"They'll never know what we had."

Forrest Warren

By Shaunna Lewis

"I wish Steamboat was still a small, old country town like it used to be."

"We used to go to town about once a week, usually on Saturday, and it would be nothing to see a lot of your neighbors. We'd shoot the breeze and have a cup of coffee together. I wish Steamboat was still a small, old country town like it used to be. Nobody would be making a lot of money, but nobody would go hungry either."

Forrest Warren, a rancher on the Elk River northwest of Steamboat, recalls what it was like when he came to the area in 1951. His place lies at the foot of Sleeping Giant, and it is 2,000 acres of mountain wonderland. He came to Routt County from his birthplace in Nebraska. He was born in the rolling hills of that state in 1912, and

he shared his boyhood memories with me.

"We didn't go no place very far, but we sure enjoyed our neighbor's more than anything. I don't think there was a Sunday when we didn't go to the neighbors house or they didn't come to our house. Us kids would play in the barn and goof around. We were like one big family, but sometimes there would be a fight. We'd get over that in a week or so.

"On summer weekends, we liked to get a gallon bucket and go to the corn fields when roasting ears were ready. Us kids would just pick 'em in the field, build a fire and cook right there. Our neighbors had an apricot tree and we liked to go over there and fill up on those. Everyone had cows so there was cream, milk and butter. We made good old homemade ice cream. Now the doctors say, 'Don't eat no cholesterol or you're going to die.' Why my dad put butter on his bread an inch thick, drank milk, and used cream. He lived to be ninety-four.

"Kids now are kind of spoiled with such a variety of things to eat. We had beans and potatoes one day and the next day we had potatoes and beans. If you wasn't hungry, you didn't eat and the folks didn't worry about it. We had homemade bread and butter and all the milk we could drink but we didn't have much choice beyond that like they do now. When we made homemade ice cream, we only got one dish so we really appreciated it.

"We never got oranges except at Christmas time, but we had a kid that went to our school who was pretty rich and had an orange for his school lunch everyday. Sometimes we'd walk home from school together and he'd peel his orange saved from his lunch. He'd ask, 'Anybody want it?' We'd all yell for it and then he would throw it off in the dirt. Gosh, us kids would have given anything for that orange!

"I went to school near Ord in a building we called "the old brick school." About thirty kids went there. We had to walk about a mile and that was just a nice little jaunt. That school went to the eighth grade and then we had to go to a school in town. My sister taught school in another building so we took her to school, and she paid our car expenses. We had a 1924 Model T coupe---that car would be worth a fortune now. I didn't like town school because it seemed like the town kids were smarter than us country kids. They knew all of the angles. They would just stare at us in our homemade clothes. After a couple of years they would begin to accept you, but I quit school in the eleventh grade. I figured I'd gotten enough education."

I asked Forrest if they ditched school then. "Yep, we skipped school and played hookie. We liked to go up to a little place and play pool. If you were out of school, we had to have a written excuse so we'd fake them for each other. We'd make up big stories about car trouble, or if we didn't get an excuse, sometimes we'd just play hookie again.

"Everybody in Nebraska has a little watermelon patch and we all would steal a few. We'd only take enough to eat, but it seemed like everyone did it. My brothers and I trapped skunks and we always ended up getting stinky. We'd come home thinking we'd really done a big job, but our sisters would bang the door shut and tell us to change our clothes outside. Sometimes it would be freezing, and there we'd be. We could get a couple of dollars for the skins and that made us big boys.

"I remember one Christmas I got a single shot .22, but it wasn't any good. I don't know what was wrong with it. I'd shoot it, but the bullet wouldn't come out. The Sunday school teacher was a carpenter and he had a bit that he could run into the gun. Everytime the gun was plugged I had to go to Sunday school. Mom tried to get us to go all of the time, but we was always busy unless the gun needed fixed, then we were glad to go. We had better times then. In those days we didn't have much, maybe a horse, rope, and a bridle. Of course we didn't have a saddle so we just rode bareback. Now it seems like kids gotta have a car, good clothes, skis and this and that. I still think we had more fun.

"My dad had bought a three hundred and twenty acre farm, but it didn't have any buildings on it. I can remember him moving a house and barn there with horses and a winch. To move they'd put a cable on and then the horses would go around and around. They moved the building up to the winch, then they'd hook the team up and drag the winch, then roll the cable, stake it all down, and start the process over again. Us kids got to ride in the house for aways. I can remember standing and watching the house coming.

"We did all of the farm work with horses, and never had a tractor when I was a kid. We usually had six to eight horses. We worked hard and I can remember one year we had a really good corn crop. It was up about three foot or more and then we had a hail storm. All that was left was stubs---in about fifteen minutes we were wiped out completely. If I would have been my dad, I would have quit, but he didn't; he just kept digging.

"I'm not sure how my folks did it. There were eight kids to feed. We had a wagon load of potatoes and beans that we tromped out of the pods with our feet. You'd just get on 'em with your bare feet and tromp. We always butchered four or five hogs for meat. By 1928 things were

better for us. Dad had a car and we was living pretty high. He only owed $11,000 on his place and then the crash came in '29. They sold him out. He couldn't even pay the interest. Practically everybody was in the same boat no matter what business they were in. Then in 1932 and '33 the dirt storms came. It was terrible. The dust would come in from Kansas and it would get dark out; just like a cloudy day. The sun would still be shining, but all you could see was a little red ball in the sky. That's what scares a guy. Everybody gets to living pretty high like in '29 and then it goes kapoot.

"In about 1933 my dad rented a farm about forty miles from where we had lived. He didn't have anything, no horses, no machinery, nothing. It was pretty bad getting started again, but somehow he did it. I was old enough to work so I got a job at the neighbors. He hired me for $25 a month plus board. We started at 4:00 in the morning and worked until dark. After supper, the lady would make you go out and work in the garden. Gosh it seemed like we never quit. I really liked to drive their tractor since we didn't have one. It was the early kind with metal wheels on it. I worked there a year and the next year a married man with three kids tried to bump me for the job. He offered to work for $20 a month. Can you believe that? A man with a family offering to work for that. The farmer did furnish meat and eggs and stuff like that though. He asked me what I thought and I said, 'I don't know, I gotta eat too.' He said if I'd stay for $20 a month I could keep the job and so I stayed for less money. I often wondered what happened to the man and his family, but you couldn't think about it. You had to take care of yourself.

"I worked three months that summer and saved $40 out of the $60 I earned. I decided to come West. A kid I knew from another town found out what his uncle was paying out here to help with the hay. He knew where to go, so we headed for Colorado, in a Model T. We came to the Steamboat area and worked at Old Man Drake's place. We stacked hay for $2.50 a day, and man that was just like gold. We got all the good food we wanted to eat too. We couldn't spend all the money we made in a day, and I really enjoyed that! I worked there for a year and then the kid I came with had trouble with the boss. He got fired, but I stayed. I worked up in Diamond Park helping build a sheep corral for a dollar a day. Then I decided I'd go back to Nebraska, but the kid I'd come with had left and he had the car. The guy I was working for got me a ride to Denver on one of Larson's trucks, but I had to find my own way from there. I got into Denver at 3:00 in the morning and I didn't know where nothing was. I asked a guy where the freight trains was so I could hook one of those out of there. He told me what direction to go so I headed down there. On the way I passed a filling station and seen a guy there in a pick-up with Nebraska plates. I asked him if I could ride as far as he was going. He told me to get in the back and he took me as far as Alliance, Nebraska. I got there at 3:00 the next morning and had a cup of coffee with him at a little cafe that was open. There was some bums hanging around 'cause in those years lots of people rode the freight trains. I got to talking to one of them, and he told me there would be a train along any minute. In about a half hour, one pulled in and they opened it up to ice the cars. I crawled in a potato car and rode out to the middle of Nebraska. I was getting closer to home, but they stopped along the way and I could hear someone banging doors. He was closing everything up to keep the heat out. It was

Steamboat Springs when Forrest first came

getting hot in the daytime and they wanted to keep the cool in. He came by, and me and the other guys called not to drop the lid on our car. If he would have, there would not have been any way to get out and we would have been trapped in there. I rode as far as Broken Bow, Nebraska, where I had a sister living."

It was the mid Thirties and Forrest started in a career that kept him busy for the next fifteen years. "I got a job driving a truck in Nebraska. It was a good job, but I wanted the guy to pay me more money. We started on Sunday to make a 200 mile trip to Omaha. He only wanted to pay me $6 a week and I wanted $7, so I quit him, and my brother and I bought this little transport truck for $2,000. It had a permit for one haul out of Ark City, Kansas, and that was the other end of the world! We were hauling gas in a 2,000 gallon tank. It was a 1936 International with hard rubber tires. Man it was nice. When we bought it, we didn't have enough money, so dad signed the note at the bank. We agreed to pay back so much a month. In order to get security, the bank made my dad put all of the cattle on the note. God, we didn't want to break him again, and we knew we had to keep going because he was counting on us. We rode that truck for weeks straight and never got out of there. My brother would drive and I'd sleep on his lap, and then I'd drive and he'd sleep on my lap. The roads were mostly gravel and they were bad. They had square corners instead of curves. We beat along like that until we got the first payment made.

The old International

"On one trip we blew a tire and had no money for another one. We were in trouble. We talked to a man at a filling station near the Port of Entry in Kansas. We wondered if we could charge a tire. He asked us a few things about where we were going and what we were doing. He finally charged a tire to us, and we got home and collected on that load. We had so little money to

The trucks at Burwell, Nebraska

operate on, but we kept plowin' along. We ran a load every day for three weeks. I remember a dollar went a lot farther then though. You could buy a pair of Levis for $1.50.

"We got to where we could hire some help and we had drivers down the road so we could change. We'd roll in, unload, and start again. We never shut her off and really began to make money. Fuel was about six or seven cents a gallon and we made more money than we ever thought we could. That little $2,000 truck really paid off. Now the trucks cost $50,000, and fuel is high. We could get plenty of gas and we loaded right at the refinery. I can remember in high school, a quarter could buy enough gas to fool around all day. You hardly ever bought over fifty cents worth of gas to run around on, unless you were pretty rich. Then you might spend a dollar. We never said, 'Filler up.' Those were the days when the pumps had the little glass bowls and a dollar bought several gallons.

"During World War II, in the early Forties, gas was rationed, but it was no trouble for trucks to get gas. They gave us what was called a T stamp, but they were used to get gas for things they weren't meant for. Gas rationing was a joke and seems to me that's when the government began to control people. They wanted you to save your toothpaste tubes for the metal and that made you feel very conscientious. But it didn't amount to a hill of beans. They never used that tin for anything. It was the same thing with rubber tires. If you had an old tire, you were supposed to turn it in to use in the war effort because some island had shut off the supply of rubber. We've got pictures where we hauled semi loads of them to Omaha. The funny thing is, sometimes a guy would turn a tire in, and then if

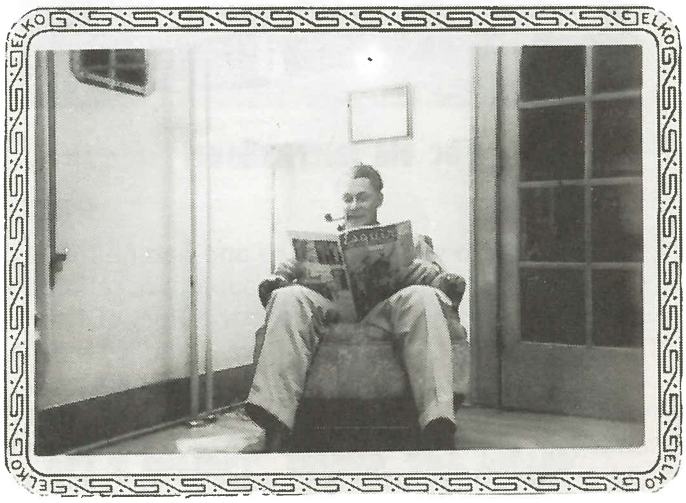
he needed a tire he might get the same one back. He'd go to the Office of Price Administration in the courthouse, make out a big form to get a tire, and get his old one. The whole thing didn't seem to work out very well."

Forrest mentioned the troubles truck strikes had caused him in the business and asked him to tell some details of those problems. "In 1940 there was a vicious truck strike in Omaha. In those days everybody milked cows and there were two butter factories near us. One was in Burwell, Nebraska, and the other in Ord. We took a load of eggs and butter to Omaha every week. From there another line took it to Chicago. When the strike came, there sat the butter and they could only hold it for about a week or ten days, because the cooler got too full. I decided I'd take a load in and slip through South Omaha since I knew that route better. I pulled up to a stop light and there were some goons, or strike breakers, who had come in from Chicago. They were sitting in a car and when the light turned green I slid on by, but when I looked in the mirror they were following right behind me. I got to the next light and they signaled a bunch who were sitting there to wheel out in front of me. Now I had them ahead and behind me. A big ol' goon came up to my door and asked, 'Where are you going?' I told him I was just delivering a load of butter and he wanted to see my union card. I told him I didn't have one so he said they would all take me to get one. A card cost about $60, but they told me I had to have one before I could get any freight to haul. They followed me right down to the union hall and I got one lined up. We only stayed in the union as long as the strike lasted, but everything was fine when we signed up. If you weren't union you'd back up to the dock, but the workers would just pass you by. They'd load someone over there and then someone else over here, but you just sat there. After three or four hours they might go ahead and load you.

"The drivers were really frightened during the strike because they would throw pop bottles and gas soaked rags to set the trucks on fire. When you slowed down at the railroad tracks, they'd have their goons out there throwing bricks through your windshield. One guy who docked beside us had a turntable on the fifth wheel of the trailer. It locks in there with a little lever. You can pull the lever and it unlocks the trailer. When he was out eating supper, the goons pulled the lever. He was loaded with furniture, and when he pulled out, it dropped the dolly wheels. They went up through the floor and crushed the furniture. It was a mess! We were all glad when the strike was over.

"It was while I was trucking that I met my wife. She was working in her dad's cafe and I was driving a truck. She wanted to go riding in my truck and that started it. Dating was great then just like it is now. Ruth has helped me through the years, driving a truck when we were first married, and working on the ranch in later times. Our son Bill still operates the truck line. He hauls fertilizer and petroleum in Burwell, Nebraska. We're the oldest transport in that state. There isn't anybody else who's been with it as long. There's still some trucking businesses that have operated under the same name, but the owners have changed. Ours has stayed the same since 1937. That's forty-one years we've been trucking."

In 1951, Forrest decided to come back to the Steamboat area and bought a ranch on the Elk River about ten miles northwest of town. "When we moved in here, the neighbors had all come in and cleaned the place out. We moved into the old log cabin below the house we're in now. It was in February, but it wasn't too bad a winter. The log cabin was really warm and cozy. The guy that was in the big house knew about ranching and we didn't so we needed to keep him. His son lived with us in the log house. The biggest shock when we moved here was milking cows. Why, I hadn't milked cows since I was a kid, and we had eight



to do. I didn't realize it was such a short time between morning and night. We'd just get them milked, wash the separator and it was time to milk again. We sure miss the fresh milk and cream now since we don't have cows anymore.

"We used to raise horses. We had a stud and four Percheron mares, but they didn't make us much money so we sold them. One team had a mare that weighed 2,400 pounds and the other one weighed 2,300. We called them Whitey and Whitey. That way when you called Whitey, they'd both go. They were sorrel with beautiful white manes and tails. The only way we could tell them apart was by a difference in a white spot on their foreheads. One had a long spot and the other had a more narrow one. Our other team was black mares called Doll and Dais. We used the horses to feed and they would pull a sled with thirty bails of hay. Now we use a snow cat. It's

way easier, faster, but more expensive.

"I remember one winter when it got fifty degrees below zero and we were feeding with horses. The harnesses got so stiff that they wouldn't bend to go on the horses. We had about an average snowfall, but we had that cold. The worst winter for snow that I can remember on the ranch was in 1977 and '78. We ran a cow and calf operation some years ago and winters were a problem for that. When they began to calve, there would be hard packed, late winter snow. The cows would drop the calves on the snow, in melting puddles, and every place else. We had to go look for them all the time. The cows didn't know any better and besides there wasn't any bare ground. Aside from that our livestock seemed to get through the winters pretty good."

I asked him how he got his brands. "Well the slash 7 H (7H) came with the ranch when we bought it. It was a very old brand. The circle bar (⊆) came from Sam Love. I had worked for him when I was young and he was an old timer here."

Steamboat was different then. The back country was more private. "It disturbs me when I see cross country ski tracks across my land. It disrupts my ranch operation, and causes me worry. I learned to ski when I worked in Steamboat in my younger days. We took some old wooden skis up one of our hills and started down. I didn't know how to slow up or stop so they said put the pole between your legs and just sit down on it for control. I really got to sailing along, but I saw some trees coming up, so I started to sit on the pole. The snow was too soft and it didn't work. That was the end of my skiing.

"After we'd get done haying, we'd each take a pack horse and go up to the lakes. We'd have a ball, and we might see only one other person the whole time we were out. We'd catch fish eight, ten, and fourteen inches long. One time we lay down on the bank and scooped fish out of a creek. We'd just lay down and flip them out on the bank. One time we were out in the back country, and we saw Buddy Werner out training. He was going up over a hill and he was surprised to see anyone out there. He waved to us and went on. He looked like a little toy out there. About a year ago we went to the same area and in one day we counted seventy people where we used to only see one."

After ranching here for twenty-eight years, I asked him if the changes make him think of selling out. "Well I don't know if I would or not, then I wouldn't have any place to go for peace and quiet. I want to stay in the country. There's too much traffic, too many people and even stop lights in town now. It doesn't make me happy. From here to Clark, we're the ranchers that have been here the longest. Everybody else is gone. It used to be I knew who was coming up the road by the sound of the car going by. It isn't like that anymore. I guess I feel sorry for my grandkids and all the other kids. They'll never know what we had."

Ruth and Farrest Warren and the big one he got last fall