



Lester Cecil Warwood, 87, the son of John Franklin and Rose Benbrooks Warwood, of Belgrade, passed away Tuesday, June 23, 2009; just a few feet from where he was born on July 2, 1921. (And as Lester liked to tell: "It snowed a foot that day.")

Lester grew up on the home place, off "Rocky Boulevard," and ranched there until his death. He graduated from Gallatin County High School in 1939. Following high school, he continued to ranch at home. Over the years he worked for a number of other ranches in the area, as he usually worked another job as well.

Lester married Inez L. Hutchison on May 24, 1945, at Bozeman Christian Church. They spent their life together ranching in the Reese Creek area. They were married for 56 years. They were blessed with four children: Sandra, Roy, David and Marilyn.

In the early '70s Lester decided to "semi-retire" from ranching, and went to work for the National Park Service at Lake Station, Yellowstone National Park. For 25 summers he ran Park Service boats on the lake, delivering supplies to trail crews and rangers at the trailheads surrounding the lake. He never said much about all the adventures on the lake but the job was a coveted position Lester held on to. And the helpers he took along coveted the job as well. (Not many places with the "perks" that Yellowstone offered.) There wasn't anything wrong with dropping a line over the side, when they cruised along in the "No Wake Zone," was there?

The bosses liked to have Lester come early in April to clear snow, etc., because he could run all their equipment, (before the operators got there) and he usually stayed late in the fall as well.

He and Inez traveled back to the ranch to work on their days off every week, which amounted to thousands of miles on their cars over the years, in all kinds of weather, on those narrow Yellowstone roads. They also spent several winters in Death Valley, Calif., with Lester working for the National Park Service during Yellowstone's off-season. When Lester finished working for the National Park Service they honored him by christening the new Boston Whaler boat the "Lester C. Warwood." That occasion really meant a lot to both Lester and Inez.

Lester enjoyed working hard on the ranch his whole life. Although he slowed down considerably after a hip operation eight years ago, he never complained. He was just unable to do the physical things he enjoyed most. But thanks to friends, he was able to maintain his big garden that was important to him.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sister, Jessie; brothers, Lewis and Raymond; wife, Inez; and son, Roy.

Survivors include a sister, Bessie Snell of Kalispell; daughter and son-in-law, Sandra and Ron Clark of Prescott Valley, Ariz.; son and daughter-in-law, David and Nancy Warwood of Belgrade; daughter and son-in-law, Marilyn and Gary Mattson of Loveland, Colo.; eight grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

A private memorial service will be held. Cremation has taken place. Memorials in his name may be sent to the National Parkinson's association.