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Ed Hill reflects over the ruins of his Presque Isle home.

Weapons collector reflects after house fire

Six months after his house burned down, Ed Hill is rebuilding his collection and his life

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After nearly nine decades on the planet, Ed Hill can't recall a time when he didn't like guns. He was about eight years old when his father, who ran a small resort on Oxbow Lake, first taught him how to shoot.

"I had a .22 rifle called a Steven's Favorite," he recalls of that early experience. "I should've worn it out, I don't know how many shells I shot through it."

By his mid-teens, before he left for the Army, Hill had already begun his firearms collection, a hobby that would become a lifelong passion, from trade shows to hunting trips to his career as a game warden.

"Over the years, I couldn't count how many different guns I've had,"

he said. "And every gun that I've ever traded or sold or whatever I did, I always wish I had it back."

Those last seven words have taken on a new poignancy for Hill within the last six months. His wife Kay's death a year ago left a massive void at his Presque Isle address, which borders the Michigan state line. And on April 11, Hill realized just how much he had lost.

"I was going to cook some smelt, and I turned the heat up way too high, I guess I had an eight on an electric," he said. "Then I got a phone call, and I was talking on the phone with some old friends of mine. I don't know how long I talked, but when I was back in the kitchen it was completely on fire, everything. Something like that, there's a lot of stuff you just cannot replace."

In the blaze, Hill lost every picture



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Ed Hill handles his .30-30 Winchester 94 saddle ring carbine, which was manufactured in 1906.



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The sun glares down on the ruins of Ed Hill's house.

he had of Kay. Though his son was able to help him replenish parts of the photographic record, a piece of his history is gone forever.

Additionally, the fire claimed a sizable slice of Hill's weapons collection: about 10 pistols and six shotguns were in the house as it burned to the

ground, as well as a pair of Lake St. Clair canvasback decoys that he estimated as being worth a combined total of \$3,000.

"I don't know if I can get someone to try and restore 'em or not," Hill said of the decoys. "They're the good ones people collect, but they're also the ones that burn very easy."

About two-thirds of Hill's guns were spared, however, because they were stored in his garage hundreds of feet away. This includes what Hill considers his rarest specimen, a .30-30 Winchester 94 saddle ring carbine that dates back to 1906.

"When I built (the garage), my friend that built it, he said 'You're going to wind up hating that garage up there, going back and forth,'" Hill said. The irony is not lost on him: "Well, it really hasn't bothered me

yet."

Initially, Hill stayed with his brother in Marenisco after the fire, and then in a couple of rental houses in the Presque Isle area. Now he's back to Marenisco, in another rental property.

"Really, nobody wants to rent a house to you for seven, eight, nine months. They can make a lot more money renting it to tourists in the summer," he said. "It's a decent place, but it's sure as heck not home."

Hill intends to rebuild at the location of his previous house, and expects the new dwelling to be enclosed by mid-October. He says he's received a decent insurance payout, and has even bought more guns to make up for the ones he lost. And, of course, he's ready to hunt again.

"I'll hopefully go to Canada, duck hunting in Manitoba, and I look forward to that," he said. "I figure that at 89, there's not a lot of hunts left in me. As long as I can do it, I'm going to."

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