

unwelcome visitors, even bears.

Once, a bear roamed right up to the cabin's back window and stood up. Bokie walked right up to the window and rapped her knuckles against it, an inch from the intruder's snout—scared the furry fellow back to Glennallen.

Alaska hunters are generally flown into remote camps, and Sailors' guide service has never shunned the small plane, either, often with his son, Dan, serving as pilot. But just as often, Sailors sets up fall hunting camps by packing supplies in on horseback. He has been all over the Wrangell Mountains' backcountry by horse.

"I've told people I wouldn't pack a moose on my back, that I'd make camp and eat first," says Sailors. "A big moose, it can take three or four horses to bring him out with the horns, meat and cape."

You can't spend 30 years stalking big game in remote corners of Alaska without adventures breaking out. It has been poetically stated and often quoted that strange things happen under the midnight sun. And boy, do they.

Riding along a narrow trail on a big, old gray horse in the Wrangell-St. Elias Mountain Range in the mid-1980s, Sailors' mind was elsewhere with no gun in reach. He was thinking about an upcoming sheep hunt when out of a



*Not one to avoid hard work, Kenny takes a hands-on approach to life in Alaska.*

brushy area 25 yards ahead a huge grizzly bear reared up on hind legs.

The rule in thick country like that is that it's best to make noise, sing a song, tie a bell on a horse in a pack string. It's wise to let a bear know you're coming, but Sailors broke that rule.

"I froze in the saddle," he says. "There was nowhere to go and nothing to do except wait. I held my breath and held everything motionless."

His feet were welded to the stirrups, and his hands had an iron grip on the reins.

The horse's nerves broke first.

"It took me a few seconds to realize that the horse seemed to stretch itself out a little bit and get a little longer," says Sailors. "Where I was sitting seemed to sink about 6 inches or a foot. Then, all of a sudden, the horse began to shake, just tremble all over. It was as if I was sitting on top of a small earthquake. There was sweat all over his withers and neck. He pretty near had a heart attack, I bet."

The bear lost interest in the staring

contest, and Sailors moseyed back to camp. It was the horse that likely retained the most vivid memory of the encounter.

Any grizzly can be mean and dangerous and when a 1,000-pounder with long claws starts menacing you, it makes an impression.

"I've rode up on bears several times," says Sailors. "I've had a sow and two cubs race up and look at you. The cubs were the cutest thing. Mama is protective, though. When they start popping their teeth and the hair on the back of their necks stands up, it's a little spooky."

Aware that some might consider their lives romantic, Bokie does point out that even though, "I wouldn't care to live any other way, it's not all easy."

No kidding. Over the years, Sailors has crossed raging rivers on horseback and been caught in mountain blizzards. He had to walk miles in the dark, without food, to lead a hypothermic client to safety. Careless hunters have shot too close for comfort. But the measure of a man's mettle might be that he lives to tell those stories himself, not have them told about him. Sailors likes to joke that he has never actually been lost, just not known precisely where he was at a given moment.

The Sailorses are also acutely aware that even someone who wanted to would find it difficult to duplicate their way of life now. Alaska is more crowded. There are more political pressures than ever on hunters. There always seem to be more government regulations.

"We got in on the best of it," Sailors says.

Or at the very least, they made the best of it. Just as it took tenacity, creativity and a keen eye to make it to the top in basketball, Sailors needed perseverance, resourcefulness and a keen shooting eye to make it as a hunter and guide in Alaska.

With one difference. No jumping when you shoot that rifle.

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*Memorabilia from Kenny's basketball career fills the cabin he shares with his wife, Bokie, in Gakona.*