

A Letter to Whoever Comes Next

From Dennis Simpson, steward of Sleeping Buffalo Hot Springs and Resort

I want to tell you how this place began, because I think it matters more than how I found it.

In 1909 an oil drilling crew was working the Hi-Line plains outside of Saco, Montana. They hit something they were not looking for. Hot mineral water came rushing up from deep in the earth and they could not shut it off. Someone in the community learned about it and saw not a problem but an answer. Their son had polio. They piped that water into a horse trough and let the boy bathe in it.

That is where Sleeping Buffalo Hot Springs begins. Not with a resort or a business plan, but with a parent who loved their child and a community that believed in something.

The Saco Health Legion eventually built the first proper pools and opened the place to the public. For decades it was the destination Hi-Line families came to know by heart. My wife Michelle grew up in Whitewater, just down the road. She remembered it from childhood.

I had spent over ten years running a hot springs in Bozeman. Sold it. Thought I was done. Retirement lasted about five minutes before I went half crazy with nothing to do. So when Michelle told me the old Sleeping Buffalo had been shut down and was sitting empty, I drove out to Saco to take a look.

What I found was a mess. The state had shut the whole operation down for sanitary reasons. Algae had taken over the pools. Mice had moved into the rooms. The previous owner had rigged up old carnival water slides and the local EMTs who still come here to soak told me those slides had been sending people to the emergency room on a regular basis. The doors were locked and the whole place was falling apart.

I figured I would slap some paint on the walls, clean up the mess, and get the pools running again. Nothing too serious.

Then Michelle posted about it on Facebook.

She just wrote that we were out here working on the old Sleeping Buffalo and that we planned to reopen it. By the next morning that post had gathered several thousand likes and followers overnight. People who grew up on the Hi-Line, people who had been coming here since they were kids, people from across Montana and into Canada, all of them saying they had been waiting for this place to come back.

That changed everything. I went back and looked at the old books. In the 1980s, when a swim cost about a dollar, this place was grossing over three million dollars a year. The demand was never the question. People had just been waiting for someone to give them a reason to return.

We went at it with everything we had. Over the next ten years we rebuilt the hot springs from the ground up, restored the original stone cabins that were quarried from the same rock used to build Fort Peck Dam, added an RV park, a greenhouse, a saloon and steakhouse, and remodeled the outdoor pool to stretch 128 feet under an open Montana sky. We drilled a new artesian well 3,200 feet deep in 2021 so the mineral water would flow clean and pure the way it was always meant to.

We opened on Christmas Day in 2014. I will never forget pulling up that morning and finding Kathy Salsberry standing outside at 9am with a smile on her face, waiting to come in. She has been a regular ever since.

What happened after that is hard to put into words. A woman who was turning 99 came out to celebrate her birthday in these pools, the same pools where she had first learned to swim decades before. Every summer the Hi-Line Classic Car Tour rolls through and the property fills up with over 100 beautiful machines from another era. A guest once brought a full grown parrot into the Buffalo Saloon and that bird sat on my son Christian's shoulder the whole night while he bartended, greeting every single person who walked through the door.

The honest reason I am selling is simple. Michelle lives and works in Scottsdale and I miss her. That is the whole story. I built something I am deeply proud of and now I want to go be with my wife. A man can only run in two directions for so long.

My son Christian has been by my side through all of it. He knows every inch of this operation, every guest by name, every quirk of the well and the pools and the saloon. Christian has his own next chapter calling him and plans to pursue naturopathic medicine once this transition is

complete. But he has offered to stay on and help whoever comes next find their footing before setting off toward that path. That offer is real and it is genuine.

I also want to be clear about something that surprises people when they hear it. You do not have to live here to run this place. The operation has a strong team in place and management options are available that allow an owner to oversee things from wherever they call home. The difference for me is that after more than fifty years of being the person the buck stops with, I am not looking to manage from a distance. I am looking to hand the reins to someone who is hungry for them. There is a difference between being away from a business and being finished with one, and I am finished. Not because this place has not been worth every moment. It has been the greatest professional chapter of my life. But every chapter has an ending, and I have earned mine.

What I am asking you to think about is not a business transaction. It is whether you are the kind of person who feels something when you walk into a place that has meant something to people for nearly a hundred years. Whether you can picture yourself standing at the edge of that outdoor pool on a cold Montana night watching the steam rise into a sky full of stars. Whether you have ever wanted to be the reason a community has a place to gather.

Sleeping Buffalo has been cared for by more hands than mine. I am just the latest in a long line of people who saw something worth saving here and decided to give it everything they had. I hope you are the next one.

When you are ready to talk, reach out to Carly Bishop at Northwest Realty and Auction. She knows this property and she will take good care of you.

With gratitude for everything this place has given my family,

Dennis Simpson

Steward, Sleeping Buffalo Hot Springs and Resort

Saco, Montana