



Forrest V. "Red" Bex (1924 - 2003)

A colorful and legendary Missoula icon. Red was a self-proclaimed preacher on the streets of downtown Missoula known for his fiery preaching of hell, damnation, and love.

- **1924-Birth.** December 15, 1924 in Dayton, Ohio. Red's mother brought him to Montana when he was 18-months old.
- **Childhood.** Red had a hard life. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was small. As a result, Red lived with his grandmother and other relatives. He received only a third-grade education, however, the one book he knew and read was the Bible.
- **Marriage.** Rex was married three times. His first marriage ended in divorce. He married Ida Lorraine in 1954 and they had three children, Eula Mae, Forrest (Butch) Jr, and David. Ida died of cancer in 1974. He married Shirley Joy in 1979 who was killed in 1992 by a drunk driver.
- **Jack-of-all-trades.** Red owned a seven-acre wrecking yard and recycling business located outside Missoula near the Wye junction. He staked and worked a mine claim near the town of Garnet, Montana. Some of his other jobs included: baking bread for Eddy's Bakery, hauling garbage for Raymond Stickney, hauling metal antenna scraps off the mountains for the two local ski resorts, and driving Lowboy Dump Trucks from Frenchtown to Philipsburg during the interstate construction.
- **Kids and animals.** Red loved kids and animals. The kids he took hunting or fishing and later gave them credit slips for parts so they could fix up their cars. Animals were everywhere on his property including two types of spider-faced monkeys and some deodorized skunks.
- **Boxing.** Red was an avid weightlifter and amateur boxer. He started the Southside Boxing Club where his students won the Northwest Golden Gloves Tournament. His bulging biceps at age 70 attested to his continued two to four hour daily weightlifting routine.
- **1977-Calling.** Red was a heavy drinker and barroom brawler. All this changed in 1977 when, as a regular patron of the Missoula County Jail, Red saw a shaft of light in his cell one night that he believed was an angel calling him to preach the Word of God. Upon his release, Red stopped drinking, grabbed his Bible, and headed to the streets.
- **Pentecostal Street Preacher.** *"Some nights I'll preach demons, some nights I'll preach hell, some nights I'll preach love."* Red became one of Missoula's most colorful and memorable characters. He was a self-proclaimed street preacher who could be found on any downtown street corner at any time. Although his clothing was tattered and he had very little money, he possessed a wealth of spirit and goodwill that he extended to all. Red would gyrate and scream one-line messages to motorists and pedestrians as they passed by, stretching the words for attention. *"You got to have the L-O-O-O-V-E, the J-O-O-O-Y, the P-E-E-E-A-A-C-E!"* Some people were afraid of him, but most loved him and watched out for him. Business owners made sure he had a hot meal, locals made sure he stayed warm, and teenagers protected him from out-of-town ruffians. Red never accepted any money for his sermons but was known to give money or clothing to anyone who needed it.
- **1992-Lawsuit.** Although Red never touched alcohol after his calling, Shirley Joy was unable to kick the drinking habit. She left a bar late one night in 1992 and walked into the street where she was struck and killed by a drunk driver named Thomas Noel Thompson. Red sued the driver, who was sentenced to 10 years in prison. (Red filed an additional lawsuit against the bar, its owners, and the car-dealership who loaned Thompson the car.)
- **2003-Death.** March 18, 2003 in Missoula, Montana at 78 years old.



Information and photo provided by Missoulian news articles, Missoula City Cemetery records, and Red's daughter Eula May Zarling.