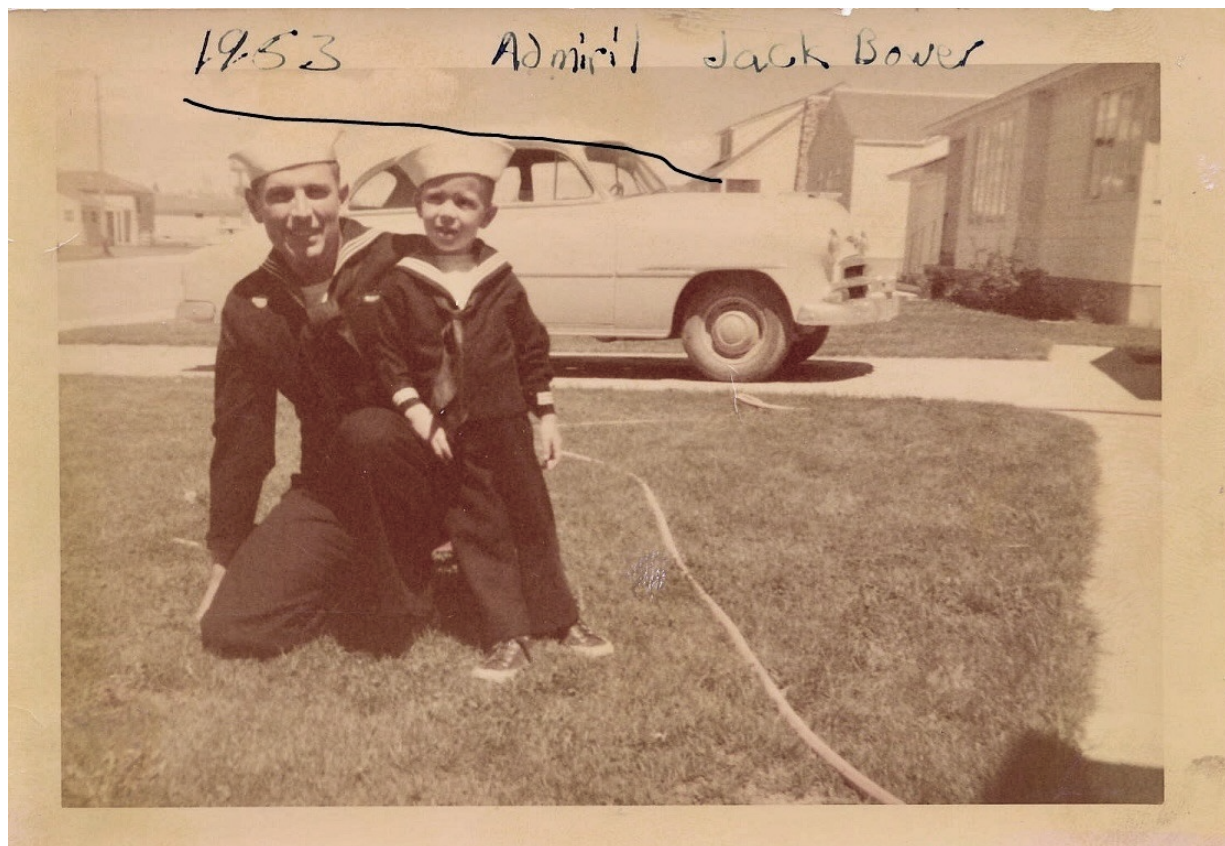


The life story of Rollin James Bower

As written by his son Warren Bower in 2002

From the collection of Jack Bower, his son



Warren Bower, left, is Dennis Bower's older brother. When Warren joined the navy, their parents bought little Dennis a matching sailor suit. This branch of the Bowers continue to dress their little boys in the suit.

The Bowers in Missouri

Rollin James Bower, also known as Rolland/RJ/James R/Roland, was born into the household of Elijah Vernon and Margaret Jane McDowell Bower on July 5, 1896. By this time this family already had twin sons, Earl Thomas, Ray Franklin, and Emma Delores. A fourth child named Eula Edna, born July 10, 1894, died January 20, 1895.

About two years after Rollin's birth another son arrived named Warren Vernon. Warren V was to die on May 15th, 1900 of rosella. Warren A. Bower, the son of Rollin and his wife Beulah, was named after this child. The toddler's death occurred just before the arrival of Bessie Elaine Rose, who was born on June 19, 1900. The next child to arrive was Ruby Olive, who was born on August 25, 1904. The next child continuing the string

of girls was Edith Opel, who was born December 7, 1906. Death again visited this family when Emma Delores, age just 14, was diagnosed with pneumonia on December 23, 1906, and died the day after Christmas. The last child born to this family was Ferne Margaret, born October 14, 1911.

By the time Rollin was in high school he was living in a household primarily made up of women, At this writing, his sister Ferne Margaret Bower McKamey has reached her 91st birthday. The Bower family lived approximately ¾ miles North of Urbana, Missouri on an East-West road which is now know as Bower Road until about 1908 when E V Bower built a new home in the small community of Urbana. The family farm was the source of the land that became the Bowers 'Chapel and Cemetery. This gift of the land to the community happened shortly after Michael and Emanuel Bower settled in Missouri.

Rollin often told his family about the very large barn on the family farm that had been constructed on the property using wooden pegs in place of nails. It was in 1946 when our family, along with R.J. visited that area on the occasion of his daughter Shirley's graduation from Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri. His first words as we drove down the lane were "The barn has shrunk." Rollin had not been back to that area since leaving around 1915.

From my personal investigation, this land from this farm added more space to the Bowers 'Chapel Cemetery (2002). The buildings were still standing in 1946 but were gone by 2002. On this trip, my dad was trying to show us the many things that he remembered about including the Huge Bennett Springs which is the source of a seven-mile river of cold water which is regularly stocked with trout. An old abandoned stone house that looked almost like it had been a castle had burned leaving only the stone walls standing.

Rollin's father was still listed as a farmer in the 1900 census but shortly after that he either purchased or started a general merchandise store in Urbana. The 1910 census listed E. V. Bower as a retail merchant, General Store. Rollin was listed as a farm laborer on the family farm. His brothers, Earl and Ray were no longer in this household. It is known from a photo that Rollin's father built a house in Urbana in 1908. Rollin's brothers both attended advanced schooling away from Urbana.

Rollin attended public schools and was issued a diploma on 3 May 1912 from the public schools of Dallas County. He was also certified as having completed the prescribed study in the High School Department of Urbana Public Schools on April 11, 1911. He played on Urbana's first School Basketball team. It goes without saying that most of the farming was done by Rollin.

The Older Bower Twins Moved to Wyoming in about 1912.

His brothers eventually found their way to Wyoming, Ray to Douglas where he was a teacher and referred to locally as Professor Bower, and his twin, Earl to the Worland area where new land was being brought under cultivation using water for irrigation from the Hanover Canal companies or associations. It was in 1915 when Elijah, his wife Margaret, and several daughters drove to Worland, Wyoming to look over the area and visit their sons. Apparently, the trip by car in those days was too arduous and E. V. gave the car to his sons and the family took the "Iron Horse" back to Missouri.

Rollin, Four Sisters and Parents Moved to Worland in 1916

Never mentioned in the stories I have heard is that Rollin was back home doing farming. The family began to sell property in Missouri and loaded horses, cows, farm, and household goods on a boxcar or cars and moved to Wyoming in 1916.

In later years I learned that Rollin had gotten interested in threshing operations carried on by one of the Bonner families. I believe he also worked actively with Bonner's threshing interests for a time. He also became very interested in the introduction of tractors for farming and I first remember farming operations as the horses on our farm were being phased out. Rollin had purchased his own threshing machine at least by 1930 and did threshing for many farmers in the area. He continued to own a threshing machine even after he quit actively farming and moved into Worland in the fall of 1942. I still recall one spring when Dad and I spent over a week literally rebuilding one of his Threshing machines.

From reading the *Worland Grit*, published weekly in Worland, his farming and livestock operations were listed as E.V. Bower and Son. During that period in history, many partnerships were simply having a bank account under the name. He continued to do custom threshing all through World War Two when he sold his machine to J M. McKamey, husband of his sister Ferne.

Rollin had a fascination with plowing; telling me on many occasions how he liked to see the soil turn over. His favorite plow was called a tumblebug. (Farming in irrigated areas required the use of two-way plows rather than the one-way plows which were the norm in Missouri. I vividly remember riding the tractor while plowing one cold frosty fall day as dad was babysitting me while mother went to attend to some unknown chores.

World War I - Drafted, War Ended While Still in Training

Rollin and his two brothers registered for the WW One draft as required by law. Rollin enlisted in the army at Worland on 18 September, 1918. While in the service he attended Radio School. He was honorably discharged at Colorado Springs on December 7, 1918. He was called to Fort D. A. Russell in Cheyenne as a Wyoming Volunteer on two occasions in 1919. He was honorably discharged from those services,

once as a private and once as a corporal. He was a lifelong member of the Floyd Minch Post # 44 of the American Legion and served as one of its early Commanders.

Rollin was also an avid baseball fan. In my memory, he was not a player but always kept the baseball diamond leveled and weed-free. He attended most home games and took team members to many games in the area. This love of baseball also extended to the American Legion Junior Baseball programs that he supported as well.

“Roland” is listed on the 1920 census as a farmer on Farm # 26. His father was also listed as a farmer on Farm # 25 where he lived with his parents and sisters: Bessie E, Ruby O, Edith O, and Ferne M. In the early 1920s, the United States held a drawing for homesteads in the Frannie, Wyoming area. From stories I heard, R.J. and his twin brothers, Earl and Ray entered the drawing with the idea being that if one of them was drawn, they could relinquish it to Rollin. That was not necessary, as R. J. won one of the 80-acre homesteads.

He was issued a patent on August 18, 1922, but had entry right long before that. I have been told he drove a steel-wheel tractor from Worland to Frannie, which is about 85 miles. He got the land cleared and into production, then sold it. The land was a very heavy soil and he said he had to run irrigation water for two days in order to provide enough water for his crop. Within two years, he sold the land. In retrospect, it was probably a good move since much of the land in the area became salty because of poor drainage. I never learned where he resided during this time.

Farming — Fascinated with Plowing — and A Feedlot

The abstract entries relating to the SW ¼ Section 19 Twp 47, Rge 92 first mention the Bower name when “Henry Paris etux” gave a Warrantee Deed for 10 acres to Margaret J. Bower, date April 2, 1924. This parcel was 10 acres and is believed to be a clear title. On March 1, 1920, for consideration of \$24,800, the SW ¼ of Section 19 Twp 47N Rge 92 W. was purchased by Elijah V. Bower, excepting the 10-acre parcel above. Also included in this deed was the North half of Lots One and Two, Fruita Addition to the Town of Worland, Washakie County, Wyoming.

Those lots were to be the home of Rollin Bower and his wife Beulah Dorothy Albert Bower and is the place I remember from earliest times. By Jan 16, 1936, all mortgages were paid. (This is the farm I refer to as the home farm.) From reading these abstracts, I believe the attorneys of the time had a field day on this property. The farmstead on this property consisted of a medium-sized barn and corals for the workhorses and one milk cow. Another larger lot originally was constructed for feeding cattle. Earl, Ray, Elijah - their father-- and Rollins conducted cattle-feeding operations on a sort of partnership basis for several years.

My first recollection of this feedlot was after it had been converted to feed lambs. Feeding livestock was the only way to convert bulk crops such as alfalfa hay and grains such as barley and oats into a product (meat) that could pay the shipping costs to a market. The cash crops of the area were sugar beets, beginning with the construction of a sugar refinery in 1917. (A few years prior, a few sugar beets were grown and shipped to Billings for processing.) Dry edible and/or seed beans were also a cash crop, but the heavy soil on this farm did not allow this crop to be grown profitably.

Lambs were purchased from various growers in the area and fed to size and quality for slaughter. During that time, there was a good market for lamb on account of immigrants who used lamb in their homelands. The demand was especially high during holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. I well remember trailing fat lambs from the farm to the stockyards at a railroad facility for weighing and shipping. In the earlier days, livestock was shipped to commission houses for marketing in either Chicago or Omaha. A shipper got a free ride on the caboose with his livestock if he chose. Many people took a trip for the purpose of going on to Flint, Michigan to take delivery of a new car, drive it home, and save shipping costs.

Abstract aside, the land did include the North Half of Lots 1 & 2, Fruita Addition. This is where my earliest memories begin. The house on this property was constructed of locally made soft, red brick and later covered with plaster. Also, an iron rod running east to west along the ceiling of the living room and kitchen had been placed to keep the wall from spreading. The house at that time was a kitchen, living room, an enclosed front porch, and screened back porch with two bedrooms on the north side separated by the bathroom and closet with a draped opening. The family owned a natural gas cook stove, a "Frigidaire" and a vented heating stove in the living room. The building was still standing in 2003.

Rollin and Beulah probably resided here since their marriage in 1922. The east half of the property was just a field of alfalfa. The west half was divided between a garden area and the home area, consisting of the house and old wooden granary, shed-type chicken coop, probably moved in from another location. The water was supplied by a well with an electric pump and pressure system.

The family lived at this place until about 1933-34. During one summer, Rollins' father had his jaw broken he was struck by a flying Single Tree from the Stacker team when the connecting cable broke. The elder Bower spent the rest to that summer in bed with his jaw wired, subsisting on a liquid diet. It was at this time he contracted tuberculosis which ended his active farming career. A new hired man, Conrad Eckert, was employed to pick up the slack. He developed into an excellent hired man and was able to do a good job on the farm even when Rollin was not there. That was when Rollin's family moved to the main farmhouse and Elijah and Margaret moved to the little house. It was here that I grew to know Elijah, sitting in a little chair with a shawl over his shoulders while his wife Margaret spent most of her time making quilts. A cousin, Leland Brown,

did live with them during his high school years. A year or two after Elijah died, my grandmother moved into Worland and for a while shared her home with Dad's Aunt Lou, a sister of Margaret. Grandmother Bower died in 1951.

After Father's Tuberculosis, Rollin Switched to Livestock Purchasing

I digress. When the good, reliable hired man came on the scene, it allowed Rollin to branch out into the livestock purchasing business, working for various packers with his partner Lloyd Kelly. A kind of strange story, on one of their buying trips, while driving south of Worland, a pheasant flying across the highway came through the windshield landing in the seat between them.

Dad never used swear words or took the Lord's name in vain, at least in his early years. He was a proud person and liked to show off a bit, especially if he had been drinking a bit. He was one of the most trusted people in the Bower family, according to people he did business with. Everyone, especially his hired help, respected him. Also, those associated with him in any endeavor. A Mexican classmate of mine relates how much his family who were sugar beet laborers for Dad, respected him. Santos said my dad would take his dad into a bar and buy him a drink, although the Mexican race was kept out of bars or pool halls in this little town at that time. Rollin was also a person who did not want to hurt anyone's feelings, to the extent if he needed to fire a farmer or any other touchy thing, he would prevail upon his wife to do his dirty work. As a matter of fact, he had me do those very things after Beulah died.

About 1939, Rollin purchased a farm five miles north of Worland from Harold Pickett. This farm cornered the tract where the Durkee School house was located. I remember him dynamiting a few tree stumps along the north border of this farm. The original farm was 160 acres, but about 4.5 acres were cut off by US Highway 20.

Farm Purchase Turned Lucky in Oil Boom

This turned out to be one of his best investments as in 1945, oil was discovered in the area but three to four miles away. Dad sold off about half of the oil, wanting to play it safe. This developed into a nice little cushion for several years and continues producing a little to this day.

A cousin of Rollins', Clint Bower from Urbana, Missouri came to Worland and farmed this place for my dad on shares. In October of 1941, a new face appeared at the Bower home with the arrival of my brother Dennis. About the fall of 1942, Rollin and Beulah purchased a home at 608 Grace Avenue and moved into town. When this happened Rollin offered Clint Bower an opportunity to farm this place, which was a better farm and was closer to town, and the offer was accepted. This was in addition to the Durkee farm which he continued farming. Dad's trusty and capable hired man was disappointed that

he was not offered an opportunity to rent the place and quit. The real problem is Dad did not want to finance him.

Remember Pearl Harbor had occurred by this time and I (Warren) was itching to go into the service and in fact enlisted in the Navy, only to be kept out for a while by an emergency appendectomy. A little story in this regard is that Doctor Anderson removed my appendix and Rollin threshed his grain in an even exchange.

Rollin and Beulah Move into Worland

After moving into Worland, Rollin continued his sheep buying, threshing, and helping out on his farms, especially plowing which he loved. In those days, with a good tractor, a man could plow about 12 acres at nearly an acre an hour. At the end of WWII Dad offered the farming of the "home place" and the Durkee farm to his Sister Ferne and her husband Jim McKamey. My mother handled the firing of Clint Bower. Clint never went back to farming, but became a carpenter for another cousin, and his wife, Rowena, began clerking in clothing stores.

My dad and mother's social life when I was growing up pretty much centered around his sisters, Ferne and Edith. These families almost always got together for Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas time. One of Dad's sisters, Ruby, had married William Snyder and moved to New York and Pennsylvania areas where he pastored several churches. The other sister, Bessie, and her husband bought a ranch 30 miles south of Ten Sleep, so not too much socializing there. That family was close to the extent that cousins, including me, would stay a few weeks at the ranch each summer and Bessie's children would come into the Worland area for a while also. Many of the cousins of course were nearly the same age. I only remember being at my Uncle Ray Bower's home on one unknown occasion and at Uncle Earl's once, when Sister Ruby and her family were visiting.

My dad did very well financially during those years until he dropped a bundle on a sheep venture in about 1952 that took him a very long time to recover from. I believe he may have had a brother-in-law, James McKamey as a partner in this venture. By this time, A.J. had sold the threshing machine to his brother-in-law, "Foxy" McKamey, and quit the livestock-purchasing business. He did still continue to help his tenants out by doing some of the plowing. One time the tractor got away from him at the end of the field and wound up in the drain ditch nearby. Fortunately, he was not injured, except for his pride.

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