

## **Interview of Brooke Marston by Mike Dunham**

Transcript

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Mike Dunham: My name is Mike Dunham. Today we're speaking with Brooke Martin- or, I beg your pardon, today we're speaking with Brooke Marston. It is the 29th of June, 2013. We're at his home in Turnagain. The purpose of this project, Brooke, is to collect personal memories of Anchorage in years past, with the idea that they'll be used by the public at some point in the future to, uh, find out what life was like in Anchorage in the past.

Brooke Marston: Mmhmm.

MD: And be accessible to the public, and, um, y'know, and available for research in the future. Uh, you don't have to answer any of the questions you don't feel like answering, and, uh, once we get tired we're done.

BM: Ok.

MD: So if we have your permission we'll continue.

BM: We'll go forward.

[01:01:03:00]

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MD: Very good. Um, where were you born and when?

BM: I was born in, uh, Muskegon, Michigan in 19, uh January 5th in 1930.

MD: And tell me about your parents.

BM: My father was, uh-

MD: In 1930.

BM: In 1930, building a golf course in, uh, Muskegon, Michigan. And in the midst of a golf craze in which everybody in the United States got involved. Uh, was a big effort to, uh, include, uh, the world at, uh, golfing.

MD: And how long did you live there?

BM: I lived there a couple years, went back for three or so. By the time I was five or six I didn't go back. I was raised in Rochester, New York 'til I was ten.

MD: And then what happened when you were ten?

BM: Ten was 1940 and, uh, Canada was, uh, in World War II, and, um, the military here in Washington D.C. was expecting to- the United States would be joining the war soon. My father was a prospector in Canada. Canada shut down all gold production because it didn't have anything to do with the, uh, war. And, uh, my father went down to Washington D.C. to attempt to sell the military on storage of aircraft, and they said, "We don't want your idea, but we want you, because you know Quebec, and, uh, we want you to establish emergency landing fields for, uh, fighter aircraft which will be, uh, on their way over to, uh, Great Britain." And from that point on he did that, and laid out the emergency landing fields. He was transferred to Anchorage, Alaska in 1941.

MD: And when did you arrive?

BM: I came very soon thereafter, we lived, um, perhaps one of the last houses in Anchorage, uh, which was just on the other side of the, um, park strip.

MD: (inaudible) 11th?

BM: Yes, right.

MD: What was the house like?

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BM: Just finished, um, new house. Very hard to find living quarters here. Uh, belongs to the Faulkners now on 12th Avenue. And, um, there was a couple living downstairs, we lived in the main floor, and another couple lived upstairs.

MD: And, uh, what was Anchorage like?

BM: Well, I had- I was a very successful businessman at age eleven. Um, I had one half of all the distribution of newspapers. Um, my route ran from, uh, 4th Avenue to 9th, and from L to what we used to call East A. And some other competitor had the rest of the route on the other side of 4th Avenue. So I had 50% of all the morning newspapers.

MD: Um, what was East A? What is it now?

BM: Well, let me see. Um, the- at that time the engineering, the United States Corps of Engineers was very uh, interesting in that they figured out that there was 1, 2, 3, 4, and A, B, C, D, E, F, and eventually we expanded then slightly beyond A Street to what was then called East A, and then came East B, etc. And, um.

MD: So is it now Barrow?

BM: Could be. Yes, yes.

MD: I've never heard of East E- A before.

BM: Well, things changed a little.

MD: Its like negative zero, yeah.

BM: That was 1940.

MD: Right. And where did you go to school?

BM: Uh, there was only one school, downtown on, uh, 5th Avenue.

MD: That was the, the large concrete building?

BM: Yes.

MD: And what was there to do for a- an eleven year old besides deliver newspapers?

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BM: Well, there was hiking into what's now the, uh, coastal trail and meeting up with Lynn Ary, who was the homesteader here, uh, where we live now. He had a hundred and sixty acres and he, um, built a log cabin with an adz. He had a very interesting history. Uh, he had been a supply sergeant in the Russian army. And, um, you were responsible, in the Russian Army, for everything that was supplied to you as a Supply Master. So he signed for several thousand boots, and when he got to examining them, the soles all fell off them very easily, just by pulling, and he- there was only one choice for him. He fled Russia and, uh, worked his way though Minnesota, finally came here and staked out a hundred and sixty acres. And, uh, he was building a cabin in the Russian style.

MD: Do your remember any of the other homesteaders in this area, West Anchorage Turnagain?

BM: No, um, there was the McCauly homestead that lay adjacent, but he left in 1936.

He was a dentist. And that was right next to where Wally Hickel's house- right on the edge on it. In fact Wally kept some of the timbers, um, of the cabin, the homestead cabin. But at that time there was only Lynn Ary here.

MD: Right. The, uh, and the coastal- what we call the Coastal Trail, Westchester Lagoon, what was that terrain like?

BM: Uh, there was a long, uh, railroad high bridge which left- is now all fill and all gravel. So it was a little scary going across there. You looked way down and you looked both directions, and then you ran across the ties, because you had several hundred yards of high, um, piling.

MD: Um, what were- what- did you get to go to the movies, or?

BM: Oh yes! There were, um, later on of course they finished the, uh, the one movie theater, and the wintertime the lines used to go all the way around. Yes. And we waited outside for the one movie. In fact there were two eventually, The Empress and, what was the other? Lathrop's?

MD: 4th Avenue?

BM: Yes, 4th Avenue.

MD: And, uh, any, any, um, memories of, of World War II?

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BM: Yes, oh yes. Um, the, um, war was declared um, when Japan hit December 7th. Uh, and we had many air raids. In fact, sometimes we had six and eight air raids a day. Um, this was before radar, but we had a listening post right near us. And, uh, we all thought they were real air raids, and, uh, the tenants downstairs hit me with flash cars. We used to use flashcards of, uh, "That's a Mitsubishi such and such", "This is a Zero", and I was supposed to be the expert on this thing. So we'd have these six and seven air raids a day and I was down there with my flashcards, and there was a 37mm in the front yard, and, um, when you went to school, uh, in the winter its fairly dark, and they'd have an air raid. So they'd say, "Everybody go home", so we'd head out. And they had the civilian patrol, um, and most of them were equipped with a fifth of whiskey in the, in the side pocket and a hunting thirty-aught-six off the back. And there would, at age eleven they would say, "Who goes there?" and I'd say, "Me! Little boy, don't shoot!" (laughs) And, uh, they were more dangerous, as far as things turned out, than the Japanese were in Anchorage. So. That's what life was like, uh, in '41.

MD: Um, and as the war progressed and you're getting older?

BM: Uh, the military was very much afraid that, uh, the communication with Seattle would be cut off and there'd be no food. We are still talking about the fact that we only have a week's supply of food in Anchorage. So these had- all military dependants had to leave. So I was gone from '41 until I graduated from high school in 1947, and I came back to Anchorage.

MD: Where were you in high school?

BM: I was in high school in Long Beach, California.

MD: Um, did- were your folks still living at the same place?

BM: No, they, they also- my mother and my two sisters were also evacuated, and so.

MD: So when you came back where did you live?

BM: Where did we live? Uh, we lived in the, uh, log cabin that we had bought from Lynn Ary.

MD: Ok. And, um, and how had the town changed while you were gone?

BM: Well, how did it change. Um, housing was very short and people were scrambling for places to live, um, banks had not yet organized themselves so you could get a thirty-year loan. And oftentimes people would get a five-year loan from the bank, and they'd build a foundation and they'd move into the basement. Then when they got that five year loan paid off, they'd frame the second story, and they'd take all the kitchen cabinets from downstairs and move upstairs. So you have Spenard, which is rather spotty and, uh, there's no architect's been hired to build it, people built their own homes. And they had their own wells and their- they had their own septic tanks, etc. So it was quite a different arrangement than you see now.

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MD: Now when folks at that time said Spenard, what did they mean? Is it just the road, or was it a bigger area?

BM: Oh yeah. There was an effort of course to, um, incorporate Spenard, and, um, it failed. And eventually it was, uh, absorbed in Anchorage, in the growth of Anchorage. But there was very definitely um, an effort, a legal effort to incorporate it as a separate city. And, and our post office was Spenard, Alaska. It wasn't Anchorage, Alaska, it was Spenard. Uh, our daughter just discovered when she was digging out her birth certificate that she was not born in Anchorage, Alaska, but born in Spenard. It says right on it, Spenard. (laughs)

MD: And, uh, where was the post office for Spenard at that time?

BM: Post office for Spenard. Well the post office downtown-

MD: (inaudible) or-

BM: -course, was quite a, um, place of meeting, lets put it that way. I would go off to college, going Outside, and there was a line that said "A-L, M-Z", and I would come back in the spring and, uh, step up to the M-Z window and the lady would say, "Ah, Marston. Here". And she'd remember me from- it was a small enough town. When I first came here there were three thousand people, so. From there it's grown to three hundred thousand though, hasn't it. And I feel fortunate to have been here at this time to live through that growth. Its, ah, been a real, uh, enjoyment to be involved with the building of subdivisions and things of that sort. So that, uh, I've seen Anchorage be a great city.

MD: Where did you go to college?

BM: I graduated from the Univ- University of Alaska in Fairbanks. Although I did attend, um, college in, ah, Stockton in the uh, I guess its called University of the Pacific now, in Stockton, California for two years, and then I graduated in the university.

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MD: And you became a teacher?

BM: Yes, I taught for, uh, three years.

MD: Uh, at, at the downtown school?

BM: Well, one year at the downtown school, and two years at the, uh, new West High.

MD: Yeah.

BM: Which we were very proud of.

MD: Yeah, I was going to ask, what was it like when that place opened?

BM: Well, it was, um, a lot of excitement that we had a stage on which almost every single important visitor to Anchorage, um, plays or played there. The music was done there, speakers used that, uh, West High Auditorium. We did not have a comparable auditorium anywhere else in town.

MD: And was there some concern that it was so far out of town?

BM: No, I never heard that. Uh, we very quickly- in fact I taught in a Quonset for a while, so very quickly we had enough students to expand way beyond the, uh, original number.

MD: Interesting. Um, what are some of the, uh, productions that you saw on the West High stage?

BM: Oh, everything that came to Anchorage came there, and I really- a whole series of them. I, um, at this point I can't give you a list.

MD: What about local performances?

BM: Yes, there were many local performances done there. Um, some were done by the symphony, and some were done by the choral groups, and, uh speakers were brought here.

MD: So, um, when did, when did your father start working on this project here, Turnagain, the idea of building subdivision projects?

BM: Probably 1945, '46. And, um, we had one loop road, and I know it was my job to, every spring- the spring thaw was a big event which doesn't happen now. The weathers the same but we have pavement and gravel, and then we had mud. And, uh, wherever we had mud, uh, you had to bring sand, so that- and wherever there was sand you had to bring mud. And people were always getting axle-deep in the roads.

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MD: The, uh, what was the one loop? What is it now?

BM: Ah, well it was called Turnagain Boulevard East, and Turnagain Boulevard West, and that's how we originally started, was with one major loop. And from there its, uh, different names have been given and things have changed.

MD: Um, how quickly were properties purchased out here?

BM: Um, we had a number of individual homes. The Atwoods for instance built a home here, which was a beautiful log home, which we were entertained by them, and they entertained us, back and forth. Uh, you gotta realize that we used to set nets here and fish, so we were always back and forth with the, uh, Atwoods and others along the bluffs. Uh, exchanging fish. And smoking-

MD: That's off the beach?

BM: Mmhmm. Off the beach.

MD: Um, how'd you get 'em across the mud flats, wait for high tide?

BM: They'd be on this side, not the other side. We- there were actually, um, almost eighty nets eventually between Point Woronzof and, uh, Ship Creek. The rule was you had to be six hundred feet away from somebody else's net. And as it got more and more crowded, and as Anchorage grew, people would come and set next to you. Well, Fish and Wildlife didn't care who set when, they just gave you both a ticket, so as it got more crowded I found myself moving my, my set nets constantly, and finally they banned it, so.

MD: How did you access the beach?

BM: Uh, with hip boots and a lot of courage. (laughs) You can get stuck in the mud, as you know. There- there's a certain way of walking and a certain place to walk and a certain way to do it. I used to come back many times- you'd have to rig a lot of your boots if you stayed long enough working on a single net or getting a fish out, you would get completely stuck, halfway to the knees. At that point you'd get out of your hip boots and, um, you'd crawl. And uh, you'd pull your boots after you and finally get back to shore.

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MD: The, uh, was there much hunting close into town?

BM: Oh yes. Yes. I used to hunt Rabbit Creek. Um, we would hunt for moose there. And then, uh, we went out to Eagle River, and then that got too crowded and we went on out to, uh, Mat-Su, and that got too crowded, and eventually we went further and further up the highway, but we did used to hunt. In fact we used to hunt at the airport here. They used to have a bow hunting in order to keep the moose off of the runways. As a matter of fact I helped survey out there when they built the International Airport, so.

MD: Uh, tell us- what was there before the airport was built?

BM: Uh, clay. (laughs) Mounds and clay, and they took tremendous amounts of equipment and leveled that whole area there.

MD: The, uh, which way does- did the water flow up, from Lake Spenard to Lake Hood? I'm trying to think- is there a creek- natural creek there someplace?

BM: there are two creeks that come out of, uh, Lake Spenard, yes. And they flood. Um, I'm not two hundred years old and I've seen two hundred-year floods so far. So its very possible. Actually the water flows from the, uh, south side of Lake Hood and Lake Spenard into the lake, and then out the north side.



MD: So coming towards, um, kinda the north end of the runway?

BM: Yes. There's- Fish Creek comes down through here, that's one exit.

MD: That's one, ok. How did they, uh, where did the, where I guess did the gravel come from to build the place?

BM: Well, we gradually used up all the gravel in Anchorage, and now you get gravel from, uh, the Matanuska Valley, so the last few subdivisions I have been involved with we've actually dug the peat here, hauled it all the way out to Palmer, get a load of gravel and bring it back, which is a long ways to go. But, um, there used to be pockets of gravel here and there throughout Anchorage. And of course the first thing that was built in Anchorage was built in good ground. You looked for birch trees and you knew you had good drainage and good places to build. So all those got built up. The good ground. And then when that was gone you said, "Well, there's spruce, how deep is the peat?" And then- now we're entering the- (laughs) start to get digging out the peat and putting in the gravel. And, h, that has to be. There's just no way you can leave unconnected portions. A subdivision here and a subdivision there, where there's a knoll, where there's birch and gravel. And, uh, there's a sewer and water line and an electric line and a gas line, all of which have got to be paid for somehow, and the only way its paid for is to build along those routes.

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MD: Um, how long did you teach?

BM: I taught for three years?

MD: And uh, then what did you?

BM: Well, I was, oh, at one time I was a commercial fisherman. Uh-

MD: Where did you fish?

BM: Out of Kasilof.

MD: Salmon?

BM: Yeah. Drifting, yes. And I worked on the railroad as a gandy dancer. Now they've got a machine that tamps ties and, uh, they don't need gangs of people with shovels to do that. So I did those things in college. Bit of mountain climbing while I was there. And, um, after college, teaching. Uh, I got involved in real estate and laying out subdivisions, um, and building houses. And been involved in that for forty years now

MD: Um, were you involved at all with the push for statehood? Peripherally or directly?

BM: Peripherally. My father was very much involved at that time.

MD: I found a photo of him and the mayor Anton Anderson, shaking hands, and-

BM: Yes.

MD: And it was odd because the photo was not labeled. Of course I recognized Colonel Marston, and I recognized Anton by his hat.

BM: Mmhmm.

MD: He only wore one hat that I recall. But, um, with the, uh- what was the mood like at that time leading up to and around statehood?

BM: Well, having been a commercial fisherman, I knew what traps were. And, uh, traps are a very efficient form of fishing, perhaps the best form, because the fish can be kept alive and ready for the cannery. But, the people who owned, uh, these are Outside sources who didn't live here. And they got Corps of Engineer permits and, uh, they practically owned Alaska. And, uh, that's why- that's one reason that statehood went through. Was to get Outside interests out of owning the fisheries.

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MD: And, uh, I understand that more and more of the permits, the limited entry permits, are now owned by out of state interests?

BM: Yes, um, its a hard battle to keep Alaskans with their own resources, owning them.

MD: With the, um, the building of Anchorage. How have you seen it go from 11th to the Anchorage Bowl now?

BM: How have I seen it?

MD: What were some of the big developments that occurred in your life?

BM: Well, Turnagain was one of the first. And, um, I can remember that I had the only telephone in, uh- eighty-six people lived there at that time, and there's one telephone line. And it went to our model home. So I was very busy delivering messages for some time. It wasn't all- it didn't all come at once. The telephones came later. And, uh, I developed, uh, I was involved with Windermere, and Broadmoor, and Ocean View. Ocean View is about eight miles out, and I know people, you would-

they would say where they wanted to live and I would say, "Ocean View", and they'd say "No, that's too far out". In fact, they used to say Turnagain was too- much too far out. Too far away from downtown. And I'd say, "Well, let's go out and look, let's see". And I'd put my foot on the gas and be out in Ocean View in ten, fifteen minutes. And they'd say, "Oh, this isn't so bad". So. There you go.

MD: Um, how has the permitting process- I mean, you say at one time, y'know, people sort of built any way they felt like it, and now-

BM: Yes. That- things have changed. Of course, Spenard was not in the city at that time, so the city had no authority when they were building their own foundations and their own basements. Now of course the city supervises the entire subdivision. Not only that, the, uh, the EPA also gets involved. So you've got both federal and city in subdivision development. And of course the municipality is in charge of the structure itself. You have to have an architect; you just don't go build it as we did then. And of course there is sewer and water, which is, uh, we were living off of shallow water wells of twenty-five feet deep, and, uh, those don't go with septic tanks for very long.

MD: Um, and yet there's still places within just a couple miles of us here, that are using septic and water systems.

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BM: That's true.

MD: In the Sand Lake area.

BM: That's true.

MD: How long can they hold out? (laughs)

BM: How long can they do it? Well, um, shallow wells are not a very good idea. And, um, with septic tanks they're good for maybe twenty years. At the end of that you're, you're- the overflow from the septic tank into the cesspool clogs it up, so its time to either build another one or hook onto city sewer and water.

MD: Um, it was- in addition to sewer and water and telephones, how did gas, uh, change lives here?

BM: Uh, greatly! Greatly. We were on oil up to that point, and, uh, most people had a couple fifty-gallon drums with copper wire coming out to a pot-type burner. We used to have one central burner in the middle of the living room area, and that's where all your heat came from. But once gas came, oh, tremendously different. Its cleaner and you're not always having to fill it, and we began to have, um, baseboard

heat, and uh, decent heating. Yes. Been through it. Dug my own well. Dug my own cesspool. Dug, y'know. So.

MD: Um, do you recall a time when people were using coal?

BM: I can remember that there used to be coal you could buy that was packaged with, uh, wrapping paper, and there were a few people who did, yes. But very few.

MD: Um, where was- where was your mom getting her groceries from? In your first year here?

MD: Uh, downtown, the Food Center was on 4th Avenue. Across from the post office.

MD: And what all was in the Food Center, how big was it?

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BM: Uh, I remember one year on the summer time I was looking for a job, and I- there were three thousand people out of work in Anchorage, and I was determined that I was going to get a job. So I started at one end of 4th Avenue, and people would look at me and say, "No" before I even got my mouth open. And so I decided, "Hey, I'm going to get the first word in", and as I worked my way down I came to the Food Center. And I- they started to say no, and I told him how great a retail clerk I was. I could do anything in the, um, retail food business. And I had been working as a clerk in the food business. And, uh, he said, "Well, we do need somebody in charge of the, um, fruit and vegetable department. You're in charge." Well, I have marked a lot of cans and I've been a cash- run a cash register, but I had never run the fruit department. And I think I just oversold myself. (laughs) So anywhere there was the food center downtown. And...

MD: How was the fruit and vegetables coming up here?

BM: Oh. I had never marked a can over a dollar when I went there. And the crates of celery and vegetables, you would lop about half of it off, and clean it up and put it on the shelf. Because it came up by boat and, uh, it sat on the dock, and then it sat on the dock down in Seward, then it got on the railroad, then it got here. By that time it was not very fresh. In fact, we had two types of eggs. We had what they called boat eggs and we had airborne eggs. Now, you paid twenty-five percent more for airborne eggs. But if you were frugal, most people bought the ship eggs. Came in by ship. And you had to treat these quite differently. Um, airborne eggs you just cracked as you normally do and used them. But if you got sea, sea- sealift eggs, you cracked them over a, um, bowl, and you looked at them, and you smelled them, and some of them you dumped, and some of them you used. So, um, food, fresh foods were in short supply.

MD: There was no local, uh poultry, or-

BM: Not that I am aware of.

MD: And um, (laughs) little suspicious there. When did you become aware- I guess, when did they start bringing- what was it like when they started bringing fresh fruit and food in?

BM: Well, I became a commercial fisherman at that time, so I don't know.

MD: (laughs)

BM: I haven't seen- I've never seen a boat egg in the last twenty years. But if you've been here long enough you remember boat eggs and air-freights, air-freighted eggs. Actually, uh, right after World War II, uh, it was an amazing town in terms of, uh, being serviced by airlines. We had fifty airlines. Now, that sounds ridiculous, but each airline had one airplane, and that one airplane was a DC-3. And they all had their headquarters in various bars on 4th Avenue. And so when you wanted to fly Outside you could fly Outside for fifty dollars. But you went down to one of the bars, and you put your name down with one of the airlines, and they would give you a call when they got a full airplane. And, uh, you'd go and sit on bucket seats, steel seats, and the, um, middle of the aisle was piled with your, um, carry-on. You sat with your feet up on top of that. And, uh, you had to stop at, uh Annette Island, was it? Yeah, on the way down because there wasn't enough fuel to get all the way down, so you stopped and refueled and then went on down to Seattle. So.

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MD: How long would that take?

BM: Oh, about thirteen hours or so. That's a little better than the- well now its what, three hours? Three and a half.

MD: Yeah.

BM: Things have changed.

MD: We complain a lot about it.

BM: (laughs)

MD: Um, did you ever take the steamship?

BM: Oh yes. Coming to Alaska, most older Alaskans will tell you which ship they came on, because Alaska Steam had a number of ships, they were all a little bit

different. People would talk about how this one had a quiver to it and that one didn't, and I came up on the Denali. And course you were a week coming up from Seattle to here, and so you got to know people, and you didn't have many visitors. There were not tourists.

MD: Right.

BM: These were people who lived here. And, uh, I think that's one of the regrets that those of us who've lived here for a while are still saying, that when we go to the airport we used to see- know half of the people. Or coming up by ship you knew the people. Uh, we had four meals a day, we had an orchestra, you danced from seven until midnight, the orchestra played. And, uh, there were six hundred employees on the ship to five hundred passengers. We lived very, very, well and didn't realize it.

MD: Much more luxurious than I imagined.

BM: Yeah, we, um, I always remembered those days going back and forth on the Alaska Steam. So when the ferry system started in Alaska, I told my good wife Wilda that, uh, "Hey, we'll go down to Juneau!" Y'know, we've got friends in Juneau. I was thinking orchestra, dancing, things like that. And, um, I sat there waiting at seven o'clock at night in the bar in the ferry, people got mattresses out, they put them over their heads, they went to sleep. That was it. (laughs) No music, no fun.

[01:37:49:00]

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MD: Just the trip.

BM: Just the trip.

MD: Um, what were you doing during the earthquake?

BM: I was on McCauley Avenue, which is about half a block from where we're sitting down, and I was driving home. It was 5:30 at night, and the, uh, the car that was approaching me- the man driving it pulled over to the side and out his arm around the, the lady who was on the other side in the front seat. And I thought, "Gee this is a- 5:30 at night's a strange time to be romantic". And then things began to swish, these big spruce trees. You could hear 'em swish, shhwah, shhwah, back and forth. And I drove half a block, that's right next to my house here on McCauley, and, uh, part way down what is now Turnagain, and I realized that my driveway wasn't there anymore. It had slid. So I backed up a block, and then another block slid, so I backed up three times, realizing that my family was in the original homestead log cabin. And when it finally quit shaking and sliding, I told myself, "Well, your family's out there, jump!" And I said, "You're not going to do yourself any good with a broken leg", so I finally got- went back into people's garages here and got a rope. And tied a rope to

the tree, went down and, uh, my wife was there. The house was at a forty-five degree angle, and all the kids were in, in good shape. So we got out.

MD: And you had to- how, how far down had the, had the land settled?

BM: Probably, uh, forty feet.

MD: And you had to come down that by rope-

BM: Yeah.

MD: How did you get everyone back? (laughs)

BM: Well that's how we got back up.

MD: Hauled them on the rope?

BM: Yeah.

MD: The, uh, and then the days that followed, um, what- how did the city cope?

[01:40:10:00]

[00:40:04]

BM: Um, I still respect the Corps of Engineers, they did a great job. Uh, they ran, um, pipe, aluminum pipe that you would use for irrigation, down the streets. And in front of every house there was a hose tab, so you took your- of course it was spring, and it was still- time with freezing. So you'd take your house out and screw it into the irrigation tap, and screw it into, uh, your hose bib, and use it for water, but every night you had to go out and unscrew it so that it wouldn't freeze. Yeah.

MD: And that's how people got their water?

BM: That's how they got their water. Mmhmm.

MD: And, um, what were, what were some of the places you frequented before the earthquake that you could no longer frequent?

BM: Well, Spenard Road, for instance, which was the only way into town. Uh we really questioned what had happened. Nobody could figure out- you had to drive through water to get down- Spenard Road was there, but it was about axle-deep coming through the lower sections of it. And it was almost six months before we got elevations. They had to go quite a ways away from Anchorage- a few hundred miles- to get a reference point and bring it in. And I know there are some places where the railroad was repaired. And they put, um, culverts through, and they're still, uh,

maybe eight feet in the air. They were trying to use reference points that had been here but no longer were accurate.

MD: Um, that- Spenard was flooded down by Chester Creek?

BM: Mmhmm.

MD: Yeah.

BM: Actually, uh, the new dock we had just built, um, the water came right over the top of that. And, uh, we were fortunate that we had a second house, so we moved into that. Um, some six months later- six months? I think so. Y'know.

MD: And the, uh, one of the features of the town when I look at the old maps- you mention Spenard had its own post office- it has Anchorage, Spenard, Mountain View, and Eastchester.

BM: mmhmm.

MD: Was that a part of the town? Was that-

BM: Those were neighborhoods, um, Eastchester Flats, yes. Um, was interesting, they were all built, all the houses in that Eastchester area were not built under- to conform to building standards. And you would have small lots with shallow wells and septic...um, actually cesspools only, no septic.

MD: Yeah.

[01:43:21:00]

[00:00:06]

BM: And it was a dangerous health situation and I did serve on the committee in which we went through urban renewal.

MD: This was following the earthquake?

BM: ...yes. It was after the earthquake.

MD: And what, what, what became of those houses in the area.

BM: They were all, they were all- all the- all the older houses were bought and demolished. And, um, its all brand new in that area now.

MD: Right.

BM: And its connected to sewer and water and things of that sort. Uh, Alaska Housing Authority did that. It took them twelve years to do it, but.



MD: Uh, prior to the earthquake I guess- or maybe prior in the '60s as well- but what were, what were the good places to go to eat, for instance, for an evening out in town?

BM: Hmm. Now that's a good question.

MD: Got some extra bucks, maybe someone to entertain?

BM: The Jade Room was known. And that's the one that pops to mind right off. Uh, but, uh, there wasn't that much nightlife going on.

MD: Right.

BM: Except in the bars, and of course payday with the military you had the MPs going up and down 4th Avenue. And there was a time that we were featured as one of the, what, most wet towns in the United States. There used to be one bar after another on 4th Avenue. There's very few of them left.

MD: Um, did they have live- live music at most of those? Or were they-

BM: You went, um, after hours in East, Eastchester, yes.

[01:45:25:00]

[00:45:20]

MD: Hmm. Music in Eastchester?

BM: Yes.

MD: And bars?

BM: Yes. But that's gone.

MD: Right.

BM: That was pick-up music that people would come in and play, and...there wasn't a regular affair.

MD: Right. Um, how's the city changed, matured, or decayed culturally in your estimate?

BM: Come again? "Aged, matured-"

MD: Well, how's it changed, culturally- the culture of the city?

BM: Oh.

MD: Yeah.

BM: Well, due to my wife and other people, um, we have created institutions in, in, Anchorage. Which I'm very proud of, my wife being involved with the library, historic preservation, things of that sort. And, um, we've both been involved with the World Affairs Committee. Um, and, uh, we've seen Anchorage grow and mature, uh, and we've been very fortunate to, to have been here during those formative years.

MD: And, and, you were the president of the World Affairs Council?

BM: Yes, I was.

MD: For how long?

BM: Uh, couple- couple years, but I was on the board for many years.

MD: Who were some of the interesting people you brought up?

BM: Well, uh, Mrs. Atwood, Evangeline Atwood, wife of the publisher, um, 'course was really the founder of World Affairs Council.

MD: Who were- the people who came up and participated in meetings- I mean, you always had speakers.

[01:47:09:00]

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BM: Yes. Often times in the early days we put it together ourselves.

MD: Right.

BM: Um, and I can remember we had a Russian organized to speak down at the Westward Hotel which is down- not called the Westward, but, um. And he didn't show up, and I was President, I was at the podium, so I said to myself, "Well, looks like you're giving the lecture today". (laughs) So those things happened.

MD: Uh, were you-

BM: In fact, I was going to elucidate somewhat- the World Affairs Council then was the concept of Evangeline Atwood, who was the creator of many of the social, um, the women's club, several other things that she developed. She plucked me and said, "You. You do this". And I admit, at noon once a week I had a movie I took around, uh, to homes so housewives could participate. And, um, then we had lunches, and then we had an evening session at the Loussac Library, so we had three every week. And I was running around with films and speakers and things like that. I can remember

Mike Gravel and I used to have to- when you have a speaker come up oftentimes they'll come up to fish and do other things, so you have to entertain them. And I'd say, "Mike, I have got to- I've got an appointment at work, you take 'em!" And Mike would hand 'em to me, and I would hand 'em to Mike, and back and forth, so we often worked that way, entertaining speakers for a week at a time.

MD: This was before he became senator?

BM: That's right.

MD: Uh, what was he doing? How did you encounter- how did you meet him?

BM: He was a member of the World Affairs Council.

MD: Oh, ok. Um, and what was he like?

BM: I wouldn't comment on Mike.

MD: (laughs)

BM: Personally my relations with him were good. I was never part of his political life.

[01:49:37:00]

[00:49:32]

MD: Were you surprised when he defeated Gravel? Uh, Gruening, I'm sorry, Senator Gruening?

BM: Uh, Gruening is a hero of mine, and so yes, Gruening has all my respect as the intellectual leader of, uh, statehood. Without him it never would have happened. A brilliant man. Brilliant.

MD: Um, what was, well- what was he like personally? I mean, intellectually and so forth, but what was he like to converse with?

BM: Well, we've had discussions around our dining room table, and he would tell you stories about Midway Island, how he selected that and chose it, and his relationships with Franklin Roosevelt, things of that sort. A very personable person. He- I enjoyed talking with him.

MD: He- He worked with Robert LaFollette, one time-

BM: Yes.

MD: But that's getting towards ancient history at this point. I always thought that was a fascinating thing, I would have loved to talk to him about that. Um, what was who were some of the other politicians you've encountered over the years? Either who earned your respect, or, um.

BM: Well, Gruening is so- you mention Gruening, you, you cover it all right there. I wouldn't, wouldn't parse the rest of them. There've been some better than others, yes, but Gruening head and shoulders above all the rest of them.

MD: Did you have any inkling, even in the '50s, that Anchorage would turn into the sort of large city it has become?

BM: No. I don't think so. Um, it was year by year, putting subdivision together, building houses and then putting your finger up to the wind and seeing which way it blew, and if it said, "Yes, we're still growing", you'd add more houses and more subdivisions, etc.

MD: And if you were to project into the future, about what Anchorage may become another fifty years from now, anything the crystal ball might reveal?

[01:51:55:00]  
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BM: Uh, I'm highly fearful of the future.

MD: How so?

BM: Well, at this point you can judge the future by how many, um, barrels of oil are coming down the pipeline. With eighty percent of our budget being paid by, uh, oil- I don't think some people realize it- if they're out there passing petitions to increase the oil taxes and the oil companies are saying that we're not competitive, I think we're cutting our own throats. Um, I have to feel that its a- one resource is holding us up. We can't live off of fishing, we can't live off of mining, and eighty percent of our income is off of oil. And we've got to do that fairly and honestly, to tax it, but, uh, I think we overshot the mark previously.

MD: Yeah. Anything else that comes to mind, that perhaps you'd want people to know about in the future?

BM: What I'd want them to know about? We've fought through a lot of issues here. Um, segregation was part of it.

MD: Tell me about that.

BM: Well, I was, um, on the Federal Civil Rights Advisory Board for several years. And it was written right into a lot of the restrictions on subdivisions. No, uh, Black would be allowed to have ownership within the subdivision. And, uh, we eventually-

MD: "Only an American of the White Race"-

BM: That's right. Yes.

MD: -was the language.

BM: And, uh, that was tragic. And, and, I spent quite some time working, uh, with the Civil Rights Committee, and went to Washington on that issue. And in selling, in fact, we opened many subdivisions, uh, to Blacks rather than discriminate. And that was one step we went through. But it took four or five years. People would threaten to want their earnest money back because we had sold to somebody of a different race.

MD: Hmm. And yet there was a notable non-white population in Anchorage at the time.

BM: Yes.

MD: And professional.

BM: Yes. One of my heroes- you're asking for heroes- Willard Bowman was one of them. He was State Human Rights Director. And I guess they've named a school after him out here. And Willard was a strong, capable man. We used to hold hearings throughout the state on the subject.

[01:54:58:00]

[00:54:53]

MD: Have you traveled ex- much around Alaska?

BM: Well, I've climbed and I've worked on the railroad, up and down. And, um, I worked on the road to, uh, from Anchorage to Seward down the Turnagain Highway. The Turnagain Arm.

MD: When did they build that?

BM: Hmm. You're asking me for a question I can't give you an answer to.

MD: I mean the railroad, and then you built it.

BM: That's right.

MD: So what was it like building- working on it? How did you get to the-

BM: Oh.

MD: -stations and so forth?

BM: Uh, I built the, was involved as a laborer building the bridge at Bird Creek. And, uh, then I was, uh, using an axe at the top of the Turnagain Pass up there, later on. And we got there by D8. And I remember pulling my feet up into the cabin, looking at the treads of the D8 as it was going deeper and deeper into the mud. So, you asked me how I got there- in my D8, and uh, Bird Creek we got there by railroad.

MD: A Caterpillar then, would pull you up there.

BM: Yeah.

MD: Were you like in a wagon behind it? (inaudible)...tractor. (laughs)

BM: No, no, we were sitting up on top of the cabin. (laughs)

MD: (laughs) Oh man. The, uh, yeah, a lot of muskeg there. The, um, let's see, traveling. Well, are there places that you have not been able to see that you would like to?

BM: Yes. Um, several. Um, I still have desires to go. I did have the opportunity to go down the Yukon. And around to Unalakleet out the mouth of the Yukon. And- which I promised my children I was going to take them, and they're now grown and I haven't fulfilled that promise, so I've still got that to do again. I want to take another trip down the Yukon.

[01:57:05:00]

[00:57:01]

MD: What kind of boat did you use, what kind of vessel?

BM: A landing craft, which doesn't belong on the Yukon River.

MD: (laughs) What powered it?

BM: Well, um, I'm trying to remember what the power was. Um. It was a twin engine LCVP, surplus military.

MD: That's amazing.

BM: Well I was going to tell you earlier, that, uh, you have to choose your course very well going down the Yukon, because its very shallow and you go from one cut bank to the other cut bank. So you're going back and forth and back and forth down. And, uh, we had some engine trouble, uh, at Galena. And, uh, first thing I did, having been fishing here in Cook Inlet, was to go to the bow of the boat and get a line and,

uh- have somebody was going to come and pull us. Well, I'm standing at the bow, and I realize that the, uh, protocol at, on the river is you push, you don't pull. So I was on the wrong end of the boat. They, they attached two lines at the back and pushed us into shore. And I remember one of the natives of Galena sat next to us and gave us advice about the engine. We had the manual there and we'd start it up and it would quit, and start it up and it would quit. And we kept ignoring him, I will admit. He is, I, he really did- he was not a mechanic, but he was trying to be helpful. And he finally said, "You got no exhaust", when it started. And that was- took us four days to, to get to that point. So we took the, um, exhaust ports off and it ran just fine, blasting fire in all directions. And we found that the old quiet nature of the engine was designed so that you could turn a valve and put the exhaust underwater so people didn't hear you, and it had jammed a log in it, so.

MD: (laughs)

BM: We got the log out, we got the thing back together again, but that, um Galena resident I admired him now. I ignored him for three days but he knew more than I did, just sitting and watching me.

MD: That- you said you were following the Nenana?

BM: Yes, yes.

[01:59:54:00]

[00:59:49]

MD: This was like in the late '40s, early '50s?

BM: Yes, um, '50s, yeah. Um, the Nenana was- which is now in the park at, in Fairbanks, is on display. It was then operating. And I went to sleep upstairs in the cabin of our small landing craft, and the sun came up, say four o'clock in the morning or so. And I woke up, and, uh, the boat had not been there when I went to sleep. So when I saw it I think, "Gee, this is just like Mark Twain." Here's that beautiful, beautiful boat, and, uh, when they left town I decided, "Enough of this sounding and trying to stay in the channel, we'll just follow this hundred-and-some-odd-foot boat, no problem". Well we got around the first curve and we hit bottom so hard it just jarred my teeth, and they went off in the distance. 'Cause they only draw about a foot and a half of water, they're very, very shallow.

MD: The landing craft was-

BM: The landing craft draws three and a half, and that's enough to set you back.

MD: And, uh, kay, are there any other-

Bob Curtis-Johnson: You wanted to touch on unification?

MD: Oh yeah that's right, I actually wrote that down here. Yeah, um, were you involved at all with the unification of the city and borough?

BCJ: Any stories?

BM: Uh, no. I was not, really. Um, it was an interesting time.

MD: Did you have an opinion about it?

BM: Did I have an opinion about it? Uh, I think its the most logical thing. And I look at the South 48 and other pars of Alaska where you have- the South 48, a county and a township, and they've each got authority, so the city is all divided up into little chunks and they have different taxing, and they have- its wrong, to me. What we did was right. We combined two sets of government, we expanded the, uh, the size of Anchorage, eliminated the Borough, the, um, City of Anchorage as a separate entity. Was very good.

MD: Um, why do you think there was a resistance to that idea?

BM: Uh-

MD: It was a very close vote several times.

[02:02:28:00]

[01:02:23]

BM: Yes. People were fearful of regulations. Alaskans and others- particularly Alaskans- don't like to be told what to do by anybody. They want to build their cesspool and use their half a stick of dynamite to loosen up things if it doesn't work. And, uh, they knew that if you eventually had government controlling everything you were going to have to put the sewer in, and the sewer was very expensive. You had to run it from down the street. And, uh, water had to be run, and somebody had to pay for it. So, there was- the resistance was the cost to become a modern city. Um, actually, it wasn't all municipal effort. Uh, Mr. Ken Cato, who was, um, a developer here, um, put together Spenard Utilities. A private development company. And they probably laid more sewers and more water lines than the city did, or the borough. And Ken was a very, very successful man. He did Island Homes in Fairbanks. And some projects- many projects here. And had an arrangement with financing through the Permanente Cement Company. So, um, he laid, I would say, a large portion of the sewer and water outside of Anchorage.

MD: Yeah, I still see the SPUD manhole covers around.

BM: Yes, yes.



MD: SPUD. Um, how did, how did the construction of the airport sort of change the city?

BM: Well...

MD: You had the old airlines running out of the bars...

BM: That went away.

MD: That went away, yeah.

BM: That went away. Um...

MD: Was there a noticeable increase in the traffic?

BM: Oh, yes, yes. We used to, uh, after it was built, at first we, we got on board and off board what we used to call the cattle shed. It was a plywood ramp that, uh, led out to the. And as I remember there was only one, there might have been two. But the airport continues to expand at a tremendous rate. Course, we went through a period in which the only way you could access Europe from Asia was to stop here. And when that went away as a necessary stop, then we had quite a difference. Uh, we had some real problems with supporting the airport. Food preparation and things like that didn't happen for quite some time. We didn't have, um, Japanese Airlines flying to Europe through here, and that was an awkward time for the airport. Course, now we all look to the German Airline that comes in here, and we're looking happily towards the Icelandic Airlines.

[02:05:55:00]

[01:05:51]

MD: Yeah. You could spend a weekend in Reykjavik.

BM: Yes. My children are just doing that, they just-

MD: Really!

BM: They're now in Italy. My grandson is a drummer and he has got a, uh, institute on drumming over in Italy, so he flew over the pole and, uh, stopped at Reykjavik for a day and a half.

MD: Um, any other stories that come to mind that you might want to share, or?

BM: Stories I might want to share.

MD: Stories of- interesting experiences. Well everyone in Alaska has had what we call a hundred close calls.

BM: (laughs) Well, I can remember when my house- our house, the original log cabin was still sitting in the slide area. And, uh, a portion of Elmer Rasmuson's house was still where he originally built it here in the Turnagain area. Everything else was cleared. Just absolutely leveled. There wasn't a tree or anything in sight. They burned everything that was wood, they buried everything that was concrete, and there were just two houses left. Mine and Elmer's, and so I went over and talked to Mr. Rasmuson about what he was going to do, and he said, "Well, there's no sewer, there's no water, it looks pretty hopeless to me." And I said, "Well, gee, if you're not going to fight the issue I don't see how I could", and the Corps said, "Well, your log house is worthless. So we're going to burn it." And I said, "No, its not worthless! My gosh, it has historic importance. Lynn Ary hand-adzed this, each log, log by log with a adz put it together". So I finally talked them into moving it. And it did get moved, and I sold it to, uh, the Culligan man, who used to come around and take care of my well. I had a well that had red rust in it. Nobody else had red rust. I had red rust. But since I had talked with him so much and he had been in and out of my house, I sold it to him. And he spent ten years straightening it out, putting tension on this side and that side, and its still uh, a few blocks from here. Its still, still alive. And when I walked down through the cleared area of what had been the slide area, there's only one little drainage comes out, and its red. Its right where my house was. All the rest- everybody else had clear water. I was sitting on an iron deposit, so.

[02:08:51:00]

[01:08:47]

MD: The, uh- and you, you rebuilt right here next to the big slide area.

BM: Oh, yes. That was interesting. After the- after the earthquake they sent- SBA sent all sorts of people up here. And, uh, people were getting new loans based on the value of the house they had before. So I went down and said, "Well, I would like to get a loan, I wanna build a house", and they read my financial statement and they said, "You can't afford a house, you're broke! Go away". Well, I thought about that for a while. And I went down- other people were still getting loans that I knew, and so I went down to somebody else and I applied again. Thought, "Well, hey, if at first you don't succeed, try it again." And, uh, second man looked at it and he said, "You're too rich. We can't loan you any money!" (laughs) And I thought, "Jeez, I'm not winning this time". but I went down a third time, and I am forever grateful, and I have forgotten the man's name, who was brought up here to do this. He said, "You go over and tell the people that you owe that, uh, on land that you are developing, that they're going to have to take a third of their price off it, or, and we'll loan you the money to pay your, your land off, and we'll loan you the money to build a house." And I did that. And, um, the person I owed money was unhappy, but in the end, he said, "Gee, something's better than nothing, I'd best be able to do that, that's just great." So they said, then, "Well, where do you want to build?" And I said, "Well, as close as I can to where I was before. This is my home now." And, um, they said, "Oh, I don't know. This is the Turnagain area that's shaken, and things could be very difficult, and we don't think we can do that". And they said, "But we'll do this; we'll

wire Washington and see what they say". So we waited, and a week later the telegram came back loan approved, everything's ok. So I went down and signed the mortgage, and I got a backhoe and I'm down in the, um, basement, and we're laying the footing. And a man with a white shirt and a tie came to the top of the hole. And I said, "Trouble". When anybody with a white shirt and a tie comes on a- on a construction job, you know there is trouble. And he said, "You've got to stop". And I said, "What do you mean I got to stop?" And he said, "Well, they left the last line on the telegram off. And it said 'subject to the approval of the Corps of Engineers, and we didn't catch that'." And I thought about that for a while, and I said, "Its too late. I've signed the Deed of Trust. I've laid the footing. And I'm building the house". So I kept taking pictures of me as the house got framed, and I make another draw on the loan, and they- it all slipped by, and we're very happy where we are on the new bluff. Anyway.

MD: But you weren't concerned about rebuilding this close to the slide zone?

BM: Um, no. Um, I told you that I've been through two hundred-year-floods.

MD: Right.

[02:12:23:00]

[01:12:23]

BM: But they weren't here. And earthquakes of 9.1 or 9.2- the last one that was that big was in St. Lewis in, uh, 1805, and that's an estimate of it. So I figure a couple of hundred years anyway. Life is not given to anyone. There are floods, thee are earthquakes.

MD: And there are mountains. What are some of the mountains you've climbed?

BM: Um, well, I do have one that we, we uh, on the- up towards, um, Black Rapids Glacier, we admittedly picked out a mountain that was above ten thousand feet and had never been climbed. And if you climb a mountain that had never been climbed above ten thousand feet you can name it. We did climb it and, uh, I remember the rest of the crew got into an argument about what the name was gonna be, and I- six months later they finally named it, and it does appear on the maps. Um. And we tried Deborah too, uh, which we failed. Um, and I was seeing a republished book on mountaineering here recently, and I thought they were the fourth expedition that had made it. So I read all the way to the end of the book and they didn't make it either! And I looked it up on the computer, and Wikipedia, and here's all these people who had attempted to climb it. And, uh, I decided, "Well, uh, most of my friends are now either retired or died, but we aren't in here!" And I sat down and wrote a little article about the time that we, we were the third unsuccessful attempt. So I plugged that into Wikipedia, and now those people who are- three of them, that I climbed with are now deceased- I made them alive. (laughs) And put them in Wikipedia as the third unsuccessful attempt on Mt. Deborah.

MD: The mountain that you did climb though, over ten thousand feet- what name did you guys finally decide?

BM: I keep forgetting it. I'll dig it up here. It had a nice sounding name, but.

MD: Ok. I don't think I have any further question to ask. Do you have anything to add?

BM: Um, I will add its been a wonderful place to live- is a wonderful place to live, and I would, uh, I'm very pleased that my family lives here. My daughter lives across the street, my son lives six or eight blocks away, and my grandchildren are going to college and they're all going back. So I've had a really, uh, great experience in Alaska. Even though I've got to go a long ways to hunt now, and even though they've paved the streets so we don't get stuck axle-deep in mud, I still like Alaska, I still like Anchorage, and I hope to be here the rest of my life.

MD: Thank you much!

[02:15:55:00]

[01:15:52]

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