

7-20-07

Rocky Brown's reminiscences of Charley Morledge

Charlie grew up at the Morledge ranch, which then was out in the country, and now is in the middle of town. The Morledge house was a meeting place for all of the Morledge kid's friends, and throughout the constant chaos and cacophony, Mrs. Morledge was serenely in command. As with the rest of his family, and especially his Dad, Charlie genuinely cared for other people. I don't remember when we first got to know each other, but I suspect it was at McKinley Grade School. Later, when we were 16 or so, he had a motorcycle, and I had a Model A Ford. Once while with Charlie we were pulling a Bob sled loaded with guys behind my car heading to his house, my car started to boil and when I tried to shut off the motor, it kept running. We looked under the hood and the engine head was cherry red-hot from overwork. I had a lot of fun rides on Charlie's motorcycle

Charlie and Patti started dating at Billings Senior High, and I ran into them in Livingston during a basketball tournament. While Charlie, Pattie and I were eating at the Hotel, where everybody stayed, we would periodically hear a loud popping sound on the sidewalk. A group of us guys staying in the room above had placed bottles of beer on the ledge outside our window so they would stay cold, and every once in a while a waft of wind would knock a bottle off. I remember being sad about loss of our beer.

There were so many other memories of the fun times Charlie and I had together while teenagers, which don't come to mind. We didn't see much of each other while we were studying and learning our respective professions, and while we were in the Service. Charlie and Patti's two girls, Marilyn and Bonnie were the same age as Holly and Julie, our (my Marilyn and I) two oldest girls. In the late 1960's Charlie and I hatched up the idea of a father-daughter back-pack trip into the Beartooth Mountains. While in camp on the Beartooth trip, the girls and I discovered that Charlie had taken his razor and was about to shave. We intervened and hid his razor. One of our favorite things to eat on the back-pack trips was "biscuit on a stick". We would take a box of Bisquick, find a suitable stick of wood (not Pine), then make a thick dough of the Bisquick, roll it out into a rope, wind it around the stick, and suspend the stick over the fire. It often was burned on the outside and gooey on the inside, but fresh baked bread, after meals of dried everything, tasted mighty good. Another good one was chocolate pudding. The next year our father-daughter trip started at the ghost town, Independence, up the West Fork of the Boulder River. From there we went over a divide into the headwaters of Slough Creek in Yellowstone Park, and ended up at the highway near Soda Butte Creek. On that trip we saw the remnants of Frenchy's cabin. Frenchy was a trapper that located in the Slough Creek area before Yellowstone was established, and the story is that he was eaten by a Grizzly bear. We would crawl into our tents at night thinking about Frenchy and Grizzlies. The third and last father-daughter trip was from the Gallatin River drainage in the Spanish Fork area, over the Madison range into the Madison valley. For each of these trips, we needed to be taken to the starting point, and picked up at the end point. As I recall Patti, and possibly with my Marilyn, furnished this service. The Spanish Fork/Madison trip stands out as one of the poorest planned trips, (among many—I understand) that Charlie ever committed. Charlie studied a USGS topographic map of the area and

concluded that it was a piece of cake, with an easy trail, and gentle slope on the first day. Accordingly Charlie encouraged us to take canned goods and other heavy stuff which could be consumed the first night. At the last minute, Charlie brought along his niece (forgot her name) who never hiked before, and for equipment had an Army surplus backpack made of heavy canvas which was stiffened by wooden boards. Early into the hike, we learned that Charlie grossly mis-read the contour lines on the USGS map, and rather than easy it was a Billy Goat trail. The niece (who was a very nice young lady and tried her very best) got sore feet right away, as she wasn't wearing the right shoes, and the Army pack dug into her back. Charlie and I then took on most of her load in our backpacks. My recollection is that we scaled the trail, hand over hand, holding onto one rock or ledge after another, but admit that it may only have seemed that way. It was very hot and there was no water along the trail. Marilyn Morledge learned to swear on that trip, and I picked up a few words from her that I hadn't heard before. Finally we reached Jerome Lake at the top, and took a day to heal up, before heading down the West side of the mountain to the Madison Valley.

Charlie and Patti gave new life-blood to Rocky Mountain College when they became active in RMC. I can't begin to count all of the wonderful things they have done, and continue to do, through their good works for the College.

I will miss my old friend Charlie. He was a good, kind, loving, Montanan and God must be very proud of him.