

White Grass Heritage Project

INTERVIEWEE: Clare and Bill Leach

INTERVIEWER: Matthew K. Heiss

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Matthew: Today is the 5 of September, 2014. My name is Matthew Heiss and I'm working as a volunteer for the Grand Teton National Park as a part of the White Grass Heritage Project. This afternoon I am thrilled to be with Clare and Bill Leach, who are former White Grassers. I don't know how you got my email address – was it through Rachel?

Clare: Through Rachel, yes.

M: Okay, well, we emailed a couple of times while you were on the road, which I thought was way cool and I was jealous because I'm sitting behind my desk in an office. We're going to be talking about the Leachs' experience here at White Grass. Just for the sake of context, Becky my wife is indexing this interview and she's here as well, so her voice may appear on this recording. Clare, first of all, why don't you tell me which years you were here and in what capacity, either as a dude or did you work as a wrangler? And then Bill, I'll ask you the same question and then we'll do the autobiographical sketch. So Clare...

C: (I was here in) 1966, 1967, 1979, 1980, '81, and '85.

M: Okay, and Bill?

B: Somewhere in between those years. '81 and '85.

M: You know what, I do not have any stories about the last year that White Grass was operational, so you coming today is really filling in a huge gap in the history, so I'm really pleased that you're here. So as I said before we started, I'd like to get just a brief autobiographical sketch and, Clare, let's start with you. Tell me where you were born, raised, your education, and just a little bit about you, how you met your husband, etc.

C: Well, I was born in Richmond, Virginia (and) grew up in Tennessee. (I am) one of three children. I was lucky enough to be very well-educated. I have a master's in counseling/psychology, so I'm a private practice marriage and family therapist, which some of it had a lot to do with being here when I was really young. Bill and I met – it all weaves into the White Grass – I was here when I was 16.

M: With your family?

C: No, this was Westward Ho, which was a 2-year stint at the ranch, which was a very important piece of the history because Frank allowed a young Episcopal group led by Dan Matthews, who was an Episcopal preacher, he came with 80 teenagers from Tennessee; 40 stayed at the White Grass and 40 stayed at the R Lazy S. I was lucky enough to be at the White Grass both years, so that was when I was 16 and 17, so I came with that against my father's wishes. Now the interesting thing is that it was a church trip, but my parents (I was 16) heard that Frank and Nona were not married, so my father argued that I shouldn't be able to come because they weren't married. Dan Matthews came over and said, "No, no, I really want Clare to come on this trip." So I had never been west of Tennessee at that point and so we came out here on a Greyhound bus in June, so as a teenager my father kept a tight hand. This was a big adventure out in the west.

(3:41)

M: I'm going to come back to that. First, Bill, I want to get a little bit of your background. Tell me where you were born and raised and about your education, career, etc.

B: Ohio, born. Farmer background. Like Clare, I had an abundance of education; doctoral studies at the University of Virginia.

M: UVA in Charlottesville?

C: Yeah, we both went to graduate school at UVA in Charlottesville.

M: So did I!

C: Did you really?! Oh my! I graduated in 1975 from graduate school.

M: Oh, in '75 I graduated from high school. So give me a decade and a half and I'm at UVA. (laughter)

B: Both of our children went to UVA.

M: Beautiful, oh my gosh I love the place. Mr. Jefferson's University.

C: Yep, yep.

B: So I did real estate in Charlottesville after I dropped out of college in education. I was a dean at a college and then the college administration. (I then) got into real estate development, built some of the medical things around Charlottesville and homes there. Then Clare and I lived in Portugal and took a sabbatical for a short time.

M: Why Portugal?

B: We flipped a coin between there and Costa Rica.

C: (laughs) Seriously, that's true.

M: How much Portuguese did you speak?

B: Very little, even today.

C: He would say “bon die” and then point to me. (laughs) I'm the language person.

B: We love to travel, so a part of our goal was to travel. After getting out of education and then out of real estate development, we wanted to open up something. We traveled the American West, visiting places we always enjoyed, from Carmel to Santa Fe to Tucson. We ended up opening a fine art gallery in Aspen, Colorado. Our son Ryan runs it now. (The gallery has) amazing American art; many of the artists who are shown in Jackson Hole are the same artists in Aspen. So that's been there for 20-some years, about 25 years. Clare and I have always had a love of the American West, so we travel as much in the west as we can (that's why we have a motor coach).

(5:55)

M: Awesome. Let me come back to Westward Ho. Why don't you tell me what kind of a program (that) was and why were they bringing kids out west?

C: Dan Matthews was an Episcopal priest in Nashville at a young parish called St. David's. It was his first church. He was 32 at the time and he had a strong youth program, so he just decided that this would be a great way to bring kids together for fellowship, a close-captive audience. We were all the active kids in the church. He brought us here to have a retreat, which was really an Episcopal retreat at the ranch. Somehow he made contact with Frank. It was June (off-season), so I remember that it cost \$225 for the whole week (using) the Greyhound bus. To stay at the ranch for a whole week, (including) the Greyhound bus and all expenses!

B: The reason this particular minister just retired is because the head in the Episcopal Church went to Trinity, New York –

C: – So he became a bishop and went far. (Dan) brought a gynecologist to talk to us about sex. He brought another guy who was a physician to talk about health. He was way ahead of his time. You signed up for the trip if you were a part of the Episcopal youth group and it was called Westward Ho. And it really only went from 1966, '67, and maybe '68. I was 16 and 17 those years, so I came (for) two years.

M: What kinds of activities would you do out here? And when you arrived, were there other families here or –

C: We took over the whole ranch! There were 40 of us. We were the ranch for that week. These Greyhound bus drivers would just speed through, so we got here early. We got

here at 5:30 in the morning and I remember seeing the sun rise for the first time over the Tetons and I said, "I'm in love." So we came to the ranch – and you've got to understand that for a lot of people to be from the east and come here (was a big deal). I bought a pair of Acme boots and blue jeans and a hat – we were real dudes. We were all 16 and 17 years old. Seeing the sign for White Grass and coming up this road in the morning was the most magnificent sight I had ever seen. There was a bear that was just coming out of the kitchen when we arrived and it was pretty wild back then! And porcupines lived under most of the cabins (back) then.

M: So talk about the week's worth of activities. I've talked to some of the former dudes and one of the reputations here was that it was really easy going, that you could do your own thing. I'm wondering if this Episcopal minister had you programmed. Talk about the week and what you did.

C: We got here and we would ride in the morning and the afternoon.

M: Had you ever ridden a horse before?

C: I had. They would take you down to the ring and see what you could do. It was a loose ranch (because we had been to others). You'd start galloping around if you could stay on the horse (and that was really good), and if you didn't they'd go, "Well, gotta show you how to do a few things." So we all went in the ring and we learned. We rode, we did a float trip down the Snake River, we had gatherings at night. The second year I was here we climbed with a climber up the Idaho side of the Tetons and there was still snow there. It was mostly like a ranch week; riding twice a day, we did some all-day rides. So we did what the ranch did, but I think Dan watched over us. We had lots of wranglers with us all the time. It wasn't as loose as it was when we came back.

M: We'll talk about that in chapter 2. As part of this, did this minister also have a spiritual component built in? Would there be scripture readings, testimonials, etc?

C: Well, what we did was gather in the main dining room and eat our meals together. He would have a program every night. These are 40 teenagers; some people came from Memphis and other churches he had known, so it wasn't just from our little church. (One of my favorite things we did was when) he had us write compliments for each other. You had to write one sincere compliment for every person. And if you didn't know them well or didn't like them, you had to sit there until you could come up with something. He said it can't be bogus. At the end of the night they had an envelope and we all got our compliments that we could take with us home. I had those compliments for probably 30 years. I would read them every now and then, so the counselors who came did it. We'd cut out magazines and talk about the future, talked about spirituality and (if) we believed in god. There would be prayers and watched the movie *David* about a schizophrenic. Every night there would be a program. We went to the rodeo on Wednesday night, but every night there'd be a program revolving around spirituality and the church.

(11:26)

M: Were you here on a Sunday, too? Were you able to go down to the Chapel of the Transfiguration?

C: Oh yeah, he went there and Dan was a guest speaker there that week. We rode our horses down there, it was just fabulous. We did all of the things that they did back then. Frank was very involved that week. He took us on a raft trip, he was there at night. He was constantly smoking, so at Westward Ho we got together and we bought him a lighter. (The lighter) said: "To a man's man, Frank Galey." Being older we probably should have said "to a ladies' man." (laughs)

M: I'm going to come back to a little bit of that in a minute. I'm very interested in your first impressions of Frank for those first two years you were here as a teenager as a part of this religious retreat.

C: He was bigger than life. He was an imposing cowboy; he had ruddy cheeks, he had an uproarious laugh, and he liked to tell stories, he liked to be there. He ran a tight ship in a way with the cowboys. His main concern that week was keeping them all away from us! (laughs) He was like, "These are the teenagers and you go over there." He would talk and smile and tell us old stories of back in the day when the ranch got started and when his father was here. (Frank) was a very amazing character. We didn't know a lot about him, but he was bigger than life.

M: What about Nona back in those early years? Did she have anything to do with you?

C: Nona was not around much when we first came here. She would show up, but not during the time of Westward Ho. I didn't really meet or have any contact with Nona until '79. She wasn't around much.

M: Now here's kind of a strange question, but this dude ranch had a little bit of a reputation of a lot of alcohol, a little bit of hanky panky after hours, romance, etc. And Frank had his own reputation. During those first two years when you were here, were you kind of sheltered from that?

(13:53)

C: Yes. The thing that I think sheltered us from that was that Dan was running a tight ship. You had 40 people taking over the ranch that were all 15, 16, and 17 years old. So Frank just kind of came in and out. The wranglers were kept away from us. I think that was a part of it because there was a lot of drinking and partying. We were sort of cloistered, so we didn't really know a lot about that. When I was older and came back, Frank's ruddy cheeks were obviously from a whole lot of drinking, but back then he was just the funny cowboy who owned the ranch and talked to us. We were protected from all of that for those two years.

M: So what brought you back in '79 (12 years later)?

C: I had so fallen in love with this place that I said, "Someday I'll be back." It's kind of a funny story; I had been married from 19-28, got divorced, so that was a real pivotal year for me. I had moved back to Charlottesville (I had gone to graduate school there), went into private practice in counseling with a woman who said, "I just got back from a vacation." I said, "Where'd you go?" And she said, "The White Grass Ranch." I almost fell over! And I said, "I went there as a kid!" She said, "Well, I want to go back in a month for the horse drive." Frank did a horse drive at the end of every year. This was a whole different trip, so my partner Carol Sins and I came here on the horse drive in '79. That was a whole different memory set. I always wanted to come here at changing points in my life; this was pretty much right before Bill and I met and it was a very important time for me to just be here and see this place again. These mountains are very healing, this whole place is very healing.

M: Talk about what you did on the horse drive.

C: We got here in September right when they were closing the ranch, so we would drive the horses to DuBois. I didn't know it until I got here, but my partner is having an affair with one of the cowboys and I didn't know this until we were driving into the ranch. We were supposed to share a cabin (which we never did). So I'm left alone here at the ranch in my own cabin with the bear scratching around. That was a big surprise to me, but she had just been here the two weeks before and wanted to come back and see the cowboy. So we came and it was chaos and wild. Frank gave the cowboys full reign. He wasn't going to be there this week, so Frank came in and said hello –

M: Did he remember you?

C: Yeah, he remembered that I was (from) Westward Ho. So that was the first time we went to Frank's house (and Nona's) and we had cocktails the first night and everybody got to know each other. We took off the next day. We were here at the ranch two nights and then went away and came back at the end of the week. Frank had given the cowboys a map and we were driving all of these horses to DuBois – and the cowboys were drunk. The cowboys didn't know where they were going. We got lost and so the second day we were supposed to be in the saddle for maybe seven hours – we were in the saddle for thirteen hours because we got lost somewhere in the middle of nowhere. So my partner and I were together – they set up tents and you weren't supposed to shower for the week, but we talked some cowboys into taking us somewhere and watching while we showered. We looked fresher than everybody at the end. (laughs) Frank didn't come back until the end of the week. These cowboys were just drinking peppermint schnapps and they were practically falling off of their horses. None of us knew what to do. One horse hurt its leg and they said that they were going to shoot it and I started crying. They had actually let the horse hobble down and they didn't actually shoot it. It was wild. We did get meals, we did stop, we did have tipis to sleep in.

(18:08)

M: So it was like a “5-day pack trip,” which is what Frank would have called that.

C: Well, he would have called it the horse drives. These were for dudes to drive these horses to DuBois. We took this rickety old bus back that somebody was driving and we didn't know we'd make it, but we did. You could go out and ride horses and take yourself out. We'd go to R Lazy S Ranch. It's very organized – you can't do this and you can't do that. Here you could do anything that you wanted.

M: But did you like that as opposed to the R Lazy S? The freedom (to do what you want)?

C: Yeah –

B: We loved the R Lazy S in terms of their string of horses and the way they do it very professional. But there's something very mysterious and adventurous to getting on a horse with no clue what to do and go lickety split up to the meadows. All hell would break loose and you didn't care. They didn't worry about insurance, they didn't worry about someone falling off –

C: No, Frank didn't worry about that.

B: You just did it and it was an adventure that you wouldn't have thought of.

C: Well, in '79, Carol and I went out with her wrangler boyfriend – and we just galloped. You don't gallop horses like that forever, but we just went out and galloped early in the morning and Frank would say, “Oh, be back by lunch.” So there was a certain amount of the wild west that was still very present here. Frank used to tell us stories about the wranglers.

B: Do you ride horses?

M: I don't, no.

B: There's something about a horse, you know, as wild and as stupid (they can be) at times, so you never really know what's going to happen. It's that unknown factor – and to have the elements of the wind and the rain in your face and going through these meadows was just nice.

C: For instance, when I was here with Westward Ho, the one wild moment was when we had gone to have lunch at Dornan's and tied our horses up. We came back – and my mother had said before you go, “If there's lightening, you get out of those fields because people can get struck.” Okay, every place else they get off the horses (and) you move away. We were coming back in a rainstorm, flying across this front meadow with all of us hanging on to our horses so the wranglers could get us back to the barn by lunch. I mean, (it was) just full gallop and to a 16-year-old this was thrilling, but definitely dangerous.

M: Coming back with your cabin mate having a fling with the cowboy, getting a little glance into Frank and Nona and the drunken cowboys, was this disappointing to you after having such a different experience as a teenager or was it okay?

(20:59)

C: It was alarming to me. It was frightening at first. But I loved the mountains and I loved the ranch. When you sit here and watch the sun set from that porch and you see the magic of it... Yes, when I was here it was very disturbing, but it didn't keep me from coming back the next year after Bill and I met. I wasn't going to come back alone. (laughs) Oh, and that year before in '79 I met a cowboy named Austin who was here and he was great when all the wranglers were drunk he said, "I really don't drink," and he wanted to know what I wanted. He rode I don't know how many miles to get me a six-pack of Coke and came back. Austin called me when I got home (I was just starting my private practice) and he says, "Well, darlin', I want to make you my fifth wife." And I said, "Well, Austin, I'm back in Virginia and I have a job to do." He said, "Clare, I can offer you the ranch in the summer and in the winter we'll go to Arizona and do the rodeo circuit and we'll sleep under the stars." And I said, "Well, Austin, that's really nice but I can't be your fifth wife." And when Bill and I came back the next year, Austin had found his fifth wife. (She was a White Grasser. So he did marry her. (Austin) came up to Bill and I (we were at the cowboy bar) and said, "May I dance with your little darlin'? I almost married her last year." (laughs) And Bill said, "I guess so?" (laughs)

M: How did (you and Bill) meet?

C: Well, we came (to White Grass) when we were dating. We met in the summer of '79 and started dating –

B: We started dating and Clare said, "I've got to share this experience with you of the White Grass." And if you ever saw the movie *Shane* (it was like that). You've got to see it and experience it. Being around the farm I had always been around horses; not a rider, per se. Clare wanted to come out and we did and it was a magic experience being out here. The mice and the raccoons and the horses... The things that happened to you was just an adventure. The first time they size you up, they assign you a horse. They assigned me a horse named Big Red. Big Red was the meanest son-of-a-bitch in the corral. He was barn sour, he wouldn't go down where they did the barrel racing – he just wanted to go back. Frank and Shorty and Little Dave would get out the cattails – I would say, "Oh, I was trying to pull the horse around." And they'd say, "Don't do that, get off." So I'd get off and they practically beat the snot out of the horse.

C: Yeah, they were mean to the horses.

B: Big Red was a biter, he was a kicker, but man he had spirit. He would be the one who would lead the charge through the meadow and we could do our thing. He taught me to

be a better rider, to be a careful rider. Can I continue this story with Big Red?

M: Yeah.

B: Big Red would do everything he could to make the ride different and adventurous. When we'd come out, that (was the horse) that I'd get. He was the big horse, about 16 hands. We came out one year – the third or fourth year – and asked where Big Red was. And they told us this story – there was a cowboy here (an all-around cowboy, had a big buckle) from Oklahoma (named) Mike. He was only 24-years-old and they told us the story the year after we didn't come out that year Mike was up on a ride on one of the rims and they caught the scent of a bear or something. The horse Big Red just got nervous and went over the cliff –

(25:11)

C: The both of them.

B: So Mike and Big Red were both killed.

M: Oh my gosh!

B: And you wonder why they kept him within the herd because they really did have some good horses and some not so good horses. If you go to a ranch like the R Lazy S and others, they really try to match you – your experience and your background – with the horse that you have. I was always amazed that this event ever happened, but it made my life here just where I can remember 30 years later because of what it was.

C: And that same year we had come out with another couple we knew really well ('81) – we came out a second time. I had this great horse named Blanca who was out in the meadow and got gored by an elk, so they had to come to the cabin in the morning and tell me.

B: We were waking up and we heard a shot. They came up and knocked on the door and said, “We don't want to upset you, but we had to put your horse down.”

C: I thought they were joking.

M: Wow.

C: I was so distraught that I thought I couldn't ride another horse and I wanted to go home.

B: There was a little fence right here –

M: Just outside of this cabin?

C: Yeah, and so they gave me another horse and it was just so upsetting, but to them it was just a part of the rutting season. We usually came in September.

B: But that began our love affair with horses. (We had horses in Colorado) and we would trail-load them to different places in Colorado. There's a special thing about being on a horse.

C: But as the years went by and Frank drank more... You know, he did tell us a story when we were here in '80 about how Nona had bought him two geese for his birthday. The geese would follow Frank around everywhere he went, especially if he was in the ladies' cabins visiting other women, these geese would just honk and honk if he went in or if he was gone too long and he would say, "Damn geese, I can't do anything anymore." And that was Nona's way on keeping up on Frank. I remember thinking this is just such a wild place. And (Frank) was drinking more, so it was breaking down. There wasn't that order or structure like there was in the early days. Towards '85 the cabins were going downhill, they weren't taking good care of it. By the last year there was a sadness to it because you could tell that the whole operation was just not going to be the same.

M: (To Clare) I asked your initial impression of Frank as a 16-year-old when you were here with Westward Ho. (To Bill) You're coming in as an adult later in life – tell us your impressions of the Galeys.

(28:09)

B: Again, I didn't know her, I had only met her twice (at a couple of the dinners and they would invite us down to the house). They didn't invite large groups. I mean, when we went down it was just us and maybe another person. We'd sit around and drink and they would show us their beautiful rug collection, probably one of the best.

M: Navajo rugs?

C: Oh yes, they were beautiful.

B: So (Frank) was a storyteller and I love stories. I love telling stories myself. I think the thing that will be missed in the American West (so many of the dude ranches today are slick resorts) is this kind of adventure that won't be there anymore.

M: Sort of a rustic experience? More authentic, maybe?

C: Mm-hmm, I think so.

M: I don't want to put words in your mouth.

B: No, if you read Zane Gray and like the old cowboy things with Roy Rogers and Gene Autry – I think if you grew up in the '30s and the '40s and '50s, it's a different look that it is today (where things are computerized) and (back then) you did everything by hand or

phone; it was hands-on. And when Shorty and the wranglers would spit juice on your shoes, you know, they didn't care. There was tobacco there and, you know, it was a totally authentic (experience). You can't imagine what it was like unless you experienced it. So the people that we knew that were here (who came in the '50s) probably even have a better story to tell because it was different even then.

C: But I think that that last year Frank was not as interested in the ranch. He had already sold it to the park years ago, but I think he saw that that day would come.

B: He was ill one time, remember?

C: Yeah, he was sick.

B: He was sick for awhile.

C: Oh, I know, but Curly (the head wrangler who was here for a long time) – I think the difference was that R Lazy S always had mostly college kids going back to college – but I think Shorty and Curly and Little Dave were real cowboys. I mean, these guys made their living as cowboys, they had to go some place else. Curly had a bad foot and he had been stepped on by a horse. I think this goes back to, you know, cowboys (saying), “Buck up.” Because once he took his boot off, his foot (looked like) it must have gangrene. I had never seen a foot like that. Nobody took care of it. It was like, “Well, you forget it.” But Curly limped after that and I'm surprised he never lost his foot. But these guys ran it like cowboys. The R Lazy S (cowboys) were more advanced in horsemanship and how you treat horses. (The White Grass cowboys) were old cowboys where if the horse didn't behave, the horse was going to pay. So it was a whole different west in the '60s and '70s. Now people's pride and joy are their horses. You know, there would always be horses that would die on the trail or something would happen to them, and it was no big deal (to the cowboys), but to us it was like, “Oh my gosh, this is terrible.” To them it was just a day at the ranch.

(31:14)

B: Frank reminded me of the cowboy that's always the second banana in some movie that won the Academy Award – Jim Johnson...

C: Dan Johnson?

B: No, he was in the yellow ribbon movies with John Wayne and all the others – and he had a sort of mystique about him. Frank had the same thing. Being as tall as he was and the stories that he told – it was like listening to the American West that you would never hear again.

C: When he told stories about the cabins and the main cabins, and his dad and the people who came here, people who'd come out from Philadelphia for the whole summer – I was mesmerized. I thought, “Wow, I wish I had had the chance to come out here for the

whole summer.” That would have been fabulous. But Frank came from a background where he was privileged and then he came out here and didn't have to answer to anybody, but anybody who's alcoholic (has) a lot of demons. I think he was restless in his own soul. He had this big smile, but beneath that smile I saw (when I got older) a lot of sadness. Regret, maybe. What else was there – and maybe not much was left before he died.

B: But to walk in the barn on a Sunday or Monday and the cowboys would be walking in with a black eye or a broken wrist because they had gotten in a fight –

C: – down at the Stagecoach! They'd go over to the Stagecoach and they'd drink and fight and then they'd come back with broken bones and they'd be so hungover. You didn't ride on Sundays. Sundays weren't the day you'd ride – and I really think that it's because after Saturday night the cowboys (were hungover) and there was nobody to take you out. The year we came with Steve and Catherine, they had a stallion here – one of our friends rode race horses for a living – well, they would let us take the stallion out on a trail ride with the other horses, which is unheard of!

B: We had been so enamored with our experiences here that when we meet nice people we want them to experience it, so we'd bring people out to Jackson. We brought a couple out here a couple of years ago and, like everyone, they bought the boots. And any vacation (they traveled around the world, they really know how to travel), out of any experience they had they told us that this was their number one experience.

M: Was that here at White Grass or at R Lazy S?

C: R Lazy S.

M: So it's the Jackson area and everything.

C: Yeah. The thing that people didn't understand is that when we were older, the people that you met here – you could come here and in a week you've got such intimate relationships with people, talking and knowing about their lives that you'd go home and be friends with these people for years. So the coming together of people (was special). You've got to remember – no TV, no electronics, no phone, no newspapers – so for the first time in a lot of people's lives as an adult (including mine), nothing but this place, nothing but horses and fun – just relaxing. The group of people who were drawn to the ranch were always exciting and interesting and came from all walks of life. So the ability to commune with those kinds of people is what I think makes dude ranching so incredibly special. And Frank had so many contacts. He had a way of bringing together people. He'd go around and say, “You're gonna love this person.” And then he'd put his arm around you and introduce you and say, “Here, now you talk now.” And he'd stand up and tell stories and throw back his head and laugh. Most people had never heard stories like that. They were all great.

(34:56)

B: That was Ben Johnson – physically (Frank) looked like him; he was tall, imposing, a storyteller. And, as Clare said, maybe had demons, but he had a great personality as well.

M: How did you hear about Frank's death? He died in '85, which was when you were –

B: Clare got a phone call –

C: – yeah, I can't remember who called, but I think Carol found out.

B: It was one of the wranglers...

C: Maybe it was Austin?

B: Someone called and said, “Did you hear that Frank died?”

M: So you were here in '85 before he died?

B: Yeah, he wasn't well –

C: – that's right, he wasn't doing well.

B: He wasn't doing well and he was forgetting things. What happened to the fire (you never know what all occurred) – well, he wasn't at all the things he was (at) before. The events and welcoming people.

C: And Nona just wasn't around. She was drinking and doing what she was doing. She had a nastier side. She could have moods. She could be very engaging or she could be very imposing and not nice. But we had heard (about Frank's death) and I was very sad. When we came (I think we came in '90 and went to R Lazy S for the first time), we went up to see his grave – always coming back here every time we went to R Lazy S. It was a part of our pilgrimage to go to Frank's grave and just be here.

M: This is an awesome way to move to conclusion: When you say pilgrimage, I think of a sacred place or a place of transformation or significance – talk about that, each of you.

C: When I came here, these mountains and this ground felt very sacred to me. I was always drawn to it. The White Grass Ranch – there was just something in the land, it was just here. So we would come up here and sit on the porch with the dilapidated cabins and eat our lunch.

(37:09)

M: This is after the White Grass closed down?

C: Mm-hmm, just come back and remember. For me it was transformation because I went from a young girl – Dan Matthews doing so much for people made me want to

become a therapist. And meeting Bill – this places just holds for us so many incredible memories of so many sections of our lives. Me getting divorced and us falling in love and then getting married. So coming here was just a major part of our lives and I just love these mountains. You know, I like everything about this, but this meadow when it was fenced in and the light – the way it comes off the Tetons – it isn't like this anywhere else that we've seen in the valley. So that was a part of the magic. Just so many wonderful memories.

B: We like to bring people up, even today when we are staying at the R Lazy S and we'd always bring people up here. Even now we have adventures. We had one doctor (who was the head of the college in Omaha – Clark University) and he got trapped underneath the logs watching the elks fight. He got too to the bull and then all of the sudden felt this breath on the back of his neck. He turned around and it was the biggest bull he's ever seen in his life – and he was trapped there for a couple of hours. We were sitting here up on the porch on the cabin drinking wine and he's down there trapped. So you have those kinds of experiences. And as you go through life, you want to share those experiences with people that you enjoy. And as Clare said, it has a special meaning and you want to have other people just enjoy that meaning.

C: Yeah, during the first year I was here with Westward Ho we stayed in the main cabin. I think there were six girls in there? And one night one of the girls left her jeans on the stove and started a fire. And we could have burned down the whole ranch! That's the only time I ever really saw Frank upset. "You girls could have ruined our life." We got the counselor and they put out the fire. But I also got my first serious kiss at 16 on that porch. It was one of the guys that was at Westward Ho – with all the girls peering out the window. His name was Frank also.

B: Well, you live in the valley, right?

M: No, we live in Salt Lake City.

B: You live in Salt Lake City? It's a great place, too. We love it over there. We'll be heading there after we leave here.

C: I just want to say one thing – What's so interesting is if you add it all up, it's six weeks of my life, to come to this ranch. But those six weeks – every time seems to change your life and enrich your life. Those memories of that week carry with you through a whole lifetime. It's a very unusual experience. Most people don't ever have that. So those weeks become pivotal in your life – and I don't think many people can say that, except (those) who maybe went to camp as children or something. But as an adult, to have this kind of experience (is priceless).

B: And we're history buffs – I love history. When you read "Home City," about the elk and other books about the valley, and the early trappers that come through here and the adventures that occurred, the people that were here long before we ever even heard about this – it's just (great) knowing you're a part of history.

(40:20)

M: Well, and you were an important part of White Grass history. And like I said, your story here in the 1980s up to 1985 is a chapter that we hadn't recorded anything about. Well, thank you very much!

C: Thank you.

B: Thank you for your time. And we'd love to somewhere down the line if there's something written about the story – we'd love to hear more stories about it.

M: Give your email address to Roger – go back to the information booth, fill it out and you'll be on the mailing list, and then we've got to see what will happen.

Addendums were submitted during the reunion 2014 at White Grass as a note for all attendees.

White Grass Ranch
by
Clare Webb Leach

A Greyhound bus brought 80 teens from Tennessee to the White Grass and R Lazy S ranches in 1966 and 1967 on a trip with Rev. Dan Matthews called Westward Ho. I had never been west of Tennessee. Assigned to the White Grass both years my first memory is that crisp June morning when the Greyhound too big to navigate the narrow road sat to the side and Frank drove with some wranglers in White Grass vehicles to shuttle us to the ranch. His broad smile and ruddy cheeks welcomed us. As we rounded the corner I caught a glimpse of the barn with mustached wranglers waving at us. It was love at first sight for me as I saw all the cabins scattered through pines and the granite mountains so close to the ranch you had to stand back to get the scope of their size. I sat in the very back seat of the car feeling my feet slipping a bit in my new acme suede cowboy boots... My parents almost didn't let me come because Frank and Nona lived together at the time (sans marriage) and my parents were scandalized. Dan was a brave man taking all those kids to a dude ranch but the fellowship and friendships have lasted me a lifetime. I was 16 then and I will be 65 this summer and the White Grass Ranch weaves into the very fabric of my being at all the major turning points of my life. I got my first serious kiss on the steps of the big family cabin during Westward Ho. The beauty of the ranch captivated my heart and holds it even now.

There were porcupines under the porch of two cabins keeping us awake that first summer of 66. The yipping of the coyotes after a kill raised the hair on my neck and I remember lying in my bed listening wondering how close they must be. I'd never been as cold in summer as waking and climbing out from covers and putting my bare feet on the cold wooden floors and seeing my breath. We all loved nights in the lodge with the big stone

Fireplace with Frank telling tales of life at the ranch in the early days. Meals were plentiful and tasted magnificent after a day's riding. The barn happenings were a mystery because we were absolutely not allowed inside. I would lean over the fence to try to see in the dark center isle to little avail. I can close my eyes today and see the brand on the gate going into the big meadow in front of the cabins with the horses chomping the high grass and raising their heads in alarm at any unusual sound.

Our most scary moment of '66 was when one of my Westward Ho cabin mates left her wet jeans on top of the wood stove to dry and we all went to sleep. I woke with the thick smell of smoke and we all got everybody up yelling for our counselor Maggie to come. Not one of us thought to put out the fire in our panic. Thanks to Maggie dousing the fire the ranch didn't burn down and it easily could have. Frank was down there airing out the cabin so we could go back in and reassuring us we did the right thing but NOT TO EVER leave anything on the stove EVER AGAIN.

I didn't get back to the ranch until I was 30 going through a divorce and broken hearted. It was 1979. The sight of the Tetons and the White Grass gave me a feeling of coming home, centered me and made me strong again. Frank and Nona welcomed us with a cocktail party in their cabin which as a teen I had never seen. The collection of Navajo rugs and hand-made furniture and pottery stood in every corner as I tried to memorize the moment. Frank had aged a bit and his nose a bit purple from years of cocktail hours with countless numbers of guests who just like me had experienced life altering experiences at White Grass. I doubt he ever knew the depths of joy he brought into so many lives. For Frank the ranch was simply home.

The next year I came out for the fall horse drive to Dubois and that was a wild time. Frank had to go somewhere and couldn't supervise the wranglers. WHOA NELLY what a ride! The second day's ride was through Wind River wilderness. We left at 8 AM with the herd of horses and didn't dismount until well after 9 PM that night. Wranglers got lost and more than a little drunk during that day. One horse fell behind and they talked about shooting it and I started crying and said I'd stay with the horse until they could pick it up. The cowboys laughed at me and called me "Little Darlin". The lame horse hobbled forward and later I found out was rescued. Frank arrived back that night as we were finishing dinner after 10 PM and barely in control of his anger at the Wranglers. We heard clinched teeth voices outside the tent.

We weren't in shower range during the four nights of the horse drive but my friend and I sweet talked some wranglers who found us a shower in staff housing at a neighboring ranch. We sneaked off and two cowboys watched the door for us while we showered. Other guests kept marveling at how well we looked and how clean our hair was. We never told! The next morning after the 13 hour day my sore aching body longed not to get back on that horse but surprisingly I awoke feeling great and got right back in the saddle. I can still see the red glow of Frank's cigarette hanging out of the side of his mouth as he walked around inspecting saddles and tightening cinches.

The next time I came I was 32 with my fiancé William. I have ridden all my life but William had not. That first trip he put on a Stetson and boots and looked like he was born on a horse. That trip was the most romantic of my life. We loved our tiny cabin with the wood stove in the corner and mice scurrying across the floor with the scratching sound of their feet. William fell in love with the Tetons and the raw beauty of the ranch. We galloped our horses from Dornan's in a late summer thunderstorm. The wranglers leading us a full gallop and I can still smell the earth and the rain in my mind. Frank wasn't much on strict rules so we were allowed to do far more with our riding than most ranches allowed. Curly was still head wrangler then with his yellowed white hair and mustache and foot that must have caused him pain every waking moment. But he ran that barn and Frank ran him.

William and I came back the next year with friends. We flew into Billings and went through Yellowstone not knowing no gas stations were open at night. We arrived after midnight on fumes and Frank was there with Fresh coffee for us. On that trip my horse Blanca was gored by an elk during the rut the fourth night we were there. She had to be shot in the morning and I cried all day; my first real cruel experience with nature. Frank came by to let me know how sorry he was and it was a rare event when a horse had to be put down that way but she couldn't be saved. I almost didn't ride anymore but Curly got me a new horse and I kept on riding.

Frank loved women and certainly not just in a sexual way although there are legendary tales about that! He liked talking and getting to know women. And he was always charming when a pretty woman was in the room. He lit up. Nona was ill in those last days in 1983 and 1984 and it was clear the ranch was winding down and we knew Frank had sold the ranch and only had a life estate. Frank liked to tell the story of Nona buying him two geese for his birthday one year. She liked to keep an eye on him. He said those damn geese followed him and honked if he went in a cabin until he came out. Frank said it sure put a damper on any long stays with lady guests. Then he let out a raspy smokers laugh. I was saddened to hear the cabin with all Frank and Nona's collected treasures later burned to the ground.

Every year we came after 1985 and before the restoration of White Grass started William and I drove the road to the White Grass climbed over rocks where the barn had been and walked around the dilapidated cabins. Caved in asphalt roofs; splintered boards on the wooden porches and broken window greeted us. We'd sit on what was left of the front steps of the dining lodge and eat a sandwich and reminisce. These things I know I would not have experienced if I had not spent time at White Grass and are as fresh in my mind as today's coffee; sipping water from a paper cup right out of Phelps Lake in 1966, no worries of Giardia; An Eagles cry as she returns to her two fledglings to feed them; an Elk bugling during the rut at such close range we could hear him breathe; having the cook fry a brown trout that William caught just moments before and eating it for breakfast; seeing the stars with no light or pollution to cloud them; walking in solitude and taking refuge in the silence with only the sound of my boots on the ground for company;(serves me well even now) Riding trails and not seeing anything but wildlife and our group; Frank standing, one hand on mantel of the stone fireplace in the lodge and

the other in his pocket, smiling and telling tales; rafting down the Snake River with Frank at the helm in 1966; the fellowship of getting to know others from a deep level of sharing and seeing cowboys doing what they love best –working with horses; the full moon shining on the meadow; a bear raiding the kitchen rattling pots and pans; the lilting voices of guests sharing a drink on a cabin porch swapping tales and laughter echoing toward Death Canyon and sleeping better than anywhere on earth; waking to a bell and not needing a watch; and so much more. I have a deep respect for nature and preservation because of my time at White Grass. And thanks to Historic Preservation even though new visitors to White Grass will never know the adventures we had there they will have a sense of the ranch.

In 1926 a 15 year old guest at the Bar BC Ranch, Becky Mettler, fell 100 feet down Taggart Canyon to her death after being warned numerous times not to venture so close to the edge. She left behind a diary in which she said, GOD BLESS WYOMING AND KEEP IT WILD.” I guess that says it all for me and the preservation of the White Grass is a part of American heritage. I hope to bring my grandchildren to see White Grass. The memories we made at White Grass are now preserved in an oral history and so White Grass lives!

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The Story of Big Red at White Grass 1981
By William Leach

My wife, Clare, fell in love with Wyoming in general and White Grass in particular when she first visited there at 16. Her description of life at the ranch, the majestic Tetons the beauty of the Snake River with moose knee deep munching grass, and the fabled town of Jackson Hole led us to visit the ranch while we were dating. I wanted to share this love affair of White Grass which coincided with our falling in love.

We have since returned to the White Grass as guests and as visitors as the restoration project began, but it was our second trip in 1981 that I met Big Red. He was my assigned horse and a beauty. As I soon discovered Big Red was a biter, kicker, barn sour and just about the craziest horse I have ever encountered. I often wondered how in the world I got “lucky” enough to get Big Red. Maybe Curly’s idea of fun? When I first tried to mount him, Big Red shied away from me, ears pinned to his head and looking like he was ready for war. At well over 15 hands high, broad chest and glossy red coat Big Red certainly stood out in looks, but I could really sense an element of danger. But no one argued with horse assignments or risked being labeled a complainer. And I am not a complainer!

Our first ride proved to be an adventure with Big Red biting the horse in front while trying to kick the small mare behind him and being a bully to every living thing in range including me. All this was happening at a full gallop! I will say this for Red; he had a comfortable gait, reined well, and loved to run. He also liked to chew on every hitching post whether it was at the barn or at Dornan’s. In all honesty I liked Big Red even with all

his faults. I always felt that his life and those around him would have taken a different turn if he had been treated differently. Those were the days cowboys were rough on horses that misbehaved. But that's another story entirely.

I personally had some close encounters on Big Red especially going up to Phelps Lake or any narrow rocky trail. Big Red liked testing the limits of the rider's ability. A couple of times he got too close to the edge and my palms would sweat.

On our last trip to the White Grass before it closed I asked about Big Red since I got a different horse. We were devastated to learn that Big Red had taken Mike (an all-around cowboy from Oklahoma), who had been our guide on several rides in years past and himself over a cliff killing them both. Witnesses told us that Big Red acted up right preceding the accident due to a bear being close or maybe Red's sheer meanness propelled him over the cliff. Almost 33 years later I cannot recall many of the horses I have ridden, but I will always remember Big Red and a cowboy with a smile as broad as his Stetson.