

A Family of His Own

1941–1947

AFTER FOUR YEARS OF COURTSHIP ROMA CARRIERE at long last agreed to marry Dave McCoy. The excited couple drove through desert heat to Yuma, Arizona, where they could buy their license and get married in one day. On May 10, 1941, accompanied by Roma's sister Frances and her husband Zach Martin, Roma and Dave pledged their lives to each other.

Shortly thereafter, having spent several years studying engineering correspondence courses in preparation for the civil service exam, Dave pushed through the final phases of his application to become an official LADWP hydrographer. Result: the highest score in his group of examinees and a job as the first hydrographer at the soon-to-be-completed Long Valley Dam. The LADWP raised his salary from \$135 to \$165 per month. They promised him a bungalow overlooking the dam and assigned him the responsibility of monitoring LADWP stations throughout Long Valley and on Mammoth Mountain.

While waiting for the dam to be completed, Dave and Roma rented a room in Bishop. Roma saved pennies to buy a stove for their future home while Dave planned for the oncoming winter. "Ma" Yerby of Tom's Place had given him the original special-use permit for McGee Mountain, which Corty Hill had passed on to her in 1938. That permit in hand, Dave decided to use one of his motorcycles as collateral and purchase his own Sweden Rope Tow, which he immediately rebuilt. He also followed Forest Service Supervisor Roy Boothe's suggestion and secured a year-to-year roving permit which allowed him to run a portable tow anywhere from Bishop to Bridgeport.

Each weekend that spring of 1941, Dave and Roma loaded the portable tow into the trunk of their Chevy. Although they could set up anywhere, Dave generally

drove toward his favorite spot: an open glade on the snow-covered north side of Mammoth Mountain. Then, one Friday night with Dave's paycheck a long week away, the young couple ran out of money. Dave told Roma not to worry. All she had to do was collect fifty cents from each skier who came to ride their tow that weekend. Roma panicked, fearful and embarrassed to ask for donations.

The next morning, to Roma's great relief, not one skier complained. On the contrary, they were glad to pay for the privilege of riding the rope tow. After a few hours, she walked behind a tree and discreetly counted fifteen dollars in cash. Roma could hardly maintain her composure. Dave skied by and she called him over. A grin on her face, she opened her fishing-creel cash box and whispered, "Look! We eat!" The McCoys had officially entered the ski business.

In October 1941, just as the LADWP began to flood the dammed Long Valley basin, recently named Crowley Lake, Dave and Roma moved into their employee bungalow. By late November, they celebrated Roma's pregnancy with their first child. Then, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

Dave's "essential job" designation prevented him from joining the Armed Forces. To make matters worse for a man who believed in serving his country, that April he shattered his left leg racing in the 1942 State Championships. Enduring hospitals, multiple surgeries, crutches, chronic pain, and a limping gait, Dave decided that his contribution to the war effort would be providing a place for returning veterans and their families to ski. In that light, he spent every spare penny he made and every spare hour he had preparing McGee Mountain for a time he envisioned as a homecoming of happy skiers.



Building the McGee Warming Hut, 1947.

After the War

Dave McCoy could only work on his McGee rope tows and warming hut after he completed his hydrographic duties, so he often stayed there until one or two in the morning. Roma refused to go to bed until he returned. Many nights at the Crowley Dam house after putting her children to bed, she sat and knitted, listening to the radio, looking out the front door. As soon as she saw the lights at McGee turn dark, she warmed a dinner for Dave and whoever was helping him.



Roma and Dave McCoy welcoming skiers at their McGee Mountain Rope Tow.



Roma holding Poncho, born May 27, 1945.

McCoy's Rope Tow

I wish I could remember all the people who helped me build the rope tows at McGee. There was Andy Anderson, a man named Eddie, and another named Young who worked at Tom's Place, an ex-GI named Jim Wilson. We used his Dodge 4-wheel drive truck to carry the engines up the slopes. Chuck Kispert from the State Highway Department, Pat Coons and his boys, Howard Cooper, who was living with his family at the Whitmore Hot Springs, Stover Lowe, and his friend...

—DAVE MCCOY



1947 Bishop High School Ski Team. From left: Bob Cooper, Bob Autry, Dayton McDonald, Eddie Riley, Don Coons, unknown, and manager Aim Morhardt. Chaperones Pat and Rita Coons kneel in front. Dave McCoy coached these local racers.

Aim Morhardt's Bishop High Ski Team

Teacher, photographer, and poet J. E. "Aim" Morhardt sponsored the Bishop High School Ski Team. He also organized the Sierra Nevada Interscholastic Federation (S.N.I.F.), and orchestrated skiing into becoming an official California Interscholastic Federation (C.I.F.) sport.

One day we were driving down Minaret Road and I was riding on the front hood of the car. Dave saw something move under a blanket of snow and yelled at me to grab it. Without even thinking I jumped into the snow and landed on an almost-frozen duck. We took it to the Tavern, warmed it up, and let it go.

—DAYTON McDONALD



Bishop racers Bob Autry, Dayton McDonald, Don Coons, and Ed Riley.