

2016-04-04

Ethel Stoneman

Karen Brewster, interviewer

July 9, 2015

North Pole Alaska

Series: Ethel Stoneman interviews

Karen Brewster asked Ethel Stoneman about the roadhouse at Scotty Creek on the Alaska Highway. Stoneman said after her husband, Glenn, left the phone company and his health was bad. He decided that he needed a change of occupation. They bought the roadhouse and ran it for four years. She said you work seven days a week. She thought they could make a living in Fairbanks and sold the roadhouse and moved back to Fairbanks. She said they were far out of town and people would wake them in the middle of the night to use the bathroom. They were at Scotty Creek all year long. They still had property in Fairbanks and moved back and built a house. She went back to the university for a year. Brewster asked about traffic in the winter at the roadhouse. Stoneman said there were quite a few people. People were usually having some kind of car trouble. One time a lady came in the middle of the night who was expecting a baby. There were a lot of situations like that. They had a gas station, sleeping facilities and meals. They also had a wrecker service. She and her husband did everything. They tried having employees and it wasn't successful. She said it took a certain temperament to run a place and she didn't have it. Her husband thought it would be something good for them and it wasn't. She said that was a bad point in her life. Stoneman said Scotty Creek had beautiful northern lights. They would get their supplies on a bus that ran from Whitehorse to Fairbanks. She said they had regular pie customers. They had regular restaurant food. She talked about some of the people who came through their roadhouse. Beaver Creek was the closest town to their place. They were located in the United States. They would stop traffic on the highway for a plane to land for accident victims. They had seven rooms at the roadhouse.

Brewster asked her what she was taking when she attended the university. Stoneman said she was taking accounting courses. Her husband started buying furs and selling from their home. He was also doing some taxidermy work. They have an ivory collection that they traded for. She said the Natives were friends with her husband because he dealt fairly with them. Her husband liked to do the same things they liked to do. Her husband passed away in May 1999. After attending college she was a bookkeeper. She worked for a paint company. The pipeline was being constructed and the paint company expanded dramatically. She was working sixty hour weeks. One of her friends was CEO of the Ft. Wainwright Credit Union and became sick and they were looking for someone to take her position. She interviewed at five in the morning and hired her. She wanted to give her employer three weeks to replace herself. She managed the credit union for 26 years. She said it was a great job. She was on a national credit union committee. She made several trips to Washington, D.C. and visited legislators. She help put in the first ATM systems in Fairbanks and Anchorage. Stoneman talked about credit unions.

One of their jobs was helping soldiers handle a check book. There was a robbery by one of its members. Two young girls were doused with gasoline and they were threatened. The robber set a fire on another part of the base to distract all the police and firefighters. The soldier got off base, but was caught. She retired in 1994. She tutored at the grade school in North Pole. She tutored in reading. When her husband was diagnosed with cancer in 1978 she quit tutoring. While she was in the credit union she was in the local chamber of commerce. One of the colonels who retired here started an interest in ice carving. There had been ice carving in the 1930s but it disappeared with the war. A manager of the Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce thought they should have it. The chamber started it in 1988 and she helped raise funds. Wally Cox the manager of the chamber. The ice carving was associated with the chamber of commerce for four years and then it was on its own. One of the colonels from Wainwright decided to take the responsibility. Dick Brinkley was the real promoter and started having contests. It was the start of Ice Alaska. The chamber had had events at the Cushman Street Bridge. She was keeping the books for them. For the next twenty years it got bigger and bigger. She thought the project was worthwhile for Fairbanks. It brings tourists to town in the winter. She remembered when the hotels weren't very full in the winter. Fairbanks was promoted in the winter. She said people in the lower 48 know more about Ice Alaska than some people in Fairbanks. She doesn't think there is enough push from the community. Karen asked about the international carvers. Stoneman said many of them are here because they are promoting their own craft. They provide their own tickets to get here. They meet other carvers from other countries. Even if they win first prize they have to pay more to get up here. The carvers learn from each other. She always promoted it because it was good for the community. Karen asked about the ice used for the carvings. Stoneman said it is a special unique clear blue ice. It makes beautiful sculptures. Karen commented about keeping the books for the organization. Stoneman said they had to have the funds to move people in so we get to see the sculptures. The gate fees pay for food and a place for the carvers to stay. She promoted the event to get funds. She loved the carvers who came in. She spent a lot of time keeping money flowing in. She said their light bill for one month in the past year was \$13,000. The carvers in the past would stay in hotels. The hotels would give them a special rate. She talked about the different volunteers and their work. She said there are about 400 volunteers from mid-February and March and after the event. She said there were some volunteers all year long. Karen asked about the board. She was on the board. There were seven board members. She did a lot of different things. Her husband volunteered to make light boxes for the sculptures and some of them are still being used. Stoneman said everything about ice carving is creative. She talked about the new location of the project. She said the railroad decided to rent their property to someone else who could pay more money. They were paying \$42,000 for the rent of 17 acres. Now there isn't anyone renting the railroad property. Ice Alaska purchased their new property. She commented about the new location. Ice Alaska honored her this year. They named the street in front of the property the Ethel Stoneman Blvd. After she retired she had more things to do. She got active in the Santa Seniors. They have worked hard to get a place where they can have entertainment. Several elderly men in the North Pole area didn't have any place to go have coffee in the morning. A couple of the seniors started a breakfast place. It has expanded over time. It was held in a building owned by the city of North Pole. Now they have a very nice building. They have volunteer cooks. There is also an exercise program and they have games. Some days they have dances. They raise funds by doing yard sales, bake sales, book sales and donations. They have a birthday luncheon once a month. She used to make jars of jam from wild berries for sale. She talked

about the seniors writing the Santa letters that came to North Pole. She said a lot of people come to the center for the social life. They do not get any of the state funding. The downtown center does and they have Meals on Wheels. She said they also have a craft shop on 5th Street.

She said people from her Santa Senior volunteer for Ice Alaska. People from her church have also volunteered. The Santa Seniors make a lot of mittens and caps which are sold for Ice Alaska. The Lutheran Church got Samaritan Counseling started. She served on their board for twelve years. It helped a lot of people. Every year they had a celebration of lights to raise money for Samaritan Counseling. Since she retired she put in about thirty hours a week on volunteer boards. She has been honored for her volunteer work. She said it was not a burden for her.

Stoneman showed her citation from the Alaska Legislature. Brewster read the statement from the Legislature. Stoneman said she was surprised to get this honor.

Karen asked about Christmas on Ice in North Pole. Stoneman helped get that going. She and Dick Brinkley worked on the project. They didn't have a lot of volunteers.

Stoneman showed her certificate of appreciation for patriotic civilian service from the Department of the Army. She got it the day she retired from the credit union. Brewster read the citation on the certificate. Stoneman said at the last celebration of light they had for Samaritan Counseling she wrote a humorous prayer and statement about being born before many of the modern amenities and how the meaning of words has changed. Stoneman talked about the reason she has done so much volunteer work during her life. Brewster talked about her being such a good role model for the younger generation. Stoneman said she hopes her sons carry on.