally got everything in its own place in both the house and the cabin. I felt like I didn't belong in such a nice place!

We had many experiences during that first year, some happy, some sad. I learned many things. My wish did come true and we had 26 years in Elk Falls. On August 6, 1998 we moved into a small apartment we had built on Judy and Jim Koucherik's home in Littleton. It was time for us to move. I have thanked the Lord many times that He gave us that cabin and all the rest of what we have. We made many dear friends there who enriched our lives by knowing them. I'm grateful for those friendships, the good times, and even the bad times. I wouldn't trade all those memories for anything.



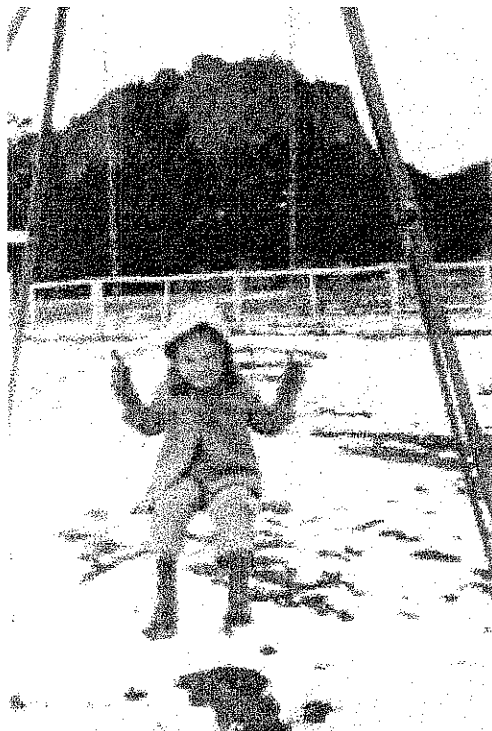
Jim and Irene picnicing



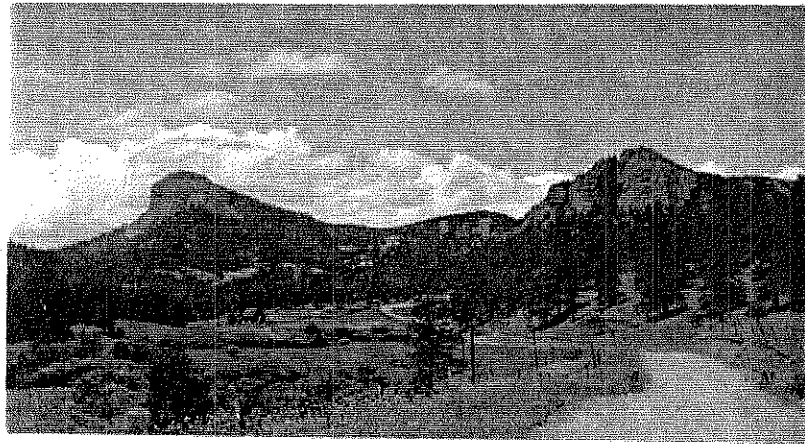
Irene on top of Lion's Head



Hardey Cabin



Judy swinging at the Ranch



August 1951



Linda hauling firewood



Judy, Jim & Linda at the tire swing



August 1951