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Gail and Walt Phillips

Anchorage, Alaska

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Leslie McCarthy, interviewer

Jeanne Phillips, Sherry Modrow present

Gail Phillips talked about her personal background. Her grandparents came from Sweden as missionaries in Alaska after the gold rush. Her mother was born in northwest Alaska. Her mother and father met in Nome during WWII. Her father was from Arkansas and came to Alaska as a soldier. She was raised in Nome and graduated from high school in 1962. She graduated from the University of Alaska in 1967. She returned to Nome to teach for a few years before they moved to Anchorage. Leslie asked about her grandparents. Gail said they were in Minnesota and were transferred to the Seward Peninsula. Her grandfather named the town of Elim. Her grandfather was the magistrate of Marshal for many years. Walt talked about his background. His paternal grandparents came to Valdez in 1907. His grandfather was a school teacher. They were lay people active in their church. His mother came to Copper Center area in 1937 as a medical missionary. The work that she started there became present-day clinic in Glennallen. His parents met on the trail between Valdez and Copper Center. He was born in 1941. They moved outside for years. They returned to Palmer in 1947. His father came to help construct the children's home and then became director into the 1980s. He graduated in 1958 and went outside for a few years. He returned to Alaska and attended the University of Alaska. Gail studied business and Walt studied geology.

Leslie asked about their experiences at the university. Gail said she stayed in Wickersham Hall. They had curfews at Wickersham and very structured. She talked about the utilidors that ran under Wickersham Hall. The boys would try to go through them to get into Wickersham. The house mother was determined to keep the boys out. When she left they had a more lenient house mother. The girls planned a raid on the boy's dorm. They had a very organized raid. Walt said it was a tradition of their department to wake up the campus with explosives on engineer's day. Traditionally it was done at the bottom of the hill. They decided to place the explosives in snow right next to the university greenhouse. It took out a lot of windows on campus. Another engineer day they managed to get some green dye. They went out in the middle of the night and sprayed all the snowbanks green. They woke up the next morning and it had all turned orange. Gail said she was there in the days of Vietnam protests. Lathrop Hall was being completed and they didn't have laundry facilities. It was governor's day and Wood's Hole had just been completed. Governor Egan was expected. They arranged a gentle protest. They filled the fountain with laundry detergent. They strung line between the flag poles and planned to wash laundry and hang it up on the lines. President Wood was not very happy with them.

Gail said she was the first one on both sides of her family to attend college. She has six younger sister and four of them went to UAF. They didn't have money for college. They worked their way through college. She had three jobs at one time. She always wanted to be a nurse but decided to major in business. She said Melba Pelosi was head of their department. Pelosi told them that they would be able to see someone on their phones at some time in the future. The students didn't believe her. Walt said he and his sister were encouraged to attend college. They worked their way through school. Walt helped Gail out with a loan when they were attending college. Gail said they will be celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary next summer. They were married in Nome along with one of her sisters. Her grandfather married them. Walt studied geology. He said it came later in his college career. Troy Pewe was the head of the department at the time. Dr. Forbes was his mentor during graduate school. Gail said she had some very good teachers. One of her English teachers was tough. She had to go to the dean and challenged her grade. She said she liked Dr. Wood and he moved the university into a new generation. They enlarged the campus. She was in student government at the time. They were trying to raise money for student activities. They got the Chad Mitchell Trio to come to the university for a concert. They were planning on having a lot of military people attend the concert which happened the day Kennedy declared the Bay of Pigs invasion. Her Uncle Lincoln was the commander of the base at the time and he shut down the base. The student government took a huge financial hit. She said a lot of classmates went into the war. There were very little protests on campus. Gail said during her freshmen initiation she had to do snake dances through all the bars downtown. Her husband was in the fire department at the time and noticed her. Walt said he had free room and board as a fireman on campus. He said the biggest fire they had was at the bottom of the hill. It was in 1963. Gail said Walt once picked her up for a date in the old fire truck. Walt said they were allowed to take it out, but not with civilians. He got into some trouble because of this. Gail said campus was small and most everyone knew each other. For people coming from smaller places in Alaska this was a blessing. They said there were just a few people from out of state. Walt was also on the rifle team. He said they had a good team. He traveled with the varsity team, but was the fifth man on the team. There were three all-Americans on the team. Gail said the university has had a good team. Walt said their coach encouraged everyone. Gail was active in politics. Her grandmother was in the legislature and other relatives were active in city politics. She was active in women's athletics and joined the basketball team. They played half-court. She talked about the ice skating pond they had located behind Wickersham in the winter. She had to teach the ice skating instructor how to skate. She was active in Young Republicans. She said they had Alaska issues. Terry Miller was another member of the club. She talked about the time Richard Nixon came for a visit. He came the day after Starvation Gulch where she was burned. She said there was a huge battle when the Department of Environmental Conservation was established under Governor Hammond. Walt said the university would often join with the city of Fairbanks to bring up entertainment. Gail said Dr. Wood did a lot to bring dignitaries to the campus. Leslie asked about buildings on campus. Gail said when they built Bunnell and Woods Hole it changed things significantly. The dining hall was in Constitution Hall. Walt said he lived in Hess Hall. He said all of the housing was down on the main campus. Everything was within walking distance. Gail said the walk up to Skarland's cabin was considered a hike. They would go down to Fairbanks every so often. Walt said they had a bus service but it wasn't very often. Gail said they would walk down the railroad tracks to get into town. Leslie asked about social activities on campus. Gail said Starvation Gulch was a big deal. They had a lot of dances and concerts. Walt said they

didn't have alcohol on campus. Gail said they just left Fairbanks before the 1967 flood. Gail said they had taken everything and shipped it up to Nome before the flood. They did lose their vehicle during the flood. Gail worked for Alaska and Wien Airlines. After spending time in Nome they decided to move Anchorage. Gail worked for Western Airlines for eight or nine years and then worked for Wien again. She was working as an executive assistant. After she had children they decided to do something different. At the beginning of the pipeline days Anchorage was changing. They decided to move to Homer in 1978. They bought a sporting goods store. Gail worked primarily in the store. Walt was working for an engineering firm at the time. He said the pipeline kept them busy for many years. He was asked to go to Houston for a few months and it turned into three years. In 1969 and 1970 they were laying out the pipeline route. Leslie asked about serving on the Kenai Peninsula College board. Gail said she served on the board in the early 1980s. She also served on the Homer Council. She said education issues have been important to her. Gail talked about the design of the pipeline and what happened during the Denali earthquake. Walt said there were a lot of individuals involved in the design.

Leslie asked about her political activities. Gail said when she first got to Homer she became involved with the chamber of commerce and the college board. She always wanted to be more involved. She was elected to city council in 1978. She talked about the people that came to work in the canneries and lived on the beaches. When they left in the fall there was a lot of plastic left on the villages. One of the first things she did while serving on the city council was to introduce legislation to prohibit visqueen plastic on the beaches and to put portable toilets on the beaches. She served on the Kenai Assembly. In 1988 she ran for the House of Representatives and lost to the incumbent. She won the next time she ran. She served five terms and was the majority leader and speaker of the house. Some of the major issues they covered were education reform, tort reform, the Mental Health Land Trust issue, and subsistence which wasn't settled. Subsistence is controlled by the federal government. They wanted rural priority and they couldn't get that legislation passed. She talked about the legislature right after statehood. She said she enjoyed working as the speaker of the house. She said any education a person has develops your life skills. She always urges people to go on with their education. Walt said as an undergraduate he worked for the state in the summer and the highway department in the winter. He worked for DOT in Nome and later transferred to Anchorage. When the TAPS started the DOT people were well suited for the project. Gail wanted to return to Nome after university because that was where her family was. She had worked for the airlines while attending college and was able to get a job in Nome. The high school didn't have a business teacher and she was asked to teach. She taught typing. She was able to get new typewriters and books. She also taught bookkeeping.