

Interview of Opal Meyers by Mike Dunham
Transcript

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Mike Dunham: My name is Mike Dunham. I'm interviewing Opal Myers at her home in the Fountains in downtown Anchorage, Alaska. The date is June 22nd, 2013. Um, Opal, we're recording these conversations to try and get some memories about early Anchorage, and your personal experiences here. They remain confidential until such time as you choose to release them. And you don't need to answer all the questions that I may ask, but just talk about what you know. And when we get tired, we're done.

Opal Meyers: Ok.

MD: That's, uh, basically the rules on it. If we could start with your start. Where were you born and when?

OM: I was born in 1922, in Ceylon, Saskatchewan.

MD: And what did you parents-

OM: Canada. Pardon?

MD: What did your parents do?

OM: My father was a rancher, farmer. We moved from there to Montana and he did mostly just farming there.

MD: When did you come to Alaska?

OM: My husband and I came up here in 1952.

MD: How did you meet- what is your husband's name?

OM: Mickey.

MD: Mickey. And how did you meet him?

OM: We went to school together back in Montana. Our parents were good friends.

MD: So what brought you guys to Alaska.

OM: Uh, during the second World War, I got acquainted with a neighbor that moved in near me. And she was from Anchorage and always wanted to come back up here. So when the war ended, she and her husband took right off for Alaska, all the time begging us to come up here. On the way up the highway they were even calling us, "Oh, you just gotta get rid of everything, come to Alaska!" So we did. And loved it, I wouldn't leave for anything.

MD: How did you get here?

OM: We drove up. Up the highway. And it wasn't much of a highway either, believe me, back then.

MD: And how long did that take?

OM: I don't know. I think about it sometimes. A week, or something like that. But that is staying overnight in a - what did they call 'em then? They didn't call 'em motels or hotels, but, uh.

MD: Kind of a roadhouse situation?

OM: A roadhouse, that's what I was looking for.

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MD: Do you remember what you drove? What kind of vehicle did you have?

OM: Uh, boy. I did know but I don't know today.

MD: Was it a car or a pickup?

OM: A car. Yeah, we brought a brand new car. My, my parents- they weren't very happy about us moving up here, and they said, "If you're going, you're going in a new car. We want you starting over, we don't want you heading up that highway in something that might be questionable". So they helped us buy a new car and away we went.

MD: Did they think it was, uh, going to be a dangerous place for you to be? Or what were their objections?

OM: They- I don't think they objected, they were probably glad to get rid of us, I don't know. (laughs) I know I shouldn't say that, but.

MD: So did you come straight to Anchorage?

OM: Yes.

MD: Ad where did you- where did you live? What all did you do?

OM: Well, the friends that talked us into coming up here lived up on Government Hill. And they had a, an apartment let's say, in, in their basement. And we lived there until we could both get jobs. I had never worked before in my married life, and my husband agreed if we were gonna do all this we were gonna do it to make some money so we could own our own business, and we, we did that. And so I went to work as a waitress, and. There was a place called the Aleutian Gardens, where I went to work for. And this place had fabulous entertainment that they would bring up from Outside. Live entertainment and a live band, and, um.

MD: Who were some of the groups or performers you remember there?

OM: Pardon?

MD: Who were some of the performers that you remember at the Aleutian Gardens?

OM: Some of the performers.

MD: That they brought up- either main people from the lower forty-eight or local guys.

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[00:05:00]

OM: Oh. Eddie, Eddie Peabody I think.

MD: The banjo player?

OM: Mmhmm.

MD: Yeah.

OM: And, hmm. Boy I just don't remember.

MD: What were the customers like?

OM: Very-

MD: It was kind of an elite place as I recall.

OM: It was upscale. Linen table clothes, linen napkins, that sort of thing.

MD: And what did your husband do?

OM: My husband was a bartender, and soon as we saved enough money he was a bar owner. And I kept it eighteen years after he died. I didn't work in it, but I owned it, and did the hiring, firing. Collected the money.

MD: Was that the Pioneer?

OM: Mmhmm.

MD: What was- uh, 4th Avenue. What was, what was Anchorage like in 1952? What did you see when you came into the town?

OM: Well I didn't find it too different from Western Montana. I still don't, I mean, as far as the trees and the hillsides and what not its very much like home. And I've always loved it here. Uh, I didn't love living on Government Hill. There was no, no overpass at that time. And I worked a split shift and I spent all my life in that railroad yards waiting for trains to go by so I could scoot that car at least part way across some of those tracks and wait for the next opening. Because working a split shift you were back and forth. It wasn't handy. And when we were real busy at the Aleutian Gardens I just wouldn't go home after the lunch rush, I'd just stay there.

MD: Um, where did you get groceries? Where did you buy your groceries?

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OM: Well, after we moved off of Government Hill- we had an apartment in their house, there was- well I guess there still is a little shopping center up there.

MD: Right.

OM: We didn't buy a lot there, but as soon as we could move downtown, and that was in- well, not in this building at first. We lived over at 11th and A, and then here. Just the local groceries. There was one right on 9th Avenue. I forget the name of it, but there was a grocery store on the corner over there. But ever since then its been Carrs-

MD: Right.

OM: Or now mainly- what am I trying to say? The big one.

MD: Fred Meyers?

OM: Fred Meyers.

MD: Um, when did you move to 11th and A? How, how long-

OM: Well, we came up in '52- probably '55 or something like that.

MD: And when did you get the Pioneer? When did you buy the Pioneer?

OM: I'm not positive about this, but I think probably 1953, something like that.

MD: Before you moved?

OM: Oh yeah.

MD: Huh.

OM: Yeah.

MD: What was your house like on 11th and A?

OM: Pardon?

MD: Is- is the house still there on 11th and A?

[01:08:58:00]

[00:08:45]

OM: No, because they tore it down when they widened A Street. It was right on the corner.

MD: Oh, right. It was a lot more convenient to get to downtown from there?

OM: Not more convenient than this.

MD: (laughs)

OM: But more convenient than Government Hill.

MD: Government Hill. What, what about- what was there beyond 11th Street. What if you were to go past 11th, how soon would you come to the edge of town in the '50s?

OM: Going south?

MD: Yeah.

OM: Boy, I don't remember.

MD: Did you ever have much of a chance to get away from the downtown area, or were you pretty much working here the whole time?

OM: Well, we were pretty much all just downtown. Uh, the one that sticks in my mind the most is when Sears opened. That was a big deal for all of us. I'm sure they weren't the first good-sized store to move out there, but maybe they were.

MD: Right.

OM: It sure created a lot of interest.

MD: Um, and was downtown kind of a rough area?

OM: The east end of it was, and may still be. Not where we were.

MD: Right. The courthouse is-

OM: The Elks was right directly across the parking lot behind us, so. And, uh, there were bars and bars and bars and bars on 4th Avenue. Even down in the 700 block where we were.

MD: Sure.

[01:10:54:00]

[00:10:41]

OM: But you didn't get into the rough area until you got down in the east end.

MD: What did you guys do for entertainment? What were your pastimes?

OM: Fish and hunt.

MD: Where did you go fishing?

OM: Every place!

MD: (laughs)

OM: We'd hire a plane to take us out, way out in the boonies, drop us off, we'd say, "Come back in a week". And it would- we'd have a devil of a time keeping those fish fresh. They took a lot of care and a lot of ice. If the weather was really, really hot the plane might come back with a shipment of ice for us. Cause everybody did this. And it was really great. One night we were sound asleep in these bunks, with head to head. Mickey had the most beautiful curly hair. There was a bear came up on our porch. And I reached behind me and got hold of that curly hair and I would jerk him like everything! He was, I think he was snoring, I knew he was sound asleep. Boy I was jerking on that curly hair, "There's a bear, there's a bear!" By the time he could get out of bed- and it made some racket and kind of startled the bear-and he was right outside on the porch. And he got away. Thank gosh. It was kinda iffy going- it

was a quarter mile or so down to where we liked to fish on the- I almost said the name of the river- and there were, there were bears along there. Boy if I heard the least little noise- one day I heard the brush crack behind me and boy, I took off! And I went past Mickey so fast he said it was just like a flash. And when I got past him I stopped and looked, and my pocket of my jacket had got hooked on a branch and the faster I went the more I was pulling these branches off and making the noise that I thought was a bear coming after me!

MD: (laughs) The, um- did you then put up the fish for eating over the course of the year?

OM: Oh yeah. We smoked a lot of 'em, and provided everybody at the bar with fresh fish. Even more so when we moved down to Homer. Well, we didn't move down there. We lived there during the summers.

MD: When did you get your property on McDonald Spit?

OM: When did we get it? Let's see- Mickey died in '76. He was killed on the Homer Spit in a car accident in '76, and we'd had it...I suppose five years or so, I don't know. I'd love to see it again and see if they've taken care of it.

[01:14:03:00]

[00:13:51]

MD: Yeah.

OM: 'Cause as I say we had everything you could think of- I had never lived in a house that nice.

MD: Oh. And did you choose that because of the fishing?

OM: Pardon?

MD: Did- was the fishing part of the reason you chose that particular spot?

OM: Well, that and the isolation. But yeah, we loved to fish and smoke the fish and can the fish, and. I canned a lot of it.

MD: The, uh, so I'm presuming the business was fairly successful.

OM: Oh yes. I think it probably still is. It was kind of like a neighborhood bar. Everybody knew everybody. We had birthday parties for everybody, we had anniversary parties for everybody, we had a wedding- I can't remember whether they got married in the bar or came there afterwards, but the gr- it was the first woman bartender that had ever worked in there. And I swore I would never have a woman bartender, I thought that was disgraceful. (laughs) And, uh, there was a bar

called Tiny's out on Muldoon. And Tiny called me and he says, "Now I know you're going to say no but you gotta listen to me. I've got a woman, that- a young lady that needs a job and I just can't- I've got a full crew, I can't use her. And I know you're looking for somebody. So I want you to give her a try". And I said, "Well, ok, I'll give her a try". And I said, "She won't last a week. These customers will not put up with a woman bartender. They gotta watch their language and all this". I know when I'd walk in the backdoor you'd say "Hey you guys, there's Opal, watch it!" (laughs) Then I learned that I could keep up with them. I could swear just like they could.

MD: (laughs)

OM: But I didn't do this in front of them, believe me. And, anyway-

MD: But she worked out ok.

OM: Pardon?

MD: She worked out ok?

[01:16:22:00]

[00:16:10]

OM: Yep. I did- I didn't spent a lot of time there. I spent every Sunday there, and the day I sold it my younger son- the older one just passed away- the younger son still lives here. And he spent every Sunday down there with me 'cause he didn't want me there alone. Just in case somebody had hid out- we had heard of this happening- and there was an apartment unused upstairs. And boy on Sunday I tell you he'd make a trip up those stairs and make sure nobody was hiding out there.

MD: Right.

OM: 'Cause we had our share of burglaries and robberies and things in, in those days, no worse than it is now, or no different from now.

MD: How were the police?

OM: Pardon?

MD: Were the police better or worse at solving these crimes? (laughs)

OM: Were- how was- what?

MD: The police. The police-

OM: Oh. they used to poke their heads in pretty often, just to make a showing. Maybe walk down the bar and back out, or walk down the bar and out the back door. I was

always glad to see them, because we never had a police call in all the years we owned the place. We wouldn't allow any- in fact, when my kids were small and they'd go down there with me on Sunday while I took care of the money and the orders and stuff for Monday, and the place'd be locked, y'know, so I let 'em play at the pool tables. And one day they got to arguing back and forth, and I said "Come here you guys". So they came over where I was standing, and I said, "You know what? I don't allow the customers to do that, stand here and argue, and I'm not allowing you to do it. And what I tell the customers- you wanna act that way? There's the door, get out." And I said, "One more word out of you guys and there's the door". And to the time they grew up all I had to say to them was "Hey you guys, you know where the door is in this apartment?" Boy they'd stop it right now. I had them buffaloed.

MD: The, um-

OM: And they were never afraid of me. To this day they wouldn't walk in this door without a hug and a kiss. Or they wouldn't leave without a hug and a kiss.

MD: (laughs)

[01:18:59:00]

[00:18:47]

OM: How many children do you- did you have?

OM: Just the two.

MD: Just the two boys? How many grandchildren do you have?

OM: Five. And five great grandchildren.

MD: Oh my gosh.

OM: Can't name them, but I have 'em. (laughs)

MD: The, uh, what were the- did you get any feel for the attitude, I guess the political attitudes of the people in town in the '50s, or especially as we got closer to statehood?

OM: People interested in politics?

MD: Yeah.

OM: Well they couldn't talk to my husband if they weren't interested in politics, I'll tell you.

MD: What were his politics? How was he involved with these folks?

OM: I don't know. He was just interested in whoever was running. He'd know all about them long before I'd read it in the paper or long before I'd know it, he'd know all about them. What they did for a living and what kind of person they were.

MD: Were, were any of them, uh, regulars at the bar, or occasional customers?

OM: Oh yeah, yeah. What mayor was it? One of the mayors- well, we had illegal- don't you put this in your article! (laughs) It was illegal to have gambling.

MD: Right.

[01:20:24:00]

[00:20:12]

OM: And we had some kind of deal where they'd buy a square, and they were betting on the, on the final scores, I guess. And I'd keep those well hidden, I'll tell you. Worried to death about it, but everybody'd say, "Oh come on, Mickey had 'em, you're gonna keep 'em to!" So I did. And then one time my mother happened to be up here visiting, and we went down there and somebody said, "Opal, we got a problem, the games about to start and- Bobby, let's say- bought his favorite number." I would save the number, for the regulars. And I had saved this for him and the game was ready to start and he hadn't paid for it yet. Meaning I was stuck with it. So I went in and put up my money, and- cause you had to pay the winner when he left. And my mother was with me, and doggone if I didn't win. Oh, was I unpopular!

MD: (laughs)

OM: And I, I didn't know how to get out of it. What was I going to do with the money? I won it fair and square.

MD: How much money was it?

OM: Twenty thousand dollars.

MD: Good grief. The, uh, what-

OM: We had some big boards.

MD: I'm sorry?

Bob Curtis-Johnson: Your microphone-

MD: Oh, I'm not clipped in. I don't think I've ever done this before, put my own microphone on.

BCJ: There we go.

MD: That work?

BCJ: Pull that cable up and fold it so it doesn't stretch.

MD: Yeah. Gotcha, get it on my lap there.

BCJ: Yeah.

MD: Ok. That work?

BCJ: As long as its not tension on the microphone, so.

[01:22:32:00]

[00:22:19]

MD: Ok, I think that should work. Ok. Um, do you remember when we became a state?

OM: Oh, yeah.

MD: What was the scene like?

OM: Sure.

MD: What did you do?

OM: Went out and celebrated with everybody else. The bars just went wild and everybody was drinking and whooping and hollering. One guy was walking up and down our bar and dropping money on the bar as he went, "Buy him a drink, buy him a drink, buy him a drink". (laughs) I couldn't very well get mad and kick him off of my bar.

MD: The, uh, people were, people were celebrating, then? Or that sort of thing?

OM: Oh yes. Out on the streets, hugging each other and, yeah. Lots of excitement over it.

MD: Did anyone express second thoughts later on?

OM: Not that I know of.

MD: And, um, and then in the earthquake, what were you doing at that time?

OM: I was a waitress at the- what is now the Rice Bowl.

MD: Ok.

OM: But it had a different name then. And I was at work, and the cook went out the back door, and he said, "I gotta go downtown and pick up my kids and I'll be right back". And he wasn't gone long enough to pick up his kids, he come roaring in that back door and said, "There's an earth-" No, what, are we talking about statehood now, or?

MD: About the earthquake.

MD: Yeah.

OM: "There's an earthquake downtown!" We didn't feel it much there.

MD: Huh. That's right on 5th Avenue.

[01:24:22:00]

[00:24:10]

OM: We were used to having small earthquakes all the time, but we didn't know there was a big one like that. And he said he had seen buildings, or businesses had dropped right through the sidewalk. I couldn't believe it; I walked down there to look.

MD: What all did you see?

OM: I did see, on this end of 4th Avenue, places where the sidewalk and part of the street had just dropped out of sight. And a car went down with 'em, and cars in the Penny's parking garage falling out. (laughs)

MD: The, uh...

BCJ: (Could you move you chair over?)

OM: It was pretty well over with by the time I got there, I didn't see any of this action, but.

MD: The, um, I have to keep working with the sun here.

OM: Oh, I see.

MD: And, um, and did you have power or water back at your house?

OM: Not right away. We didn't have it in the bar either. That was good for business. Every time the power went off- we had a lot of power outages in those days.

MD: Yeah.

OM: Every time the power went out, and we'd grab all our- we had all of the candles light- and lamps lined up underneath the bar. But I happened to be working at the Rice Bowl at the time that the earthquake hit. And in the dark, I walked over to this table. A young couple, and she was really, really pregnant and I was worried about her. But it was 5 o'clock, we had just opened for the dinner hour, and I, in the dark I got over to their table and took a lamp with me, and I said "Are you all right, are you all right?" and she said "Yes, but we won't wait for our food, would you bring us our check please?" (laughs) Boy they couldn't get out of there fast enough. And I jumped in my car and went right to my sister's. She lived up here, and she lived down in Nunaka Valley. And that was an experience, getting out there. You'd come to an intersection, and maybe there was a light and maybe there wasn't. But you didn't pay any attention to the lights, 'cause cars were just going. You were just taking turns getting out into the intersection. And I got out to my sisters and she had a house full of people. Everybody knew that- her name was Babe- everybody knew that Babe always had lots of food and welcomed lots of company. And she had a house full.

[01:27:19:00]

[00:27:07]

MD: How did you drive to Nunaka Valley from downtown Anchorage in 1964? What was, what was the direction of the roads? Was it, did you take like 15th to Debarr?

OM: I, I would say 15th, but I don't remember.

MD: Right.

OM: I don't know how else you'd get there.

MD: I was thinking like-

OM: Unless you'd go out-

MD: Or Northern Lights, but I don't remember Northern Lights-

OM: Well, I was thinking like- I don't know about these streets down here.

MD: But it was, the car, the traffic was tricky?

OM: Yeah, but everybody was considerate, and would wait and motion you through, and then they'd go next, somebody'd motion them through. And I couldn't get over how easy it was to get to her house. Because everybody was being so considerate of the other drivers. Everybody wanted to get home.

MD: Now you said that when the lights went out it was good for business. How wad, how did that boost your business, when the lights would go out at the bar?

OM: Well we just lit candles, and-

MD: People-

OM: It wasn't out a long time, it was more the heat. The heat went off. And it was quite a while, a matter of days and days, before they could get that heat going. And I had all kind of portable heaters I borrowed from everybody I knew that had one, to keep the water in the lines from freezing. And it didn't freeze up on me, but some places did.

MD: When, uh, in the late 1960s, when the oil development and the pipeline began, did you notice any change with the bar business?

[01:29:19:00]

[00:29:08]

OM: Oh lord yes. Those people worked to, to spend money. Like I say, one guy was even up on top of our bar.

MD: Right.

OM: Yeah, they spent money like, like it was going out of style.

MD: What were, what were some of your favorite shops? I mean, I don't know if you were a shopper, but.

OM: Well, on the corner of 4th and F was, uh, the Smart Shop, and down at the other corner of that block, on E Street- I don't know, there was another kind of exclusive ladies' shop on that corner. Reed's, I think it was called. Maybe.

MD: Yeah.

OM: And of course we had Penny's. Didn't have Nordstrom's. But there was one called Ekstrom's? Does that sound like the name of the-?

MD: Ekstrom's...

OM: That might have been furniture though, I'm not sure. My memory's not very good.

MD: Um, you were telling me that you volunteer with both the Concert Association and the museum. What do you do with the Concert Association when you volunteer?

OM: Well, a variety of things. You send, write- now they're getting out the next year's shows coming up, and encouraging people to- if they want to save their seats they gotta let us know. There's a deadline on it, I forget what it is. Its pretty soon. They gotta let us know if they want those same seats. And many people do. The, the regulars, they want their regular seats. I do.

MD: How long have you been associated with the Concert Association?

OM: Both of 'em I started in 1993. I worked with a gal at the museum. I don't know howcome I started at the museum. Just because it was close, and-

MD: Right.

[01:31:47:00]

[00:31:36]

OM: And I'd been in there any number of times and knew the lady that was the head honcho in there. And I went, went there to work and this gal said "Well come with me, I want to take you someplace", and she took me down the street to the Concert Association and introduced me, and she said "You would love this". There are no benefits to either one. I pay the same price to go to that museum as you do. (laughs) More, I have to buy for my kids too. But I don't mind.

MD: Right.

OM: I do it as a volunteer, I don't expect to get something for it. Like here, I do a lot for this condominium. I did, I've done the bookkeeping for years, and now they're, they just hired somebody. They're paying her fifty dollars a month.

MD: Did you do the bookkeeping for the Pioneer as well?

OM: Oh yeah.

MD: Yeah. The, uh-

OM: Yup. Johnny Johnson did- John Johnson, Johnson and Morgan had a business right about a block from here. And he- Johnny Johnson was a good customer of my husband's, so he kept coming in, even after he died. Well, then I went to that account.

MD: Yeah. And you like to garden.

OM: I like to garden.

MD: Was that a lifelong thing, or did you more or less come into it over the years?

OM: Lifelong. We had, we had our house sat on four lots, and most of that four lots was garden. And we raised everything and canned everything and smoked everything. Uh. And then my dad was quite a hunter, he had his deer and his elk, and.

MD: The, um, what, what- and then tell me about your house over at McDonald Spit, what was it like?

OM: I don't know. I got pictures of it around here. It was very, very modern. Electric heat, fireplace, um, ice cold water piped in from up on the hill.

MD: How did they get the supplies over there?

OM: By boat.

MD: By boat.

[01:34:43:00]

[00:34:31]

OM: Yeah, that's how we got the whole, the whole house. We had a cabin there.

MD: Right.

OM: Just a log cabin. And actually we had a partner in this cabin. You probably remember Bob Seaman's sporting goods store? Well Bob Seaman and Mickey bought a, kind of a pre- I guess it came in pieces, and he, Bob's father-in-law lived over in Homer and he offered to come over and put this up for us. And then we didn't have it very long before Bob and his wife Betty got bored with it, they didn't think there was enough to do there. So they sold it to us. And we loved it. I kept it eighteen years.

MD: Yeah.

OM: Well let's see, eighteen years after Mickey died, I kept it. And we had it eighteen years after they sold out to us. So you can tell I really liked it. That's what I call living. (laughs) When you can just be sitting there at the dining table and say "Here's a school of fish going by", bang, out the door everybody'd go, and grab a pole as they went by the tree where we had 'em lined up with the lures already on 'em, you know. Run down to the beach, which wouldn't be any further than just out here, the other side of the alley. And start casting.

MD: The, uh, these are some interesting coffee holders, uh-

OM: Pardon?

MD: These are some interesting coffee holders. This, this is you and Mickey? Sorry.

OM: Yeah. Where'd you get that?

MD: I think they're- Bob just handed them to me here.

BCJ They were on-

OM: Oh, they were on the table. (laughs)

BCJ: -the dining room table.

[01:36:54:00]

[00:36:43]

MD: Where was that one taken? Do you recognize the location?

OM: No, and I don't remember, either. Well, right here in Anchorage, but-

MD: Right.

OM: He's a good looking guy.

MD: The, uh. Yes. And that'd be him in the war?

OM: Yeah. Oh.

MD: He was a sailor.

OM: Yes, he was. Uh-huh. In the second World War.

MD: I'll be darned.

OM: In the '40s, in Montana.

MD: So did you guys get married before the war, after the war, or during the war?

OM: After.

MD: After.

OM: Right after. Soon as the war was over we got married.

MD: And is that your house at L Street? No, not L Street. 11th.

OM: Not, this was-oh, yeah, this was when we lived over at 11th and A, and my brother came home on leave and he posed me for that. Where'd you get this? Off the table?

MD: Same place?

MD: These are very interesting. Same place?

OM: No, this is in Montana.

MD: Oh my gosh.

OM: Before I moved to Alaska. I think I was seventeen.

[01:38:20:00]

[00:38:09]

MD: Oh my gosh. I was gonna think that tree did not look like an Anchorage tree.

OM: (laughs)

MD: More of an oak type tree.

OM: Probably was.

MD: Yeah. Where did your kids go to school?

OM: We-

MD: Yeah, your sons.

OM: Like, grade school?

MD: Where did your sons go to grade school.

OM: Oh, my children?

MD: Yeah.

OM: They went to school here.

MD: Um, like-

OM: Well, Denali, uh, grade school. I don't think we had junior high in those days.

MD: Did you find the schools good?

OM: Yeah. My kids turned out ok.

MD: Right.

OM: Never gave me a minute's- no problem, I'll tell you. They'd know better.

MD: (laughs)

OM: That's what my son would say, the one that's living.

MD: How often did you, uh, go back to Montana or travel?

[01:39:21:00]

[00:39:09]

OM: Until my sister died we went every year. Even after Mickey died I'd go every year to see my sister. When she was gone there was no point in going, I didn't have anybody left there.

MD: Right. Um, would you fly?

OM: Mmhmm.

MD: Yeah. That's what I thought.

OM: Yeah. We drove up the highway when we moved to Alaska, and that was enough of that for me. Boy. What a long, boring trip.

MD: Yeah. So what was Anchorage International Airport like?

OM: Petty small. (laughs) It was real small. No- you had to walk way out there to the airplane and climb up the steps.

MD: There was a little restaurant?

OM: I can't fly anymore.

MD: Really?

OM: No, on account of this. This is just recent. My son was dying, my older son, he's only been gone a couple of weeks, and he wanted to see me. And I got as far as buying the ticket, and had the reservation, and in fact- see, I've still got that on the computer in there. They, uh, I happened to mention to 'em, I said, "Now, you do understand that I'm using a breathing apparatus, that's not going to make any difference?" And they said, "Oh, you can't fly with that." I said, "Why not?" And they said, "You know, if you were to have an episode having trouble breathing or something when we were going up and changing altitudes, and if we had to make an

emergency landing, you know who'd have to pay for it? And do you know how much that would cost you?" I had to back off of that. So I didn't get to see him. They took pictures of him, and they gave him the microphone so he could listen- or the ear pieces so he could listen to me, but I didn't get to go down. And I wanted my younger son to go, his brother, but, uh, by the time he could arrange to get off work, Dennis was already gone.

MD: Yeah.

OM: In fact, we're gonna have his memorial service this Saturday, next Saturday, up at Big Lake, they live at Big Lake.

MD: Yeah.

[01:42:23:00]

[00:42:12]

OM: And she's still up there.

MD: Did you, um, were you ever able- before they made the new highway, did you go to Big Lake, or go in that direction ever?

OM: Oh yeah. Yeah, that was quite a journey, to go to Big Lake.

MD: How did you have to get there? Which way?

OM: Well you had to go through Palmer, and then and then there was a road in what is now just a ditch beside the road, and you got down into this and, and drove to the turn off to Big Lake.

MD: Yeah.

OM: And then it was pretty much cross-country. (laughs)

MD: Yeah.

OM: I know when- what was it? When we had the earthquake? It seems like it was something else. Oh, when they had that big fire up there.

MD: Oh yeah.

OM: My place burned down, burned to the ground. But, uh, we went up anyway just to see, after we heard it was already gone. And it was really heartbreaking to see all those trees. And I assume they're still standing, just all burned and nasty looking. They were the last time I was up there.

MD: Uh, when did you get a place? Was your house, your cabin, on Big Lake or a different lake?

OM: On Big Lake.

MD: It was on Big Lake.

OM: Yeah.

MD: And-

OM: Over on the north shore- the south shore, right, just a couple doors down from that, that business.

MD: Ok.

[01:44:16:00]

[00:44:05]

OM: I can't think of the name of it, but they rented out boats and you bought boat gas there and stuff like that.

MD: So when did you get that place?

OM: When did we get it?

MD: When did you acquire property on Big Lake?

OM: Gosh.

MD: Must have been before the earthquake?

OM: Oh yeah. It was before the earthquake.

MD: How many-

OM: 'Cause I couldn't wait to get up there and see what happened. And we didn't have built-in cab, uh, cabinets, just open shelving. And half of the stuff was slid off on the floor. The flour, the sugar, the stuff had dumped over.

MD: And, uh, what about your house in Anchorage? What was, was there anything thrown loose here during the earthquake?

OM: Well, no, no real damage.

MD: Yeah.

OM: There was more damage at the bar with the heat lines going out. 'Cause gas, natural gas was new up in Anchorage at that time, and we had just put in all that. Those gas lines, and. At the bar, but not at home.

MD: Right. You lose any stock from the bottles breaking?

OM: Oh yeah. Ketchup bottle and stuff like that, broken on the floor.

MD: You served food at the bar?

OM: But it was just, just a few things in the kitchen. The rest of the place was all right.

[01:46:01:00]

[00:45:50]

MD: Yeah. Do you still have the place on Big Lake?

OM: No.

MD: You sold that.

OM: I sold it to be nephew, my nephew. But I sold it when, when it burned down. I didn't want to rebuild it. I wasn't using it ever, and I thought, "Why go to all that expense?" so I talked about just having that torn down, and my nephew come over and "Why don't you sell it to me" so he built a nice modern home there. They use it a lot.

MD: Well, there weren't many people on the lake.

OM: Oh, no. Not like now. It was quiet and now all you hear is the roar of boats going as fast as they can go from one end to the other.

MD: Um, was Anchorage quieter, back when you got here?

OM: Well-

MD: Has it gotten noisier over the years?

OM: I, I don't find it noticeable. I find it more noticeable hear now because I encouraged them to put in these triple windows, and they're more or less soundproof. You don't hear much of anything from, from inside here unless I've got a window or door open.

MD: Yeah, um, are you able to get to much, many performances, shows, things like that?

OM: Am I able to get what?

MD: get to many performances and shows? At the Performing Arts Center.

OM: Do I go to many of them?

MD: Yeah.

OM: Well, not so much anymore. Nowadays instead of buying season tickets we pick and choose which ones we want to go to.

MD: Right.

[01:48:05:00]

[00:47:54]

OM: Because the lady that I chum around with a lot, and we always had season tickets to everything, uh, we found we were wasting so many of them that we just weren't interested in, or weren't going to be in town. She's gone more than I am. I don't travel anymore at all, but she's gone a lot, and we just decided to skip that. And when we see a show coming up that we want to see we just go down and buy a couple of tickets. And I find we haven't had any trouble getting good seats. We always thought we had to have these season tickets so we'd have those same seats all the time. But we have no trouble getting good seats.

MD: What are some of the shows that you've enjoyed here recently, or.

OM: I haven't been to any recently. What did I see just not too long ago? A really well-known one too. Can't think of what the name of it was.

MD: Was it a show, or a musical?

OM: It was a musical.

MD: Yeah, they bring up a lot of these-

OM: Well, there was just lots of, just chattering, not, with no music- what the heck was the name of that? I could go look if you want me too but I'm sure you don't care that much.

MD: Was it this year, or?

OM: Pardon?

MD: Was it this year?

OM: Yeah.

MD: Mary Poppins?

OM: No, I didn't go to that one. So it would be.

MD: There was Chicago-

OM: Pardon?

MD: Chicago.

[01:49:47:00]

[00:49:36]

OM: Well I know I saw that.

MD: Shrek. That'd be for the kids.

OM: Not Shrek. I know I went to Chicago.

MD: Yeah.

OM: No, this was-

MD: That's ok.

OM: it was like two words. Uh.

BCJ: South Pacific.

OM: Hmm?

BCJ: South Pacific.

OM: I didn't-

MD: Oh, South Pacific!

BCJ: South Pacific.

MD: That was Anchorage Opera, though.

BCJ: Ok.

OM: Yeah. I did go to that too.

MD: Ok, yeah.

OM: I, I get to see a lot of those shows when they have the children's performances. I volunteer for that, and we get the kids settled and then normally they'll have a ten o'clock show and a twelve o'clock show, because they're a reduced version of the show.

MD: Right.

[01:50:47:00]

[00:50:37]

OM: And we have to sit around and wait for the kids to get out and then be there to seat the second bunch of kids, and then we can leave if we want. Well, we're gonna be there and have to stay anyway, so might as well watch that first show with the kids. So we get to see them regardless. And sometimes they're so good I stop right in the lobby on my way out and call Pat and say "Hey, this show's really good, want me to pick up two tickets while I'm here?" She always says yes. If I like it she's gonna wanna go.

MD: The, uh, if, if you still could travel easily, where would you like to go? Are there places you've always wanted to see?

OM: I don't know. I think about- I'd like to just see what my hometown looks like. But its not likely I would ever go by myself.

MD: Right.

OM: And I have no one to go with me.

MD: Mmhmm. Yeah.

OM: And the friends that I had that travel I'm sure would not be interested in going to Missoula, Montana for pete's sake. So I would probably go to California. Pat-

MD: And where in California?
Oh, San Diego I suppose.

MD: The hot places?

OM: My neighbor downstairs lives there, and he's always after me to come down. He bought his mother's place when she died, and, and he lives there six months and then here six months.

MD: Yeah.

OM: Back and forth.

MD: Uh, so you've lived in Anchorage for sixty years now, if I'm counting right.

OM: Mmhmm.

[01:52:39:00]

[00:52:29]

MD: And, uh, any guess about what the city's going to look like in the next sixty years?

OM: Boy, that would be-

MD: If you come back in 2072, what would you see?

OM: Interesting to know, wouldn't it, what it'd be like then? I suppose everything would be tall, tall buildings. I often look out here and thing- this is my beauty shop over here- think, "How long is that house going to sit there? Here he's got a thriving business?" Someone's going to come along and buy that whole corner and put up a big building there, and block my light out, but. It just stands to reason this- Anchorage is growing, its going this way.

MD: Yeah.

OM: The businesses.

MD: Did you ever-

OM: There's a lot of business over in, in that tall building over there.

MD: Did you ever think it was going to get this big?

OM: No. When we moved here I, I, if someone had told me that I wouldn't believe 'em. Even after I moved over to 11th And A and first thing you know, well, A Street was a main street going through there and they were ripping out buildings.

MD: Did, uh, you say you've liked living here. What, what are the things you've liked about Anchorage? What's made it a good place to live?

OM: Well, I think the people are all friendly. And I like the temperature. Its just like Montana.

MD: Yeah.

OM: Cold winters and mild summers. I guess it gets a little hotter there in the summer.

MD: Mmhmm. But the people have been friendly.

OM: Oh yeah.

[01:54:42:00]

[00:54:32]

MD: There's a good attitude about people?

OM: Mmhmm, I think so. I've got a lot of friends here.

MD: You've found people to be helpful?

OM: Yup, mmhmm. Gosh, you wouldn't believe. I just, just put away a bunch of sympathy cards after losing my son, y'know. The whole table was full of 'em.

MD: Yeah. Well he'd lived here his whole life.

OM: Sixty years. A long way from a whole life. Thirty years.

MD: Well, yeah. But still.

OM: Yeah, I know a lot of people. I don't know so many in this building now. I noticed that there's sure a lot of strangers-

MD: Right.

OM: Coming and going. In fact I, I know very few people in this building now. And I'll say, "Who are all these people, where are they coming from? Where do they work? What do they do?"

MD: Where did you have your children? Which hospital?

OM: Where did I what?

MD: Where did you have the kids?

OM: Where did I ha-

MD: When you gave birth, where did they take you?

OM: Montana.

MD: Oh, you went to Montana.

OM: They were both born there.

MD: Oh, they were born before you came up here?

OM: Mmhmm.

[01:56:03:00]

[00:55:53]

MD: You made that trip with two little kids in the car?

OM: Oh, I gotta take that back. We didn't have kids then. Well, I guess we must've!

MD: (laughs) That's interesting. The, uh. Ok. Well, do you have anything else that you'd like to add to the general stories we've been collecting here? Anything I haven't brought up?

OM: No. I'm, I'm surprised there aren't more big stores like Sears. Its kinda the only big store out that way. But of course nowadays people think nothing of driving halfway across town to, just to go have lunch.

MD: Yeah.

OM: Let alone shopping. And I suppose those stores up on Government Hill are almost a thing of the past.

MD: You'd mentioned that you're a golfer?

OM: Pardon

MD: You said that you were a golfer.

OM: Yeah.

MD: When did you pick up golf?

OM: I didn't say I was a good golfer, but I'm a golfer, yes.

MD: Yeah. When did you start doing that?

OM: After my husband died.

MD: Really? Ok.

OM: I knew women that golfed and women's teams, and I thought, "Well, I'll give it a try", so I drove to the one at Settler's Bay all by myself one day, just thought, "I'm gonna drive up to that golf course up there and, and see what it looks like". And I don't know what I had in mind, but the first thing I knew there was a man here in the building that took two of us under his wing, and he says "Hey, you two gals don't do anything but sit home and go shopping or something like that, come on I'm gonna teach you how to golf". And he took us to someplace, I guess Russian Jack. And he wouldn't let up on us either. We had to come and get out there and practice, and we had to take another lesson the next week. He was a pretty good teacher. And I never will forget, he took us up to- the first time we went to Settler's Bay, and they, they were looking for people to fill in to have a competition. And so they talked us into joining this bunch. And I was the first one out of our group to get up there and hit a ball, and I'll be darned as I didn't hit that thing straight as a string. It didn't go very far, but it just went straight down that alley. And boy are my, my- I can't think of what you call the head guy in a group- he was just tickled to death, and somebody was saying, "You brought in a sleeper, you brought in a sleeper!" Well I never hit another decent ball the whole day. (laughs) Not that I wasn't trying, but that one was an accident.

[01:59:27:00]

[00:59:17]

MD: Yeah.

OM: But I love to golf. I golfed for years after that. Used to go up here to the one on Hillside.

MD: O'Malley's?

OM: O'Malley. In the evening when they'd have the ladies' thing at 6:30. And that's make it darn late when you got through.

MD: Yeah.

OM: But I went, all by myself. I don't know how come I quit. Got to old I guess.

MD: Well very good.

OM: But its good exercise, and I prefer walking to using a cart. Unless you're holding people up.

MD: Yeah.

OM: Run into any animals out there while you were golfing?

OM: Yup. Moose, and one time a bear. But he didn't come near us, he stayed over right- he just barely, barely came out of the trees and walked along in front of the trees and kinda watches us. Course we were watching him too! And that was the only bear we ran into, but lots of- we'd see moose often. I suppose that was mainly up the valley.

[02:00:56:00]

[01:00:46]

MD: Well, good enough. If you have no more to add, we will-

OM: Pardon?

MD: If you have no more to add, we will-

OM: Nope, can't think of anything.

MD: Take off and let you get ready for lunch.

OM: Just that I'm here to stay. When I bought my husband's grave I bought two. I'm here to stay.

MD: Where are, where are the plots?

OM: Out at Klatt.

MD: Klatt? Sure, yeah. Well, make sure you let someone know where you are.

OM: (laughs)

MD: I was out there one time looking for Z.J. Lousacc, Mayor Lousacc's gave, and they said, "Oh, are you family? We can't find the family." And I kinda thought, this mayor who did so much for the town, and...

OM: Yeah. Huh. Was he out there?

MD: Yeah, he was out there!

OM: Oh, I'm surprised. I went out there one day and couldn't find Mickey's grave. And I just panicked. And I knew exactly where to go. There's the first tree when you turn off into the, into that cemetery, that first- and its a big birch, and you just turn in there, leave the car right there by that birch tree and walk right over here, and there he is. He wasn't there. And I'm standing there looking over this headstone, and there were a bunch of flowers on the grave where the printing was.

MD: Oh?

OM: In front of the headstone. And I kept thinking, "Well who would have been bringing flowers to Mickey if it wasn't me?" And I walked away, and I went to Bob and Betty's grave right there by it, the Seaman's, and I walked down here, George Woo who used to be my boss at the Rice Bowl, I walked down to his grave- I knew exactly where I was! And I thought, "Well, I'll go back to where I was standing and look one more time, and if he isn't right there I'm going to file a complaint or go to that little house they have, there is somebody there sometimes.

MD: Yeah.

[02:03:26:00]

[01:03:17]

OM: Boy I was going to raise holy Cain, I can tell you, what'd they do with my husband? And I went back over there and I'm looking over the top of his headstone and I'm in front of him like I was before, and I thought "Hmm, I wonder who brought those flowers", and I reached over there to move 'em a little bit, and that wasn't Mickey's grave. I was standing at the wrong place.

MD: (laughs)

OM: Sorry! Didn't mean to bother ya, but I'm looking for my husband. And I went back to the car and took a trap over to this first tree. And he was where he was supposed to be. Right where I left him. (laughs)

MD: That's funny. Well, here's hoping you don't have to use it right away.

OM: No, I'm not in any hurry. I'm feeling well and enjoying life. I love to cook, I love to bake, and I'm running stuff across the alley to the beauty shop and down the hall to the people. Sometimes I have to think, "What could I bake today that I haven't just already baked for them?"

MD: What do you like to bake?

OM: Oh, brownies and I bake a lot of scones. And cakes and pies.

MD: Yeah. Pies.

OM: When Alden, the man downstairs, gets home, I'll have standing request, and its for mincemeat pie. I bet you haven't seen one of those for a long time.

MD: I haven't seen one of those for a while, no.

OM: Well Alden got hold of a bunch of mincemeat. He ran into a bunch at a store or something and he decided to buy it all, and he figured he could talk me into making

mincemeat pie. And he better hurry up and get back, 'cause I'm ready for another mincemeat pie. He's on one of his six moth trips to San Diego. I can't imagine why, in weather like this, he's leave Alaska.

MD: Yeah, its hard to-

[02:05:51:00]

[01:05:42]

OM: But a lot of people do! Go down.

MD: I never understand it.

OM: Guess they don't mind the hot, hot weather.

MD: And you don't mind our cold weather.

OM: I don't mind any of it. The heat, the cold, the dark, the light all night. None of it bothers me, I like it all.

MD: Yeah.

OM: I'm easy to please. (laughs) Long as I can sit here and look out and enjoy it, well.

MD: Excellent. Um, I think that pretty much wraps it up for us, then.

OM: Ok, well its been fun talking to you.

MD: Yeah, its been fun.

[02:06:41:00]

[01:06:32]

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