

# Hungate celebrates 100 years at Priest Lake



(Photo by MARY MALONE) The Hungate family gathered on Aug. 8 as the oldest living member of the family, Frank Hungate, who is pictured just left of center in the second row, celebrated his 100th birthday, as well as 100 years of summers at Priest Lake.

By  
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PRIEST LAKE — It was about a three-day trek to Canoe Point on Priest Lake from Cheney in the early 1900s.

Frank Hungate's earliest memories are of the long journey, which included riding a trolley from Cheney to Spokane where the family would catch the Great Northern train to Priest River. The Beardmore Stage took them to Coolin where they would boat to the north end of the lake.

"My first remembrance is of coming up the lake with one of these half-horse engines you spun," he said with a laugh as he cranked an invisible engine. "Basically, it took us all day to come up (the lake), and we picnicked on the island."

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Hungate first came to Priest Lake as an infant in 1918, and has been to Priest Lake every year of his life since, save a couple during gas rationing in the 1940s.

Hungate was married to Mary "Mollie" Griggs Hungate for 72 years. Mollie Hungate died about five years ago, and although Frank Hungate turned 100 on June 6, he chose to celebrate his birthday on Aug. 8 — the day his wife would have been 99 years old.

About 60 family members gathered at the Hungate homestead in Priest Lake for his 100-year celebration, where he took the time to tell the Daily Bee a bit about his family history at the lake.

Hungate said his uncle worked for the U.S Geological Survey, and one of his assignments was to botonize the entire Northwest. As far as he can figure, Hungate said he thinks his uncle brought his father, who was also a biologist, to Priest Lake in the early 1900s to help him gather and identify plants.

"That's my guess as to why we sort of discovered this part of the world," Hungate said.

Hungate's parents, Joe and Nona Hungate, first camped as a family at Priest Lake, with his two oldest brothers — he is the youngest of five — in 1913. They made the trip annually, carrying their heavy canvas tents that Hungate said were a "pain" to carry back and forth. The land at Canoe Point where they camped each year belonged to the Diamond Match Company, and eventually the family was given permission to build on the property.

So one year, Hungate said, his parents had some shiplap delivered by steamboat and built a shack.

"That shack was simply closed in ... no door, no window, nothing," Hungate said. "And they had marked where they would saw out the door the next year. Then that became their bedroom; it was an integral part of the cabin."

As the property was owned by Diamond, Hungate said it was obviously not a permanent situation. At one time, his family was offered the opportunity to purchase about 100 acres at the north end of the lake in the Mosquito Bay area for \$35,000. That was a chunk of money at the time, and after his brother took a look at it, he reported back to the family that he didn't see much commercial

opportunity on the property, and they ultimately turned it down. In another instance, several years later, Hungate and his wife discovered four adjacent lots being developed along the shoreline of Mosquito Bay.

"We looked at them and thought, 'that's in a great area,'" he said. "And, in fact, the family was offered to buy all four of them for \$25,000."

Again, they turned it down. This time, however, it was because one lot was much preferred over the others, and Hungate and his wife were worried it would cause a schism in the family, he said.

It was many years later, in the 1950s, that Hungate and his wife purchased a lot in that area at the north end of Mosquito Bay. The couple built a home on the property in 1982. They had someone come out to do the frame and the fireplace, and everything else was done by Hungate and his wife, with the help of the family. Hungate continues to spend the months of May through October at his Mosquito Bay home. His family purchased two of the adjoining lots as well. While the cabin at Canoe Point no longer exists, Hungate said his nephew was later able to acquire the property.

Frank and Mollie Hungate met at the University of Texas, before he entered the graduate program at Stanford University to study genetics. That first year apart, Hungate said he traveled back to Texas four times.

"Finally, at Christmas, Mollie accepted my invitation to get married," Hungate said. "... One of the conditions was that we would not spend our honeymoon at Priest Lake. Where did we spend our honeymoon? Priest Lake."

Hungate said his four brothers had several children by that time, so she was "scared to death" of all the names she would have to remember. They ended up having four children of their own, as well as several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

After they married, she joined him in genetic studies at Stanford under Dr. George Beadle, who Hungate said later won the Nobel Prize. He spent six years at Stanford before accepting a teaching job at Reed College in Portland, Ore. In 1952, they moved to Hanford, Wash. In those days, he said, very little was known about the effects of radiation. After spending the majority of his working life at Hanford, about 25 years, Hungate said he likely accumulated small doses of radiation over the years. While it is not a proven theory, he thinks those small doses may have contributed to why he is a healthy 100-year-old man. It could also be the genes, though, as two of his brothers lived to be 99 and 100.

"I probably have pretty remarkable genes, because although I was the youngest of five, I knew all four of my grandparents very well," he said. "I'm doing pretty well."

In fact, at 100 years old, Hungate can still bend an ear about all things science and genetics. He will also get on his Kubota tractor to do some work around the place, which includes getting firewood for the chilly spring and fall nights.

And he will continue to make the journey to Priest Lake each year for as long as he is able.

"It is such a lovely, lovely place," he said. "You look out and it is nothing but beauty."

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