

Ethel Faye Stoneman

2016-04-05

Karen Brewster, interviewer

Renaë Byrd present

July 19, 2015

North Pole Alaska

Series: Ethel Stoneman interviews

Karen Brewster asked Ethel Stoneman about her faith. Stoneman said the good Lord put us on this world to help other people coming along. We should leave this place better than how we found it. She said her faith is an important part of her life. She believes in living your faith. She said you have to help people receive their faith. She talked about 2005 hurricane relief in Mississippi. A group from her church went on a mission to help. She said they stayed in tent houses. They went down with a Presbyterian church. Her church is the Methodist Presbyterian Church. They stayed for ten days and helped repair homes. They were in Gulf Port, Mississippi. The people they helped were very appreciative. She talked about the camp where they stayed. There were ten or 12 [16] people in their group. Her niece asked about volunteers for Ice Alaska. Stoneman said people from Ice Alaska went to the churches and asked for help. There were people from California who came to help. She has had volunteers staying at her house. In 2002 they went to Russia to volunteer. They had trouble going over at that time because another religion had created problems in their town. The people were short of food and they brought supplies. They flew from Nome. They took a certain amount of money for their own food. Their main job was to fix windows. There were holes in the walls that they patched. They were supposed to be supplied with materials but there wasn't much. They had to make do with materials they found. She talked about distributing food and the facilities in one town where they visited. While they were there the hunters got two walrus. She talked about some of the conditions of the place where they stayed. During the communist era this town had been a fox farm. It was a big one and they sold lots of furs. She didn't know what happened to the business after communism was gone. The people were hungry. She said the Natives had been reindeer herders and now they were poor. They left that town and went to Chatalino. They wanted material and they brought it for them. They took a bus over to the village and it was loaded with people. The people with them were going off to pick greens. When they got to the village most of the men were gone. It was a fishing day. They had all sorts of fishing nets. They fished from the shore. There was a Moravian group there building houses. There was a restaurant of sorts in the town. They all went for a Russian dinner. Stoneman described the dinner. They attended church while they were there and recognized the songs. They stayed in Chatalino for one day. They had two interpreters with them. Brewster asked them if they had a Russian person with them. Stoneman said they got around on their own. They were in Russia for ten days. She said it was a great experience. They returned to Prodivnia

area. They were fogged in and they were down to their last day of supplies and they still couldn't get out. They were close to getting kicked out or thrown in jail. When they went to renew their visas their plane came in. They hadn't had any food that day. They finally got out when the fog lifted. They didn't have any food on the plane. They arranged to have some pizza ready for them in Nome in the airport. It was in the airport when they got there. She said she joined with Bill Page and they went through some abandoned apartments and removed the glass. They used the panes of glass to fix the widow's apartments. She talked about how they painted the walls in the apartments. They were helping blind widows. She said it was an interesting and educational trip. She knew that Russians did a lot of beading. She brought beads to them and they made a headband for her.

Brewster asked if they ran into trouble with paperwork in the Soviet Union. Stoneman said the only difficulties were other churches that were overanxious about going in and that created problems for their own trip. The Russian people did not object to prayer meetings. The night they left the Communist lady gave them a plaque. Ethel said she was about eighty when she made the trip to Russia. Most of the participants were in their seventies. She felt good about taking the trips. She said when the people were under communist rule they had specific jobs and did not do anything but their specific job. She talked about what was in the grocery store. She said there was always vodka and bread. She talked about the grade schools. The kids didn't play outside during school. She thought there was a lot of trash outside and not a safe place for them to play.

Stoneman said the trips were rewarding to them. She thought it was very rewarding for the people they visited, too.

Brewster asked about her childhood and her faith. Stoneman said they were out in a primitive area in Colorado. The town where she lived was five miles away. She talked about what was in their town. They had an Odd Fellows lodge. They had a Presbyterian Church. It was built out of stones. They discuss the history of the church. She rode her horse to church. Attending church was important in her family. She talked about her minister who was also her high school principal. She said she remember he never raised his voice.

Brewster asked her about the collection of items in her house. Stoneman said she started collecting the dolls when she first came to Alaska. Her husband got into the fur business and would trade for his fur. He had a lot of Native friends. As long as he was fair with them they were fair with him. There was a lady who made Native dolls. Her husband made some of the little tools used to decorate the dolls. The artist was Linda Duran. She traded some of her dolls for the work her husband did. Another artist used his dogs for models and gave them a drawing in return.

Stoneman said she wished people would use some of their time helping people. She said opportunities are there.