

who has lived a life of adventure.

Raise your gaze and drink in the glittering beauty of snow-covered Mount Sanford, a 16,000-foot distant neighbor looming over the Wrangell Mountains. It is the skyscraper for the sparse settlement of Gakona, equidistant from Anchorage and Fairbanks. Trees, mountains and open sky dominate. Moose use the cabin's lawn for a pathway. Black bears root around for grub. Imagine. This is the way it was for everyone before Alaska grew up.

Here Kenny Sailors, 76, and his 72-year-old wife, Marilynne "Bokie," have made their home since 1965.

The Sailors often describe how they ended up on their little patch of paradise as an accident. Driving toward Valdez on a dusty road, Bokie, who suffers from a respiratory ailment, said she needed a break. They stopped at Gakona, about 20 miles from Glenallen. Here they met some friendly people who had overextended the size of a land claim and suggested they become neighbors in the loose community of a few hundred people. Kenny and Bokie got 77 acres and the one-night break lasted 32 years and counting.

Self-described as cowboy and cowgirl, the Sailors met at the University of Wyoming in the 1940s. A 5-foot-10 guard with a sneaky fast dribble, Kenny was not only an All-American, but when his college team captured the National Collegiate Athletic Association championship in 1943, he was the Most Valuable Player.

The renowned sportscaster Curt Gowdy overlapped in school with Sailors and once offered a description of his prowess.

"He was a great dribbler and very, very quick," said Gowdy. "Like a rattlesnake."

And the jump shot was his trademark.

The most revolutionary shot in the quintessential indoor game was created on a windswept prairie in Depression-era Wyoming. Young Kenny Sailors used to play one-on-one basketball on a hoop tacked to a windmill with his older brother, Bud, who was 8 inches taller. Time after time Bud blocked his little brother's shot. How could Kenny avoid this constant humiliation? Sim-



A self-described cowboy, Sailors has been all over the Wrangell Mountains on horseback.

ple. He would jump off the ground and release the ball at the apex of his leap. The strategy proved sound.

"It was just a weapon that came naturally," recalls Sailors. "I just did it out of necessity."

The shot, at first disdained by myopic coaches as showboating, ultimately carried Sailors to success and fame at the University of Wyoming and eventually to the NBA.

A variety of sources credit him with the innovation, including the recent book *One Hundred Years of Hoops*, by Alexander Wolff.

Retired DePaul University coach Ray Meyer said others claimed to shoot the jumper first, but Sailors was the one.

"Kenny was the jump shooter that we know today," said Meyer. "He got off the floor."

Sailors was hailed in *Life* magazine, among other publications, and following service in World War II, had a successful professional career with the Boston Celtics as well as a couple of teams that no longer exist.

Sailors pro career started late because of the war. He was an older rookie, and after five seasons he was in his 30s and already slowing down, so he retired in 1951.

Had Sailors played in the NBA of

the 1990s, he would have retired a rich man. But in the late 1940s and early 1950s professional basketball was struggling for acceptance. Sailors made about \$7,000 a year, and he recalls only one endorsement contract.

"It was for prunes," he says.

Athletes had to work in the off-season, so when he wasn't playing ball, Kenny and Bokie operated boys ranches, then dude ranches, and developed a loyal clientele during the hunting season in the Jackson Hole area. In the shadow of the Grand Tetons they pursued elk and high mountain sheep. Kenny led the clients to paydirt, and Bokie cooked the meals.

After a stint in the Wyoming State Senate, and an unsuccessful run for Congress in 1964, the couple decided to head north.

Settling into Gakona, they knocked down a few trees, put up a low-ceiling, low-slung log cabin, and had a home. Their property extended across the highway, and in homage to their roots they called the place the Gulkana River Ranch. The nearest neighbor to the cabin was a quarter-mile away. Peaceful. Over the years a big garage was added and a vegetable patch out back. The strawberries attracts varmints, some as big as 400 pounds, but Bokie has no tolerance for

