

Interview of Weaver Franklin by Mike Dunham

Transcript

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Mike Dunham: My name is Mike Dunham. I'm speaking today with Weaver Franklin at his home on Government Hill. It is the 18th of June, 2013. Um, before we start, just to cover a couple of things- the purpose for these recordings is to record memories of Anchorage and of Alaska in previous years.

Weaver Franklin: Ok.

MD: Its intended that at some point this will become available to the public. It remains confidential until you sign off on it, until you give your approval. And, um, when- you're not allow- you're not, you're not uh, required to answer any of the questions I might ask.

WF: Alright.

MD: And, um, and when you get tired we're done.

WF: Alright, alright, very good.

MD: Very good. So lets begin. Where were you born, and when?

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WF: I was born, uh, in the 11th, 22 and 22. In Nebraska, in western Nebraska, on a farm in Western Nebraska. And, uh, they didn't think that it was worth, uh, recording my birth certificate, so I didn't- I had to get a, a, different birth certificate when I- when I become an adult. I, they didn't, they didn't have to- I guess they didn't have to re- record their births, so I was surprised. That's why that was one of the chores, when you grow up you had to get a birth certificate.

MD: How long did you live there?

WF: I lived there for almost twenty years. On a farm.

MD: So what brought you to Alaska? When did you come here, and why?

WF: Well, I'm, I'm going to tell you things that I don't normally tell people. Uh, I- when the big war broke out, I tried to volunteer for the Marine Corps and they

turned me down. And then I tried for the Air Force, and they turned me down. And then when the Army turns you down, you're worthless, y'know? So anyway, when, when they did I went to the West Coast. I was- I couldn't stand to be around my hometown, y'know, on the farm. So I went to the west coast. And it was, uh, it was a boomtown of course, y'know. And I look- just lookin' for a job, and here there was one on the Alcan Highway for that Dal construction. So I, uh, I went down and signed up for the Dal construction, y'know.

And, uh, it was a, uh- I think I hired out as a laborer, but they, they promoted me to a- there were seven of us, promoted to first aid attendants. And we were supposed to learn in seven days what you'd take, take a lifetime to learn. How to take care of people who was drastically hurt in the construction. And, and there was lots of accidents on the Alcan Highway. And so I was- when I was chosen- and we did, we had a doctor. And they told us how to put on the splints and how to stop the bleeding, and, and the tragedies that would occur on a- in construction. So that's how I- and then I- we got on a ship, the Princess Louise. And it was a beautiful, small ship. And we went from, from there, from, from, uh, Vancouver to Whitehorse. By way of Skagway, which is the old, the old, the old steam locomotives, and the old, y'know all the- all the history behind Skagway. And so we went there. And then I went- we went, to, uh, to Whitehorse. And we was assigned- I was assigned to a, medical group there that had us- it was almost like a hospital but it wasn't. And I was assigned to that. And, uh, it wasn't long that they assigned me to a place that they called 108. At the- that's it, now its, they call it Haines Junction. But it was- all of them knew it was 108. And I was supposed to take care of all the, all the tragedies that occurred there. Well, it wasn't too much- there was no big dramatic things, other than a couple of fistfights. Y'know. And, and they, they needed, they needed to be patched up, a couple of 'em. So, (laughs) they got the best of my, my knowledge. Which was, which was not very much.

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MD: What was Whitehorse like when you got there?

WF: Whitehorse was a- I'd never seen anything like it, y'know. It was, it was, it was- it just- there was a small hotel- a couple of small hotels, and several bars. It had this, steam, steam, steam-wheelers. The steamships coming in and out of there. It was very, it was very busy. And they was, brought all the material that was to be distributed on the Alcan Highway both east and west, y'know. And so Whitehorse was a very, very busy place, y'know. And a lot of tents. The tents was, y'know, they didn't have room- uh, good housing. So they lived in tents. Generally a four-man tent, y'know. And there was a- now I, uh- it was, it was remote, y'know. It really was. And there was some, there was some good old-timers, some of the old-timers still there, you get to chat with them, talk with them. And there was a group of Natives of course, but they was nice people. They, they was- they were. And that's about all, I don't think that- I think they had a high school, but that's about the limit- y'know, that's.

MD: And when did you actually get into Alaska?

WF: When did I come to Alaska? After I, well, after I left Whitehorse, I filled a contract there, y'know, and then I went back to Seattle. And then I hired out on a- the Guy F. Atkinson Construction for, uh, the Aleutian Islands. And I, uh, I came up on the old Columbia. There was a ship named the Columbia that was built in 1908 from- in Germany. And it was a real, real clunker, y'know. And we run into some terrible storms. I remember it was in November, and it was- I think it was the storms of, at that time was probably record breakers, y'know, 'cause waves a hundred feet high! And I, I was a poor sailor, y'know. Anyway, anyway, we stopped at- our first stop was at Kodiak, I think. And then Coal Bay, y'know, and then, then Adak, and that's where I got off, at Adak.

MD: What did you do there?

WF: Well I was, I was a laborer there at first. And I got promoted to oiler on a big, on a big oil- y'know, for, uh, machinery. And, uh, luckily I- there was a lot of old, old men that came from the Panama Canal, that was, it was, uh, hired out here off of that really. Dal Construction, anybody, anybody, y'know, that can hired them out. There was old men and they liked to be, have- somebody like myself would relieve them, and they would get off their machine and give me the chance to practice my skills. And I was promoted, believe it or not, to locomotive- to a engineer. To an. And, in nothing flat. And I was poorly qualified, but I was- but they needed, they needed men.

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MD: What was going on in Adak?

WF: Adak was being built, uh, an Air Force. And that- that's what we did, they was laying down mats when I got there, they were laying down steel matts. And, um, Adak was a, was a Native- or it was a Navy town. And it was all Seabees and Navy. And they, they were building. And there were bombers, there were bombers at the, uh, the B-24s, I think, was a, was a- sometimes B-17s came in there, but they was bombing off of Adak at that time, y'know. And they'd fly over the Kurile Islands I guess, and that's where they'd dump their loads and come back. It was a, Adak was a, really remote. We lived in tents, by the way. And, and-

MD: Four-man tents again?

WF: Yeah. (laughs) The old tents were there. But they was- and there was a lot of snow that first winter, that- in '43, there was a lot of snow, so we- it was, it was trying, but tolerable to a, to a- I was raised on a farm, and I knew what hard work

was, and what- to tolerate hardship. And so lots of people didn't like it, but I didn't- I thought it was ok and all. It was all- y'know, it was ok with me! And, uh...

MD: What kind of entertainment was there, for you there?

WF: There was no entertainment. No, there was entertainment. I take that back. There was gambling.

MD: Mmhmm.

WF: And big-time gambling, y'know, they played the 4, 5, 6 and then the Blackjack, and there was a poker game. All, because there was a lot, there was an awful lot of men there. Construction. And, and they was, they had tables going 24 hours a day and all, but. And there was some cheating going on, and, um, rough, rough, rough and ready and all, but. And there was- there was some, some fights went on, when they was caught cheating. And normally if they was caught cheating they shipped 'em out on the first airplane. (laughs) For, for, for their own protection.

MD: Yeah.

WF: And so that was, that was the only entertainment that there was. There was no, no, the, uh...they didn't provide any entertainment. Period. That's all, you made your own.

MD: Was there any kind of base, uh, newspaper or newsletter or anything like that?

WF: Oh no. There was nothing there, no.

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MD: The, um, and how long were you at Adak then?

WF: I was there probably five or six months. And then I was shipped to Shemya. Yeah, and we went there. And I spent the next twelve or thirteen months at Shemya. In a tent, again. And- rough, rough facilities y'know, outside toilets, there were outside toilets there, and, but, it was, it was, and we worked ten hours a day, seven days a week. That was- everybody did that, y'know. And, so you made good money, but you- you had no place to spend it. (laughs) Ah, but the weather was hit tough, y'know, just like the Aleutian Islands today it is. You get a lot of fog and a lot of rain, in the, in the summer, and a lot of snow and drizzle in the winter. It was not pleasant but you always- so you always wore your, your rain gear, y'know, your rain gear and your boots and so forth. And it was a tough living, but if you didn't mind it was ok. Well, it was ok with me because I...

MD: What were they paying you? What was your hourly, your-

WF: The most, the most for a common laborer it was less than a dollar an hour. I think it was 98 cents an hour. And for the highest priced paid men it was a shovel operator dragline, which was 2 dollars an hour. But that was, that was the most, most expensive. But most of the people who- professionals, your carpenters and plumbers and so forth, it was about a dollar fifty-five an hour.

Bob Curtis-Johnson: Cut. I'm sorry to interrupt. Can you cut?

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MD: What kind of equipment were you running in Shemya?

WF: All kinds of the big-time equipment. Northwest, Northwest, Bucyrus-Erie, and that type, y'know, the big heavy equipment. Caterpillar. And it was all, it was all, uh, heavy equipment and building, building air, air, air, uh, air strips. And we built, we built that air strip that's there, y'know. And we got off, off the boat there at Shemya on a, on a landing craft. We had to, just like the G.I.s, you had to crawl down the ladders and jump into the landing craft, and then beached ourselves. And we was, we was the original people on the Shemya. (laughs) So we, we had to build our own tent and, and we set up. But it was, it was ok, it was- and they had, of course, the mess hall was in a tent, y'know. And, and the- they didn't have a whole lot of talent as far as cooking goes. (laughs) But they had lots of good spam anyway. (laughs) So.

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MD: What were the meals like? What kind of meals were they?

WF: It was, it was a G.I.-type meal, y'know. It was just bacon and eggs in the morning, with pancakes. And it was, it was, and of course, at, at noontime it was some kind of, some kind of a beef of some kind, y'know. It was just rough, rough, rough type eating. And you'd sit on a, sit on a bench, it wasn't, it wasn't, it wasn't, nothing fancy about it, y'know. And it. You tolerated it and you listened to the bitches, y'know. And you done a little yourself, y'know. But it was alright. It was not as tough as you think, y'know.

MD: Ah, so what happened after you left Shemya?

WF: Then I left Shemya, um, I came to Anchorage. I flew in to Anchorage, into the air- Elmendorf.

MD: What kind of plane?

WF: A C-47. Side, side-mounted. And we just had to, our gear all strapped in the middle and we were sittin' sideways. And we had some ferocious weather going into Adak, from Shemya to Adak we had some tremendously updrafts and downdrafts. I'm surprised that they- the plane held together, I really am. Even to this day actually, I look back at the old, the old- big sheets of static electricity coming off the tips of the, of the wings when they'd go up and down. It was enough to scare a, scare a brave man. (laughs) But it was, it was a. Then we landed in Adak-

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WF: Ok. Well we landed at Adak and I noticed that the- the air pilot- the pilot of the plane was covered in sweat. His suit was white- I mean it was, it was sopping wet. He would sweat and sweat- he was as afraid as we was! So we landed there and spent an hour or two getting refueled, and then we, then we flew into Anchorage. And we landed in Elmendorf and that was the only big airfield, airfield here. Yeah.

MD: Is that 1945 by now?

WF: That was in '45, yeah. That was.

MD: And what did you do in Anchorage?

WF: Well I, uh, I spent about two or three weeks here, and then I took a boat, boat from Anchorage to Seattle. One of the Alaska Steamship boats. I don't really recall its name. I should, but. Then I spent, uh, a little time in the States and visited back on the farms, visited my folks, and then I come back to Ala- come back to Seattle and grab the plane for Alaska.

MD: What was the plane, what kind of plane did you fly back on?

WF: That was a, it was an old, beat-up plane, with a two motors, but we'd sit side-by-side, it was a- it was a, and the one person that was sitting next to me was a Native. And he had a brand new suit on, brand new shoes, and a tie on. And totally un-Native apparel, y'know. And I was chatting with him, and I said, "Why're you coming back to Alaska?" and he says, "I'm dying!" I said "dying!" "Yeah", he said, "I'm come

back to die here". And so that's, the snot was running down his nose and it was blood, y'know. TB.

MD: TB.

WF: And so I, I was, that was an impressive, the guy, y'know- but they did, they did bring him back to Alaska in a proper manner, so.

MD: The, um-

WF: And then I landed in Juneau, of course. And I looked around for a job, and there was no jobs except for fishing, and so I flew into Anchorage and that's where I, that I. And I, uh, was very lucky, 'cause I went to work for the Alaska Road Commission. And Pete Bagoy was the- was one of the foreman, and he was the big boss. Pete Bagoy. And a nice person. He had a nice family. And then I went, went to Palmer of course, and then I was running, running an old Northwest shovel for the, for the Road Commission, and I did that all summer long until late in the year, into, into November or something like that. And they laid off everybody, everything being froze up she couldn't move dirt, so they, so they laid off everybody. And so I came into Anchorage and stayed at one of the, one of the old, old hotels.

MD: We're talking about 1945 or so?

WF: I'm talking about '45.

MD: 1945. When did you find out the war was over?

WF: Oh, well, yeah, that-

MD: What were the circumstances-

WF: I was, I was, yeah, I was out on a shovel. And I, I missed when the big celebration was, because I got myself into a pickle and I had to stay there and, and work. And get this stream diverted so it didn't, didn't wash out the high, highway. And so I didn't get into town until about 10 o'clock that night. And everybody was drunk as hell, y'know? And having a big ball, and that was- the war over then in 19- the summer of 1945, of course, y'know. And so that's, it was quite an event. It was great to have the war over and so forth and so on, yeah.

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MD: What was Anchorage like?

WF: Anchorage was, it was 4th Avenue and 5th Avenue, y'know. "The biggest bar in the world", Anchorage was at that time, that's what they claimed. And it was. It was,

it was lotsa bars and lots of honky-tonks. And, um. It was, uh, one of- Anchorage was, was a construction town, that's what it was. People was workin' on the base and they was workin' on places, but it was, it was construction. It was, and it was. And, uh...

MD: Any memorable experiences from those bars or honky-tonks?

WF: Oh my goodness, yeah. You could- there was lots of, lots of, lots of experiences in all the bars, y'know! I shouldn't say this, and you can delete it if you like, but- Wally Hickel was a bartender bouncer at the, uh, South Sea Isl- the South Seas. It was the nicest bar in town. And they had a singer and a, and a player. And he was one of the only Negroes in town. There was three of them, Negroes in town, he was one of them. He was a nice guy. But he played the piano, and it was, it was the nice place because Wally Hickel would kick 'em out if he didn't- and he didn't mind his job, I don't think. So he was, he was- but that, I probably shouldn't be even talking about that. Because he was a respected, highly respected person. Even in those days. A bartender was- you had a good job. If you had a good job as a bartender you had a good job.

MD: Yeah. Did you spend much time in Palmer?

WF: I spent quite a lot of time in Palmer, yeah.

MD: What was that place like?

WF: It was just, it was just one street, y'know, and one or two bars. And there were one or two grocery stores. The Koslosky's had a clothing store and a restaurant. And, uh, I, let's see...Governor and his wi- his, his sister was a- I'm gonna, I'm gonna delete that.

MD: I'm trying to think of any governors we had here. Wally-

WF: Bill Egan.

MD: Bill Egan! Yeah, sure.

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WF: Bill Egan and his sister was always playing poker there in Ward's, in Ward's had, had a bar there. And they always had a poker game going and she was always in it. She was a good hard nose poker player you know, and so she won. She made her living off of it, playing poker. And she was a respectable woman, she was just, she just happened- happened to fall into that occupation, y'know.

MD: And the, the, was there, were there laws against gambling at that time?

MD: I think there was, but there was nobody paying any attention to 'em, y'know. There was, you could find a, find a 4, 5, 6 or a poker game almost anyplace. But Poker games was generally the acceptability. And of course in Anchorage there you got two or three little places out of town where they had 4, 5, 6 and gambling in the bar and whatever, whatever else you wanted, y'know. It was Charlie's Place was one of them, y'know. (laughs)

MD: Where was that located?

WF: It was on 4th Avenue, I think where the Lucky Wishbone is, I think that was Charlie's Place, yeah.

MD: The um- what was the road like, in, coming in from Palmer to Anchorage?

WF: It was all gravel. It was a two-lane gravel highway, y'know. Just, just gravel, that's- but not bad. Nothing, nothing to be- and Anchorage itself- 4th Avenue had only two, two streets that was paved. And it was, y'know, the rest of it was gravel. And the sidewalks was wood, wooden sidewalks. And it was a remote, remote area with lots of bars and a couple, couple, couple of places to buy clothing.

MD: Where did you stay when you were here?

WF: I think it was just the Parson's Hotel was where they stayed at. And, and it was one of- it was the best, best hotel there was, y'know. I don't know if the Anchorage Westward is even then.

MD: Where did you take your meals?

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WF: There was different, there was, there was, um, good, good restaurants. Reasonably good restaurants. I'll tell you this much. One was George, George and Gus Granges, and they were Greeks. And they had a, had this restaurant here. And I don't know the name of it for sure but I think it was Model, or something, Model Café, and a reasonable meal I'd always get there. Later on in, after I become, on the Alaska Railroad, they would go out and they'd get their moose, y'know, two big bulls, and they'd load on the, on, on the baggage cars, and bring 'em into town. But anyway we got lotsa, lotsa hot beef sandwiches, y'know. For 75 cents a piece. But it was reasonable, and so we, we ate a lot of moose. (laughs) But they was, they was nice guys. They was really nice people, and, um, and so they- and they went- and I remember they went back to, to Greece and they bought- they got themselves a wife. And her name was Rosie. And she was a, she was, I think she was high-class as far as, y'know, she was a good, good, good-lookin', smart, smart woman. Rosie was a- and everybody liked her. And everybody knew her, y'know.

MD: When did you start working for the railroad?

WF: Uh, January the 1st in 1946. January 1 of 1946, yup.

MD: What was your initial job there?

WF: My initial job was, I was, uh, apprentice machinist. And I went to Healy, they shipped me right out to Healy, they needed work up there. And they, you learn, you learned everything you wanted to learn about steam locomotives and steam, steam, steam-fired- 'cause everything was run by steam. All the cranes were steam-operated, and, and, you- it was just- all the heating was done by steam. So you could learn, you had to learn how, uh, how to fire steam locomotives. Steam equipment, and locomotives was part of 'em, y'know. But they- steam cranes, and, everything was steam. And so, and they had one mine there, but they had, y'know, the Lathrop Mine, he provided all the coal for the Alaska Railroad. Yeah. And.

MD: These were all coal burners.

WF: Yeah, everything was coal, coal. Yeah. Nothing- no, no, no oil at all, no.

MD: Um, the buildings in town, were they heated with coal?

MD: Oh yeah, yeah. It was steam, steam heat. Steam all around, yeah, yeah. And it was, it was, it was adequate, you know. The winter I spent up at Healy was the coldest winter that had ever been recorded and ever will be recorded, I do believe. And I remember the thometer- the thermometers would only go to sixty below. And then they'd go, they'd go into the bulbs. But for, for fifty-five days the warmest- the warmest it was, it was, the warmest it was was fifty-five below. 'cause it was, the thermometers, you couldn't tell how cold it was because it was all down in the, down the, but it was at least fifty-five degrees below for thirty-six straight days. And I'm sure that that has to be a record. And we of course had to keep 'em running, those steam locomotives would come and get cold- coal and water and serviced and so forth. And so I spent my first, first year in Healy. And it was, it was, it was ok, y'know. It was, it was an old Singl- the hotel was the name of this Singleton Hotel. And it was, it was pretty remote, pretty, pretty, cold, but they had a great big potbellied stove in the middle of it, y'know, and it, it was being stirred up by some bull cook or somebody all the time. You never got a good night's seep because there's a fire in the ol', stirring up the coal in the old potbellied stove, y'know. It was, it was, it was a tolerable thing, but you had- it was, it was a rough living. Rough and tough, y'know.

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MD: Um, when did you get back to Anchorage. Or, after, after Healy what happened?

WF: After Healy then of course I, I was a machinist at that time, an apprentice, and when I came into Anchorage a fellow by the name of John Manley was in charge of loco- locomotives, and he asked me if I'd learn firing for a locomotive, be an apprentice, y'know, apprentice to the engineer. So I did, I swapped over into, into the transportation. And I was a steam locomotive fireman. And I, I kept that job for- they needed locomotive engineers real bad, and so, anybody had any talent and studied the rules and so forth, could get promoted. And I was promoted in 1948. In the spring of 1948 I was promoted to locomotive engineer. And that was- that was a real big promotion. And I was, and from, from the next seven or eight years I was, well, I was a s-steam, y'know, a locomotive engineer. And we was assigned, when, y'know, they were rehabbing the Alaska Railroad at that time, with new rails and new ties and everything, just totally rehabbing it. So you needed every stick of equipment they could get, y'know. But, uh, so we lived in, in what they call "troop sleepers". It was a military type, uh, accommodations. And then they'd have, have, have a, uh, mess hall besides that. And so we was assigned, most of us got assigned- we didn't bid on the job, you were assigned, "you're the, you're the youngest guy, go wherever", and so I was assigned at the Clear site, Clear, y'know, for quite a while. They had a big camp there. And Morrison-Knudson had a lot of big contracts back there, so. I was, I was there for, oh, a lot of 1948 and all. And then from then on y'know, you came to town and, uh, then I rented a, rented a room from a man by the name of George Capstick. And his wife was, she was- they had a son, and, uh, they had two big rooms they rented out. And I, I rented the one.

MD: Where was their house?

WF: How's that?

MD: Where was their house located?

[01:33:18:00]

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WF: 528 K Street. Yeah. And it was a nice home, it was fired by coal too. We had a coal fired and steam, kind of a hot water, hot water heat. Yeah. And he was, he was with the, with one of the distributors for the, for the, Standard Oil. He delivered to, to homes, y'know. That's what he, all I know that's all he ever did. That's all he ever did, y'know. And his wife was, she was a cripple, she had a bad leg, and so she, she, she was, she, she was capable, she, she took care of George, and he had one son. And they was. And so I was there for the next five years in that home and all. And of course I was promoted and y'know, I was a locomotive engineer, so I went, I went to everyplace there was that needed some help. I, I was forced to sign to Seward, I was forced to sign to Whittier, uh, Fairbanks, or anyplace, y'know, you, you was, you said, you had to go where they wanted you to go.

MD: What do you have to know to drive a steam locomotive? What were the-

WF: A whole, whole lot of stuff. There's just- to be a good steam locomotive engineer you had to be quite alert, you had to be- there was probably three or four hundred valves, steam valves, on a locomotive, y'know. It had because, everything, everything about the thing had to be steam heated, so they had to have tracer lines for all the water and all the air and all the stuff that had to have tracer lines. So it was, it was, it was quite a challenge to be a locomotive engineer- to be a successful one you had to be, you had to have- you had to be quite alert. Had to have very alert. And, uh, you had and all your signals and all that, your train where you'd get signals to go up or go forwards or go backwards or whatever you wanted to have, you had to have...

MD: And you're trying to regulate all those-

WF: You had to regulate it. You'd have a, the boiler itself would be about two hundred pounds per square inch. Plus or minus a little bit, y'know, you might be at two hundred and fifty if it was a real classy one of it might be a hundred and seventy-five if it wasn't so- we got a lot of military equipment up here at, and it was- all the 550s, they was all military, and they shipped 'em to Alaska. And so most of those was just, just, plain old steam locomotives, but, and they hand-fired, you had to use, you used the sh- shovels to fire 'em. And it was difficult- hard work. It was hard work. It wasn't- I don't like to lie, but I think that you probably had to average ten or twelve ton per day, shoveling. And so that ten or twelve tons, standing up on rough riding locomotives, it was a challenge! But you got accustomed to it and you didn't mind it, y'know. And of course then I was, like I said, promoted in the spring of '48. So I was a locomotive engineer and I got away from that sh-shoveling as much as possible.

MD: The, um, the cabs were open?

WF: The cabs were open, generally, but they had, they had curtains.

MD: Oh. And was it hot, or cold, or? What was the temperature like?

[01:37:05:00]

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WF: Inside the- oh, it was comfortable, they had steam, uh, steam radiators all around the whole room. The engineers, engineers and firemen, the cabins, even at fifty and sixty below zero, the cab itself was comfortable. You wouldn't think it would be but it is.

MD: How long would it take to make the run from Anchorage to Fairbanks with the steam on?

WF: Well, it used to be, uh the regular train would meet the Alaska Steamship Company, Steamship and Seward. And they would load there- and there was no

highways, so you had- it was all the Alaska Railroad, got all the, all the trade, there was no airlines, and, and the Alaska Railroad would load up the passengers and I would imagine they averaged two hundred and fifty to three hundred passengers. And I would load 'em at Seward, come to Anchorage and unload as many as wanted to get off at Anchorage, and then they would go back and get all of their things, get supplies, and then they would go to Curry, and Curry was, had, was the halfway point. They'd stop at Curry overnight. And there's a beautiful hotel, absolutely grumtious, hardwood floors, and it was first-class, y'know. Harding stayed there in 1940- 1923. And he got a big plaque on the wall where he had stayed here at, on that date. And Harding was the- and I used to- you don't need to put this down, but when I was supervisor, I come through there, they thought that I was a big shot, I was a big shot, y'know, so they gave me the president's room all the time. (laughs) That was.

MD: What was the president's room like at the Curry Hotel?

WF: It was, it was a beautiful room. It was the biggest one there, probably. And it had, y'know, dressers and modern, good-lookin' dressers, and mirrors, and it had that plaque on the wall, and it had a good view of the big Susitna River, looked out onto the big Susitna River, so it was, it was, it was not second-class.

MD: Yeah.

WF: It was, it was a very, it had a good, good, good, it had a ni- good accommodations.

BCJ: Let me cut us right there, can we cut the camera for a second?

[01:39:48:00]

[00:23:08]

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WF: And someday they will, they will discover that that is a jewel that they haven't developed. And they should develop it, because its, its, its worth everything they'd put into it.

[01:40:02:00]

[00:00:13]

MD: We're talking, we're talking about the Curry Hotel at the lookout, if you could explain how you went from the hotel to the lookout and what was there when you got there?

WF: Ok, to get to the hotel you would cross a swingin' bridge, you had a swingin' bridge there. It jumped from one side of the big Su to the other. And then you zigzagged back and forth up to, to- its about six miles, I think. And it was a good trail. Sometimes it would get a little sloppy, if the rain was there it was a little sloppy, but it was- it was tolerable, everything was tolerable. More than tolerable. Then you get up there and you realize its breathtaking. Whoo! It was a beautiful scene, and, uh, and the lookout itself was a unique little old building, that Sydney Lawrence thought was good enough to paint, so he painted there. I don't know how many pictures, but its several pictures he did, painted there.

MD: What was- what did the building look like?

WF: Its, its probably twenty feet across, and six, six, six-sided, its six-sided, and all windows all the way around. Yeah. And that's- so its just- its just for what its meant for, to observe, to look out. And nobody I don't think stayed overnight there to speak of, they'd walk up and they'd walk back. Which was a, deman- pretty demanding. And it was ok though, but I walked up there. When I was stationed at Curry I'd walk up there. On your day off you had nothing better to do except play poker. (laughs) And it was more profitable walking up to the lookout. Yeah. So, anyway, that's, that's, that's it. And maybe someday we can get some political power and get something going on that.

MD: Um, how did you meet Colleen, your wife?

WF: She was- she had been at McKinley Park for a year, and then they shut it down. The military took over and they shut it down, and she moved- then she came to Curry, and I met her at Curry. And I knew her brother. She had two brothers up here, and I knew 'em both, they was nice guys. Anyway I met her then at a dance, the first, first dance that they had, they had a little dance hall there at Curry. A log cabin. It was a nice one, they had a big, big potbellied stove in it too. But it had hardwood floors. Nice dance hall, really. And I met her there and I was, I out-waltzed the best of them. So (laughs) And we were married- it was not too long after that. Probably about three months. And we decided we would be- hook up and we did. And, uh, came to town and got married. She had been married once before, which is all, y'know fine.

MD: And, now, did she travel around with you to these various places, or did she-

WF: No, she stayed there. And I stayed there with her. When she was working there we stayed at the hotel. Well, not all the time. We got a Quonset hut there, if you, if there was one available you could get it, and so we, our last three months at Curry was in a Quonset hut. Which was, which was alright, y'know. It was meant for, for, y'know, transit mostly, but all of 'em had wives, all of 'em that had a Quonset hut they had a wife. And they had a roundhouse, y'know. Roundhouse, steam locomotive to service the steam locomotive, coaled 'em up and watered 'em up and greased 'em up, and got 'em ready to go to Fairbanks, y'know.

[01:44:03:00]

[00:04:14]

MD: Could you actually- turn 180 degrees in the roundhouse?

WF: No, it was just called that, it had different, different, the only roundhouse that had that I think was in Anchorage.

MD: Yeah.

WF: And they did have one, yeah.

MD: And, um, so, when did you finally settle in Anchorage?

WF: Well, it was in '53, I think it was. Fifty, fifty- '53 or '54. Yeah, I came- we came into Anchorage and we, uh, rented, rented a place over here at Elmen- at the, I don't know what it was then- they had the new apartments-

MD: Richardson Vista?

WF: Richardson- that's where we rented, yeah. And of course we tried, tried to get a Quonset hut and eventually we did. We, uh, when one came up from sale I bid on a Quonset hut that had, it had, it was a nice- it had all the facilities you would ever want, y'know. Has a bathroom and a good kitchen and two bedrooms. And so we, uh, we got, we got that, and I remember, uh, he wanted six thousand five hundred dollars for the Quonset hut, y'know, and the lot. And Colleen my wife said "I'll give you five thousand cash" and so we wound up with a five thousand dollar home. And that's what this place was.

MD: It was on this lot?

WF: It was on this lot, right, right, yeah. The Quonset hut was back there where the garage is. And when we built the house we built it right here. And eventually moved out of the Quonset hut into here. And here we sit since, since, I think it was '58. I think it was completed- our home was completed in '58. And it has been a good home. Excellent home.

MD: What was Government Hill like in the fifties?

[01:46:11:00]

[00:06:23]

WF: Early fifties it was almost all, all railroad, you'd consider it a railroad town, y'know. 'Cause all- you could walk to work. In the shops and, and you could walk to work for the, for the yard, yard work. Y'know, the people in the yard who shuffle

cars around. But it was, it was, this was- I would say it was 95%, uh, railroad. And of course then the one- the houses down on the bluff was the mayor, and those- they, they went pretty high. It was pretty hard to get a hold of, y'know. And let's see. Brown's Point. He was, he was living there, he and Ellie, he was still there. And you'd see him walking up and down with his dog, and he was a character. And so was she, so was she. She'd go up town and get half-swacked but she'd never get awfully drunk, she'd just get half-swacked and everybody would buy her a beer, y'know. Everybody but Nellie Brown would buy her a beer, y'know. 'Cause she was, she was a- she had lots of stories to tell and she was entertaining. And so, so she was. And this went on for I don't know how long, y'know. 'Til they both died.

MD: What- what kind of stores and shops and so forth did you have up here, in the business district of Government Hill?

WF: You had, you had, the, government hill itself had a little, had stores where they, where the, uh, the, where it is right today, right there on Government Hill. They had a store, and they had quite a good- they had a drugstore and a clothing store and a grocery store, and it was quite a nice little, little shopping center, I thought. And it was convenient for me, I could walk over and get groceries and walk back, y'know. It was very good and it was well-maintained and nice, and I kinda miss it 'cause its gone now, deteriorated a little bit. Its gone, its got quite a few little, little, uh, tax-free religious organizations there. (laughs)

MD: Was this the main gate for Elmendorf?

WF: Yes it was, yeah. It was, yeah. It was, it was, it was a busy place, yeah. The highway. They didn't have the bridge of course, because they went down through the railroad, y'know, across and over the railroad with a bump-bump-bump. (laughs) but it was ok. It was no big deal.

MD: We always suspected you guys trained slowing down as you went across C Street because the traffic would back up so bad there.

WF: (laughs) Yeah, yeah. It was.

MD: And then, um, Anchorage itself, as a city. I mean, um, how has it changed from '42 to '53 I guess?

[01:49:35:00]

[00:09:47]

WF: I, I was, that's quite a story unto itself, its- Anchorage was, uh, the railroad town. And everything in Anchorage was owned by the Alaska Railroad. The water, water, and lights, and sewer and everything was owned by the Alaska Railroad. And they- you were billed by the Alaska Railroad. And no matter who you was. And, uh, they managed it very well, I think. The railroad was well managed by the- I mean the city

utilities was well maintained by the Alaska Railroad. And of course y'know the history of that, selling off the telephones and the water and this and that. Through the political skulldogery- skullduggery. I think it was, yeah. yeah, Anchorage. Now, what was your question the first time?

MD: How, how- what changes- (inaudible)

WF: Well, when I first came here it was with, with, with the Capsticks, y'know, you think you should buy something but the, the old-timers from the 1950s on, the conductors and engineers, they had homes, and, but, the word was, "Anchorage is going to be a ghost town. Don't buy nothing here because as soon as the military pulls out, Anchorage is gonna be a ghost town". And we took it for the truth. And, 'cause these people were- was intelligent people. They were conductors and engineers, y'know. And they, every one of them, soon as they retired they pulled stakes and left Alaska. And that's- so none of us wanted any property here, y'know. We didn't- we didn't, didn't invest, y'know, thinkin' that. And there was a, there was a law on the books that if you worked for the Department of the Interior, you could not homestead. So none of the- none of the engineers and conductors like myself was not available- homesteading was not available to us. And so we, we bypas- we, we bypass another fortune. (laughs) And so that was that. But that's the big thing. The people who lived here assumed it was gonna become a ghost town because the military leave, which is reasonable, y'know, the war's over. And, but, it just reversed itself, it started- it got money for the bases and the Air Force, and Fairbanks got the money, and they they started just building up! And Alaska started building in the late, mid- late fifties, y'know. That's when they started Anchorage decided to be- they were gonna be a big town. And that's how it was.

BCJ: Can I interject for a second? Do you think cold war? Y'know, the reasoning behind the military-

MD: Oh. The reason it built up. Yeah.

BCJ The reason the military spending remained was that likely to be Cold War issues with the proximity to the Soviet Union?

WF: Say that-

MD: I mean, why, why do you think the military stuck it out here? Or built up rather than going away (inaudible)

[01:53:06:00]

[00:13:18]

WF: That's a heck of a good question. Cause I, I don't think that the Cold War was on. I, uh, Maybe it was? It was strictly military though, y'know? It was, it was, that's who brought the money in here and built the, built the runways and improved the

runways, and, um, done everything. But it was the military that did it. And I don't know- I can't tell you that there was a big- it didn't seem to me like anyone was fearful of being invaded by the Russians, it didn't seem like the Russians was, was, was a concern. Not to the average guy like myself. But it was, it must have been the military must have, must have already had- the word must have been out, the Cold War was on. They was going to take Anchorage over, y'know. They figured it was, it was once upon a time Russia and it was gonna go back to Russia. That's, uh.

MD: You mentioned that you were able to walk almost everywhere from up here.

WF: Absolutely.

MD: And, uh, what kind of car did you get? When did you get a car?

WF: Oh, I got one pretty early, I got an old Nash, an old Nash that was a six-cylinder Nash, probably a 1940, early- or late, probably '38 or '39. A Nash. An old six-cylinder. It was a good car. But it was a- and I still walked a lot. I, I I don't know why, because you just- you, uh. It was, now that's a good question.

MD: Where could you take the car?

WF: I could take it over, over, we could go as far as Potter. And we- then we'd go all the way to Willow. But Wasilla was generally where you couldn't go any further than that. 'Cause there was an old one-way road from Wasilla to Willow. And that's as far as you could go. And then of course it went over the pass up to the Independence Mine.

MD: Right.

WF: But that's, it was- and then in '51 or '52 they got the appropriation for building the Seward Highway, and it was a whole huckity- buck affair. In the old- Morris-Knutson came in there. And I was on a work train, working with Morris-Knutson for, all the summer of- I think it was summer of '50, probably, y'know. 1950 or '51. Yeah.

MD: They were using the railroad to deliver gravel and supplies?

WF: Oh yeah, oh yeah. yeah. The railroad went, went, followed the, followed 'em down, y'know. And, uh, yeah. It was, it was, it was done by the railroad. And, and, mostly parallel, y'know, but there was some places you had to get away, get away from the one way or the other for a little ways, but generally it was all, it was together, yeah.

[01:56:24:00]

[00:16:37]

MD: What'd people think about the idea that they could drive all the way to Seward?

WF: I don't think that-

MD: Were they excited?

WF: I don't think that they really, I don't think that they really thought too much about it, y'know. I really don't think it was a necessity. Uh, but once you got the idea you had, you had to go through with it, y'know. That they, they had- I don't remember anything big ballyhoo, that, that there's gonna be a road, y'know, whoopin' and hollerin'. There was nothin', nothin' like that, y'know. You going to Whittier they could load their cars on the, on the, on the, uh, flat cars and go in to Whittier if they wanted to, but Whittier, it was a long- Whittier was a long time coming.

MD: Yeah.

WF: It was, it was- there was no necessity for the, for the tunnel to be in there, y'know. Other than the military standpoint. And I just- now that's another good one, why did they, why did they continue going and all? Cause it was, they had- we'd go into Whittier with a, with a, with the passengers, and we'd load cars on flat cars and bring 'em to Anchorage, and the people too, y'know. It was a good, it was a good, it was a good, good service. And Whittier was a construction town too, it was kind of, kind of grubby. Y'know, until, until, until the military moved in there with, with force, y'know, and got the big Hodge building and the Buckner building and all the others. It was, it was kind of an out of the way place, y'know. But they, the military did some unusual things. They did the- and they did it first class! Boy, I tell ya, those buildings are beautiful.

MD: Yeah.

WF: Inside and- when they was first new they were beautiful. They got a great view of the Sound, and they was lucky.

MD: Um, now where were you during the earthquake?

[01:58:48:00]

[00:19:00]

WF: I was right here sitting right on this floor. Right there. And it was quite an experience, y'know. It was, uh, it was started shaking and juggling and bangin' banging round, y'know. And what I remember- I had my daughter was sitting on my lap, and she was screaming, she was scared. But this big, this big watertower out here, luckily it was- didn't have any water in it. But it was flopping back and forth twenty feet, y'know. From the center line it would flop plop plop twenty feet at least, y'know. And this, this highway here was like a rolling ocean. Ten feet high rolls,

y'know. In the, in the right out here in front. It was, it was violent. And it was, it was concerned, y'know. It was, it was really quite a, quite a, quite a thing, that earthquake. And of course, my being with the railroad, I- the railroad wanted, y'know, to get everything- it was trains out on the Seward Highway- or Seward, uh, going and coming in from Whittier, and they had a train stalled in Girdwood. And north there was a couple of trains stalled.

And the railroad- I felt I had to go to the railroad. I went down to the railroad, and my wife was of course with the bank. And all the, all the, the lighting had come down on the floor and all the shelves had unloaded. And it was a terrible mess. The bank was, y'know.

MD: Yeah.

WF: And we had two or three houses- we had the school over here torn in half, in two, and it was- but thank goodness it was vacant at the time. And there was three homes, one by the bank, a couple over here, they went over like the bank, y'know, they split open. But it, uh, it was it was surprising how, how quickly the railroad responded to, uh, to the needs. They called up Washington, and apparently they must have got immediately the authority to rebuild the railroad, because I think the following day they had cats and bulldozers out on Potter fl- Potter Hill, which had sloughed away. They was workin' on that almost immediately. And the railroad didn't hesitate, and apparently congress had told 'em "get, get going" on repairs. And they did. They done an excellent job. The railroad did an excellent job of supplying Anchorage, yeah.

MD: How soon were you able to get to Seward?

WF: A year.

MD: Yeah.

WF: It was terribly tore up. Y'know, Seward was- I went down there the day after that, the people was just scared to death, they didn't know- and it woulda been, y'know, you looked out here, that's the end of the railroad, it went into, into the ocean. And I think there was three hundred cars went into there, into the ocean. Three, and eight of 'em was full of fuel! The Coast Guard went out there and shot the tops of them off and they sunk, y'know, so, and that's where they are today.

MD: Yeah.

[02:02:16:00]

[00:22:29]

WF: Yeah. But they did everyth- they did an excellent job getting, getting barges and getting cranes, and getting, getting things moving, y'know. And of course Seward

was isolated, really, until after they get, they got, they got the road built, rebuilt, y'know. It was isolated. And Whittier, of course, it was- Whittier didn't suffer so much. All the big buildings stood up. They stood up and there was no big amount of damage, y'know. And the Union Oil had a terminal there, they had, but they, there was no big, no, nothing, Whittier, Whittier, y'know, and the tunnel, you'd expect it to be tore all to pieces. There was two or three big rocks in the middle of the tunnel, but that's all. It was, it was back in shape the following day, the tunnel. And its still good, y'know. I think that'll be one of the, one of the places that's gonna be there forever, y'know. Yeah. There is a big fissure though, they know it, y'know. It comes out of Whittier and goes over the, over the hill and comes back down twenty mile. And that's, that's gonna, its gonna- I've heard sayin' that the Kenai Peninsula will be an island. (laughs)

MD: Yeah.

WF: As soon as that breaks away. 'Cause its already broken away like this, y'know, it broke away, and there's, you can see where, where there's a potential there where the Kenai Peninsula can be an island. Yeah. If you get another big earthquake like we had it could settle, y'know. Because all those mountains and everything moved, shift one way or the other down, y'know, they shift several feet, y'know, seven or eight feet. I think Whittier, or I think Portage dropped seven or eight feet, y'know. Yeah.

MD: Um, what was it like raising a family in Anchorage? This was in 1950s. Did you have things to do?

WF: I think that, I think that Anchorage schools is excellent. And, uh, the, uh, we had Government Hill, y'know, and then after Government Hill you had, you had- after you got graduated from the grade school you went out to West High, that was the two schools. And they was, I think that Anchorage schools was, was well managed, y'know, even during the earthquake or after the earthquake, I think. They got the kids back to school as quick as they could. And I, so I take my hat off to 'em. All the districts, y'know.

MD: Uh, were you involved one way or the other with statehood? I mean, what was the mood like when we became a state?

[02:05:07:00]

[00:25:20]

WF: From statehood?

MD: What, what do you remember about kinda the way people were feeling and talking?

WF: I, uh, statehood was, was as controversial as it can possibly be. The Natives was 100% against it. And several real important people like, uh, like our governor, uh,

Hammond. He was opposed to it, and brutally, really against it. And it had come up three different times before it passed. And they was overwhelmed with propaganda, y'know. The, our paper, uh, he said- I remember one, one article he said- "If ya, if you vote against statehood you're a communist". (laughs) He was really, he was really- but lots of people was opposed to statehood. I would, well y'know, it failed bad, three different times. Two different times. It was not a very popular thing. We coulda done without statehood very easily. So. Like, I don't know. People who was in the know, uh, figured it would be exploited. And it has been. I, I think. That's my personal opinion.

MD: How so?

WF: Well, uh, there's, there's a good question, "how so?" Uh...

MD: If we remained a territory, how might things be different?

WF: I think it would have been- I don't know it would have remained. It was doomed to go, it had, it had to go political. It had, had to be a statehood, that's all there was to it. They was, it had to be.

MD: Yeah.

WF: Cause. Yeah. It was designed that way.

MD: And then there was a while there after statehood where people were reconsidering if it was such a good idea, too. Um, I guess, up until about the pipeline. What, what were- how were you involved with the pipeline? What was the railroad having you do when that came through?

WF: Well the railroad and the pipeline, y'know, the- I remember we hauled train loads and train loads of the pipe, and we hauled it to Fairbanks. And then they unloaded it, y'know, and it went both ways from there. But, uh, the railroad was deeply involved. They hauled all the bridge material, the Yukon Bridge, they hauled, they hauled everything, y'know. Fairbanks was the, was the headquarters for the pipeline, really, y'know. And they went both directions from then. But, um, the railroad I think was, went along with the whole works, y'know. The railroad, they had to go along with what was- they had approved it, y'know, they didn't- nobody, there was no fighting against, against the pipeline in the Alaska Railroad, thinking we'd lose customers or something. There was no such thing as that, no. So its.

[02:08:38:00]

[00:28:51]

MD: Tell me about these mittens up here on the wall. you have a pair of, uh, cold weather mittens.

WF: Well that is, those- and I got some, some moccasins that goes with that- but that was, I met a girl in Teslin, and her father and mother I met them, and her brother. She had I think the only cabin on Teslin. And they, uh, this doctor that was teaching us fellows how to become first aid attendants, he was, he was quite a conniver, and he'd steal- pardon me. We'd steal stuff out of the mess hall, hams or turkeys or anything, and would give 'em to the, to the Natives there. And they apprec- and that's how I met Pearl. She, she, and they had the dogs, and it was a remote old cabin, y'know. Fireplace was a big, big stone fireplace, yeah. And he was a, he was a Frenchman and she was a Native. And she was, she was, she was, she did most of the work. But it was, it was, that was the only people I met. And I did, I met, made an effort to meet her. And so I, I, every time I'd go by Teslin I'd stop and give them something or say hello, y'know. And she's still in Whitehorse, and she lives on the bank of the Yukon right now. And she, she comes, well, she hasn't been here for two years. But she normally comes over, flies over during the Rendezvous, and she, and she's, she's a, she's a big shot in her community. She's a, she's a, one of the big bosses, I don't know what they call them. They got a name for 'em. They, uh, the groups that manage, manage the Yukon.

MD: Right.

WF: Yeah, she's one of 'em.

MD: Interesting. The, uh-

WF: But anyway, she built, she built that, she built that. And she was telling me that they still use the method of, of tanning that they did during the 40s. Apparently they chew the leather. That's what I understand, y'know. And they, so that, she says this is original, this stuff is original. So that's.

MD: Did you ever have- you mentioned you lived on K Street- I guess Providence, Old Providence was on L?

WF: Yeah.

MD: Did you ever have business over there? Either visiting people or a patient yourself?

WF: Oh, I- on L Street- we didn't have a whole lot. We had, no, let me see, how did that work out? Yeah, I had a doctor. Doctor Casey, he was one of our doctors, he had, he had a, his business was in the old hot- in the old hospital.

[02:12:04:00]

[00:32:18]

MD: Right.

WF: Yeah. And he's gone now, just about a year ago, I guess it was. He was one of the old-timers.

MD: When you, uh, when you worked running a locomotive, what did you do for recreation?

WF: For recreation we didn't- you didn't- you worked. It was sixteen hours a day was a normal day.

MD: Yeah.

WF: And so by the time you got through shoveling coal and working 16 hours a day, you didn't need a lot of recreation. But you did- there was always a poker game going at Curry or Healy. Or a crap game. And they, they was a- both places had a small dance hall. And they had dances on a Saturday night, y'know.

MD: A live band?

WF: No. Oh no, oh no no. They were just a recording, yeah. But it was a, it was- you really, you really didn't suffer from lack of recreation. You didn't feel like you were isolated at Curry or Healy. You was not. You, it was, it was, it was...

MD: Well, when you had the family, what did your family n Anchorage do to kill time?

WF: Well my wife worked almost all the time. And her mother came up here and stayed with us for at least half the year all the time. And the kids would- Ruth went to school here, and of course Gail was just a small toddler. She was- but we, recreational? We didn't suffer from lack of- and they did have a teenage club here at the time.

MD: Mmhmm.

WF: And they had dances on Saturday nights. And it was a nice, its still a nice little building.

MD: Mmhmm.

[02:13:55:00]

[00:34:09]

WF: And I understand they're going to tear it down to accommodate this bridge, but I hope they don't. (laughs) I'm opposed to that too.

MD: The Knick Arm Crossing?

WF: How's that?

MD: The Knick Arm Crossing, is that what you mean? The bridge across to-

WF: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's it.

MD: yeah.

WF: Yeah, comin' across here and then comin' down here, that's what they're talking about. I'm, it'll go, it will happen someday, though. The bridge is gonna be built. Because it has to be, its just. Its a natural. They should have had, they should have a bridge across it. Even though I oppose it, y'know.

MD: And um...that's most of what we needed to cover. Um, what- any of the characters you worked with in the railroad or in Anchorage-

BCJ: Let me cut the camera while you prepare that question.

[00:00:00:00]

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[02:15:01:00]

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BCJ: Can we ask that question again?

MD: Yeah, we'll start off there, right there.

BCJ: Are you rolling, Peter?

Peter Sheffer: Yeah.

BCJ: Ok.

MD: Um, did you meet Cap Lathrop?

[02:15:07:00]

[00:00:08]

WF: Yes, I knew him personally. I met him up at his mine, and he used the railroad of course, when there was no road, road into Fairbanks. He always used what they called a squaw cage, y'know. (laughs) It was a small, it was a caboose- not a caboose, it was a coach on the tail end of all the trains, Healy and Fairbanks. And it would accommodate the local people. And he would, he was on it a number of times. And

he was a very, he's awfully smart, and he was a conversationalist, y'know. And he would, I remember tellin', he was talkin' to two or three guys "you ought quit this railroad and go to work for yourselves", y'know. 'Cause he was, he wanted them to go to work for the mine. But he, I remember that statement. He says, "you oughta quit this railroad, y'know and go to work". And go to work, yeah, yeah. But he was a, was a highly intelligent man. Really and, and a financier, y'know. He had lots of money. And I don't know its quite as- he could build 4th Avenue Theatre, y'know, during the war, cause it was during the war he did that, yeah. And that's still a beautiful building. And he, he financed it. And I don't know how in the world he did it, but he did. And he wouldn't tell ya. (laughs) But. And he, and he had a tug and barge operation in Cook Inlet, y'know. And he would, Hope, I remember Hope was one of his stop offs, y'know. And he was, he was a personable guy, but he was awfully smart.

MD: Did he, did he dress upscale?

WF: Always, he always had, he always had a tie on, I think. He always had a, he always looked sharp. He had a dark hat, y'know, a good old black hat. And he, yeah, he was sharp, he was. He'd look sharp, y'know. And he was, and he acted it. He was, he was, he was, one of the, he was one of the lucky people we had. He was, he made a great contribution to Alaska. So. If you knew Cap Lathrop you were pretty lucky to have made his acquaintance. And y'know the reason I did was because the old squaw cage on the tail end of these freight trains, it was, he had to use 'em, whether he liked it or not. Yeah.

MD: Um, if you were to make a guess about the future of Anchorage- I mean you've seen it go from nearly nothing to a time when people said it would go back to being a ghost town, to what we see today- what do you think it might look like in the future? What would you tell people about Anchorage, I guess?

WF: Well, that Anchorage, Anchorage has, its, its going to, its gonna become a big city. And you're gonna see a great deal of mining, and you're going to see a great deal of fishing, of course, commercial. But its going to be- mining will be the big thing. And its gonna come from cross, cross the big Su in the Prince William, Prince William Sound. And, uh, and, uh, that's, but its gonna develop. The gold mine over there they're opposing so bad, its gonna happen. It has to happen. And it will happen correctly. It won't be haphazard. It'll be a first-class mine. And no earthquake or nothing else can stop it from developing into a proper- it will be done properly. And there'll be no fish involved, y'know, it won't hurt the fishing, it won't hurt any, any, because they'll make sure it doesn't. If they can't do it safely they won't be, it won't, won't be done. But it will be done because there's just too much money involved. Three hundred and fifty billion dollars worth of gold and silver, or copper.

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MD: And some of that's going to come back through Anchorage.

WF: Its gonna all come through here, yeah. Right. As soon as this bridge here goes up, you're gonna see a road right down, its gonna go all the way to the Prince, not the Prince, to the Bay, y'know-

MD: Bristol Bay?

WF: Bristol Bay, its gonna go to Bristol Bay. It has to. And that's probably. There's probably plans already made to do that. Y'know. Because crossing the big Susitna River is nothing and all. A few pilings and so forth. But that's they're only obstruction, they can just go right on down, down, they'll be. Its, and it will happen. And Anchorage will be the financial heart of it all. I believe.

MD: What's been the best thing about living in Alaska for you?

WF: Uh-

MD: You said you got to (inaudible)

WF: Yeah, I'll tell you what; Alaska's been very, very good to me. I've always had a good job, always had a good home, I've had, I've had good friends, and I've- Anchorage, you couldn't, you couldn't have found a better place to live. Its- the schools are excellent schools, and their financial institutions are well managed, y'know, and all- its a well managed city. And it has been for, y'know, ever since I've been here. Of course you had the Rasmusons and then you had, had, the First National Bank.

MD: Mmhmm.

WF: You had the two big banks here, and they, they managed, managed, they kept the money flowing. And that's what it took, y'know. And its still, still available, and anybody's got a good idea they can get the money to fulfill those ideas. I think. Anchorage is gonna be another Chicago. That's what it'll be. But you got a good transportation into Whittier. And into Seward. And then north, everything north of here. You got everything you need to, to progress.

MD: yeah.

WF: And Anchorage will progress. It can't help it. That's my opinion. (laughs)

MD: Well very good.

WF: Well-

MD: Do you have anything else to add?

[02:22:25:00]

[00:07:26]

WF: I really don't have, I wish I had more to- there's a lot of little incidents, y'know, that happens. Like, I was thinking of that the other day. I was at Adak and there was this- all men, there was just all men there, there's nobody else but, and its all construction or Seabees or something. But into Adak came a big boat. And on it is lumber from Russia. And the crew was Russian women. And they got a lot of attention. (laughs) They was well versed on how to handle Americans. They paid no attention to 'em, they kept on working. But they surely, surely did get a lot of- those boats there were loaded with nothing but big timber, big Russian timber. And then I, I think the captain was a Russian, Russian man, but that's the only one on board. I think the rest of 'em was all women, yeah. And they was well versed in how to conduct themselves, yeah. They didn't get lost on Adak. (laughs) Yeah, it was, it was, I remember there was a whole lot of whistling, trying to get their attention and so forth. (laughs) But it didn't happen. That's one little story, y'know, I shouldn't even mention 'cause its not worth this, this here.

MD: Oh, those are exactly the kind of stories we're actually looking for.

WF: (laughs) Yeah, well, that's one of the little incidents that happens, yeah. The Russian girls on, on their ships. And their, their ability to be ignore, to ignore the men. (laughs) Yeah, but they was just like men, they was hard workin' people. Nothin', and they was versed on, "you're going to be, you're going to get a lot of attention girls, so behave". Yeah. That's one little, little, little one. But there was lots of.

MD: Anything else like that on the top of your mind?

WF: no, no, not, let's see, what in the world would be another one? Y'know, meeting the, meeting the girls on, on the Teslin, I think that was one of the benefits, that I was, that I got to meet her. And her parents. I think that was one of the highlights of my times on the Alcan Highway. Yeah. And of course.

MD: Were you working on the Alcan when they actually pushed it through, when they made the connection?

WF: I, they had already made the connection when I got there.

MD: I see.

WF: But it was a, was a mudhole in the fall of the year, in '43, they lost a lot of, sunk out of sight, y'know. It was a terrible piece of machinery. And I left Whitehorse on a military bus. And it was in the fall of '43, and we pushed that bus more than it hauled us. We was pushing it up and down hills. It was stuck so many times.

[02:26:05:00]

[00:11:06]

MD: The bus went from Whitehorse to, uh, Dawson?

WF: Just to Whitehorse, that was it. Yeah. And I guess it was kind of a regular business, but it was a military bus.

MD: Mmhmm.

WF: And we got to, to, Fort St. John, and they, uh, lots of girls, Canadian girls there. And I remember we have a schottische and the polkas being played, and when we got off the bus we was dirty up to our knees with mud, and when they playin' this I remember seeing, you could hardly see the people underneath them for the dust flying. It was (laughs) dust flyin' all over that place, but they was dancing and beatin' heck. Yeah, they had, had a great time that first evening. Yeah. Now you had to live to be there, to be a, to understand, here they are a bunch of wild guys who hadn't seen a woman for a year, and they go to them Canadian girls, they was havin' just as much fun as we was, y'know.

MD: (laughs)

WF: But it was a fact that the dust was at least six feet deep, y'know, the dust flying off the floor from jumpin' up and down, their polkas and their schottische y'know, their dancing. That's one thing, and I don't know. I met-

MD: How many does did it take to get from Whitehouse to Fort St. John?

WF: Well, the road was in.

MD: The road was in, but, I mean-

WF: Yeah, well, there was, we got on a train there.

MD: Mmhmm.

WF: And we went, went the rest of the way on trains into Seattle. But then, then of course our jobs was terminated in Seattle and we could do what we wanted to do, so. Yeah, it was a, it was a great time to live, by the way. If you, if you had any adventure in your soul, during the big war, Alaska was the place to be. (laughs) You could do anything you was big enough to do. Yeah, so. But you had to be kind of careful. You might be challenged. (laughs) Yeah, but it was. There was, uh, oh, I could tell you some stories, but they would not be fit to be shown. Yeah, that's.

[02:28:47:00]

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MD: Some of the men were belligerent?

WF: Oh, I yeah, but I, you had to be kind of careful, y'know. You, if you wanted to get in a fight you could get in a fight in a second, y'know. But I, y'know, I, I never had any big- there's another story I shouldn't, shouldn't tell, though. I, uh-

BCJ: I would suggest you be cautious, if you don't want the world to see it, better, best not to tell it.

WF: Yeah, there you go.

BCJ: (laughs)

WF: But this was- they had a, on the 4th of July 1943 they had a, they had a big, big, two weeks before that they had fistfights in the ring. But, uh. And they was, y'know, each company would have a, have a representative. Uh, and so the 4th July I told them I'd, I'd box for the Dal Construction in the welterweights So we, I, uh, I probably (laughs) anyway, they got up there and this was the guy I fought was a, they called him "The rugged Polack", and he worked for the Utah Construction. And we, we had a big fight, a good fight, y'know, and I won. Because I was raised with three brothers and we all had- we put on gloves- we knew how to box, y'know. Or fight, whatever you wanna call it. But I won, I was the championship of the Yukon in the welterweight for a very short while. (laughs) So. There's nothing to brag about, but there must have been five thousand people watching that, watching the fights, y'know, 'cause they didn't have nothin' better to do. And it was 4th July night, y'know. There, now that's that. Its not worth, its not worth, its not worth tellin' or seein' without you was there. Y'know. That's all there is to it.

MD: Some of us weren't there, we need to hear it from someone else.

WF: (laughs) Yeah, it was.

MD: I know what you mean though.

[02:31:13:00]

[00:16:15]

WF: Yeah. I met some interesting people, Mrs. Um, Mac- oh, what in the world. I'll think of her name. Her, she had a lodge north, north of 108, up on- and she run, managed this lodge. MacIntosh. Mrs. MacIntosh. A big tall, quite attractive woman, but in her 40s or 50s. And she'd married a mounted police. And I- to get to know her, to listen to her tell the stories about Alaska and the, and the people she they had guided, for the big times guides bring people into their, to their lodge, y'know. And she was, she was worth listening to, y'know. She was one of those very interesting

people, y'know. And I met her in the, after, even after leaving the Alcan Highway I come back through there, in 1953 I think it was, she was still there. And I think she passed on shortly thereafter. But she was tellin' about the Natives, all the Natives up on Klu Lake, they had a big, big scourge by smallpox or I don't know what it was, but it killed a lot of Natives there at Klu Lake. And they had a village there, and I got to look, and the highway bypassed the lake by about five miles. And so I got to, I and the superintendent went out there, took an old D-8 cat, and we would follow that trail out to the old Klu Lake Lodge. It was a bunch of cabins, and they had been all abandoned by the- the indians left there completely because they were dying off, all of them were dying off. And remember, it was 1937 when the big scourge went through there. I don't know what, if it was smallpox or what kind of- it was something. One of those real contagious, y'know, disease that would go through there. But anyway they left their cabins and their, they left even, there was two or three sleds that was left on top of a building, on one of the buildings. They left their sleds and the whole thing. Got in their canoes and left. And I don't know where they went to. But there- it was here, there was one old guy that was still, still hanging around there, he said he was a gold miner, and he did have some gold in a, in a glass, glass container. He did have some, and he was bragging about that, y'know. But he was the only one in the village.

MD: Did you encounter Nellie Lawing? Alaska Nellie?

WF: Say that again?

MD: Alaska Nellie? Lawing?

WF: Yeah, yeah. I met her, but just incidentally. I was at that time they stopped there, y'know, they stopped the train there and they visited, and she would sell knickknacks, y'know, and so forth and so on. Yeah, she's, she's still there, Lawing is still there. I don't know if her, her building is there or not. But I just image it is.

MD: Mmhmm.

WF: But she was one of the people who managed one of the lodges, there'd be a lodge, and the next one would be a hundred, there'd be another lodge, and then, all of them had small lodges all the way into Anchorage, before the railroad came in, y'know. Yeah, Nellie, yeah, yeah. Lawing. Nellie Lawing. You should stop there and check. I haven't stopped there for thirty years, or forty years, but I should. I'm going, I'm going to go down to the races, 4th July races, and I'm gonna just stop and deliver these. But I know she's gone.

MD: Yeah.

[02:35:27:00]

[00:20:29]

WF: I know she's gone, many years ago.

MD: Yeah. The 50s I think.

WF: Yeah.

MD: So you're gonna take the train down? To Seward?

WF: I can. I, I have a pass. I can get on any train and ride anywhere, y'know. Free of charge. But I don't use it very often. I used it once last year, y'know. But it is a, the train is a wonderful way to go.

MD: Yeah.

WF: If you wanna go to, if you want a, want a nice place, got to Seward on the train. Going through the tunnels, and going up over that grade, and its in a remote area still, there's no highway, for thirty-five miles its just Alaska Railroad. And its well, its the best lookin', best, best, views, best lookin' of Alaska. You got the mountains and the glaciers and the streams and the tunnels. Its, its worth seein'. It really is, its. I, I advocate it. And of course I can, I can, I got a cou- a nephew down there, he's a skipper on one of the, one of the boats, one of the big.

MD: Yeah.

WF: And he's one of the better ones. He's, he's a, he's a good captain. Yeah.

MD: Very good. I think its time you made it for those, uh, sweet rolls you brought.

WF: Yeah, did he bring 'em?

MD: Yeah, I think.

WF: Well for heaven's sake!

[02:37:14:00]

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