

**Early Anchorage Oral History Project  
Interview of Robert Poggas by Bob Curtis-Johnson**

Transcript

**Oral History 2016-18-10  
(Summit Day Media No. AA7098) Begins**  
Elapsed Time [00:00:00]

Bob Curtis Johnson: Well hello. I just wanna say, uh, a couple of things as we get going here that uh...

Robert Poggas: OK.

BCJ: This is Bob Curtis-Johnson interviewing Bob Poggas...

RP: I'm Bob.

BCJ: September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014, and these interviews are for uh, public use, to the university, and, just, talk about whatever you're willing to talk about. I'll ask a few questions, and you're not required to tell us anything you don't want to tell us. And we can stop whenever you're ready. We're in Anchorage Alaska at the Heritage Museum.

RP: I'm catching most of that, so I think were, we'll do OK.

BCJ: Alright. I'm just saying...

RP: Hey. That's better.

BCJ: Stop whenever you want Bob.

RP: OK.

[00:00:47]

BCJ: And you're not required to tell us anything you don't want to tell us. It's just for the future...

RP: No skeletons that I'll bring out, you know.

BCJ. [Laughs] Well, why don't we start with uh, who you are and uh who your parents are, and where, and where you were born?

RP: Sure. I'm Robert Poggas, yeah, and my parents were George Poggas and, uh, Edith or Erita, uh, and Dad came from, uh, Greece, uh, Velia, a little town oh about

50, uh kilometers north of Athens. And Mom was from uh Kenai or uh Ninilchik, and uh they met in Anchorage, and you know, one thing leads to another. Yeah uh, they had two other children. My brother is uh 11 years older than me. He passed away you know, some years ago. And my sister's uh 9 years older, and she's still with us. We live out there in the family house that was put up on the homestead. So...

BCJ: How did you uh, how did you all come to live in uh, in the homestead? How did the homestead come about?

[00:01:57]

RP: Well, when Dad was uh, he helped uh build the Alaska Railroad, and uh, he worked on the crew that uh, you know, built that section uh, passing through there. He said, he admired the land, and he said, "Boy, if I ever get a chance, you know, I'd sure like to get a piece of this." And well low, the Homestead Act came along, and he uh maneuvered things around, he transferred down to uh assignment there, just a few miles away uh, Campbell Station. There's no Arctic Boulevard. And uh, uh went there and homesteaded. And a few years later the Seward Highway was put through, and it uh, cut through his homestead diagonally and left uh, um, what 40 acres on one side, and you know 120 on the other, and uh, and you know he didn't appreciate losing it but, it eventually uh worked out quite well. The, the tax bill that he got from uh the Muni were so high then that uh, he had to subdivide. Yeah, uh, he got uh, formed a subdivision. Well he made a ton of money at it but uh, you know uh, that's not what he wanted. He wanted to keep as much of the homestead intact as he, as he possibly could, and he did, you know. Well as evidence, the family house is still there and uh, [Cough], excuse me, and uh my sister is uh, you know, living there.

BCJ: And you had, is that Georgia? Is her name? Is your sister's name?

RP: My sister Georgia.

[00:03:27]

BCJ: Georgia? Georgia Bass?

RP: Georgia Bass, yeah, she's, still there.

BCJ: And uh, you had an older brother?

RP: Well, uh, no. Jim was my older brother, uh, he was 11 years older and I was the only one...

BCJ: And uh, tell me about uh your early school experiences. So, did you go to school? Did they have uh...

RP: I'm sorry. I didn't get that.

BCJ: Um, you know, schooling. I'm wondering about how, what kind of schooling you might have received.

RP: Oh, well, we uh, initially moved down here from Campbell Station from uh Talkeetna. And uh so my brother and sister had to start high school, which coincided with the time of me uh, starting grade school. That worked out well in that respect and uh, I went through all the uh uh years here in Anchorage, and yeah, up to high school, yeah, class of '55. [Laughs]  
[00:04:27]

BCJ: What uh, what year were you born?

RP: '37.

BCJ: 1937. And where where was that? Where were you born?

RP: Pardon?

BCJ: Where? Where were you born?

RP: Oh. Uh actually I was born here in uh Anchorage. Uh, I believe it was the Railroad Hospital. They had their own hospital down on, uh what, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue.

BCJ: And when your, when the family moved here to Anchorage, what year did they come?

RP: Oh boy, probably '44, '43.

[00:05:16]

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[00:00:00]

RP: Those were still war years, and uh, it was interesting uh that uh every evening you put up the blackout curtains, and uh, you know with the, still lived like uh, you know uh expected any time. And um when we were at Talkeetna, my father was uh carried his hunting rifle with him on his, uh, motorcar. It was uh really required by the railroad. Well, you seen anybody mess around that Talkeetna River Bridge, you know, stop them. You know, they drop a major span like that it would be a terrific problem. So, you know, he took them serious.

BCJ: What was it like during the war years? What do you recall?...

RP: Well, of course I was a little kid then, but uh, I remember uh, things were, you know everybody was super patriotic, uh you know, that was a given. But uh, there were a lot of items that uh, you could not get. And we were fortunate in Alaska. We didn't have uh uh a lot of the price controls and uh, quotas and uh things like they did in the Continental US. But still, there were many things, you know, you couldn't get car parts, and tires, you had to forget that it was the military first. You know, it was shortages like that. And you saved uh, well I recall us saving uh, foil from uh, you know, from packages, various wrappings, and uh, yeah, collected all for the effort. Yeah. Yeah.

BCJ: Reuse. Reuse everything?  
[00:01:43]

RP: Oh yeah. Use and reuse, and uh, made uh a recycler out of you early in life.  
[Laughs]

BCJ: And, what do you recall about uh, the end of the war, or, you know, immediately after the war?

RP: Boy. I recall a December day when I got the news about uh the end of the war. You know, war is over. Everybody goes downtown. And uh, they were whooping and shaking hands and exchanging neckties, and you know, everybody was celebrating, everybody was wonderful, and uh, there was no bad times here Alaska, you know, job shortage and things like that. Everybody who wanted to work had a job. And of course, after the war that prevailed throughout the US, and those were some really golden years, you know, lots of opportunities, yeah, yeah.

BCJ: Did you have a job during high school?

RP: No, uh, there weren't, uh, you know, this was a very small town, there were very few jobs and I wasn't one of the fortunate ones, and I lived uh, you know, over five miles out of town, so getting back and forth is a problem, uh, you know, there we go.

[00:03:05]

BCJ: How did you get to school?

RP: Oh we walked uh, why I say we, my cousins, uh, I had three cousins lived up, couple blocks up the street, uh, we walked up to Campbell Station, uh, up to uh uh Dowling Road or Potter Road, rather, and uh, caught a school bus there, and uh, oh it usually arrived, you know uh, we usually got there too. [Laughs] Uh, but you know, a lot of notable exceptions, the roads were terrible in those days. I recall when they were puttin' in uh, Arctic Boulevard, gravel was uh, so loose that, you know, the bus got mired down to the axel in it, and uh [Laughs], you know, challenging days but, you know, interesting looking back at it.

BCJ. Sure. After high school, what, did you go on and do any further education or trade school?

RP. Huh, I worked at uh, several jobs uh in town. My first job, uh uh, city policeman, his wife got me a job working at his service station at 4<sup>th</sup> and C, and it was a busy place there, boy, had a busy trade. And uh, I worked uh, after about a year of that I tired of pumping gas, went to work for uh uh, a moving uh companies, and uh, despite being built small, I was strong young man, I could do my share of work, you know, out there, the moving company, and uh, I stayed with those a several years. Then my brother, uh, talked me into uh uh, going into a partnership with him, on uh uh, land clearing and uh light dozer work, etcetera and landscaping. And soon we uh had uh uh couple of Cats and three trucks and, you know, small business there was a few years that uh, I found an opportunity to go to Fairbanks on uh, a full scholarship for an electronics program, and I was uh studying electronics by correspondence course, best I could do, and though I heard about that, [Cough], excuse me, on a new and used, and I was down there waiting on them to open up the office, uh you know, at lunchtime, and uh, talked my way into that and went up to Fairbanks, and uh, yeah, earned the associate's degree in electronics and met my first wife there, uh still married to her after 44 years, and we kind of joke, that's my first wife....

[00:05:52]

BCJ: And that's Mairgery, Margery?

RP: Margery.

BCJ: What was her maiden name?

RP: Buswell. Her uh, father was uh vice president for public service at the university, and uh, we lived there for uh, several years after we got married, or uh, couple years. Then uh, he moved uh, to Maine to assume the presidency of the university, and we, we moved down to Anchorage. That coincided with about the time my parents were uh, moving their, house, uh, you know, a distance, you know we're not required a bit of work. We stuck around and you know, helped out with that that summer. And uh, then I, I went to work at, avionics technician fixing uh, aircraft radios, uh out at Lake Hood, and uh, that was very enjoyable, a lot of guides coming in there with their fantastic stories, And uh, then I found the oilfields, and uh, I found out there were a general opportunity about a half mile down the street, making exactly twice what I was earning there as an avionics tech. Well, [Laughs], so uh, the rest of my career has been in the oilfields, and, I worked for ARCO. I retired from Alyeska Pipeline, yeah.

[00:07:27]

BCJ: What was your first uh, do you remember the name of the avionics company you worked for? What company that was? At Lake...

RP: That first company uh, up there was ARCO.

BCJ: Oh, OK.

RP: That was in uh, start-up days. Yeah, largest oilfield in America. Your bringing that up and making it run like it was designed to. And it was challenging, took a while to uh, get it lined out like that, but you know, it was very enjoyable.

BCJ: Were you working on the Slope?

RP: Yep.

BCJ: Yeah. What was your schedule?

[00:08:04]

RP: At Prudhoe. And we rotated back and forth, uh weekly.

BCJ: So I imagine it took a little longer to fly there?

RP: Uh, 800 miles, yeah, from Prudhoe Bay down to Anchorage. Yeah, about two and one half hours, two hours, whatever, yeah.

BCJ: What year was that, when you went to work with ARCO?

RP: Oh golly. When'd I work for them? '78 perhaps. Yeah, they were still finishing the place up before start-up. And uh, I worked after start-up, [Coughs], I worked for them in Anchorage. That was interesting. I was a uh, repair technician. I got to work on fixing their electronics in Anchorage and uh, also go out on the line, about uh, a third or half of my, my time uh servicing the electronics out there. And you always travelled with a companion, and uh, yeah, make a lot of friends up and down the whole pipeline, so it was very interesting and enjoyable.

BCJ: Did you ever, did you have some stories about uh making do, trying to repair things in uh difficult conditions?

RP: Making what?

BCJ: Any, trying to repair electronics under under difficult conditions?

[00:09:23]

RP: Well uh, not with that job I uh, did all my repairs in town, and any major adjustments out there, well you know, even on the line, well, well, build a shelter

around it, put some heat on it, we'll work on it, huh. No, everything was down in town. Uh, when I worked as a uh avionics tech though for the airlines, I did a lot of flying up there, and there, there were several instances that were pretty challenging. But, I remember 50 below the propane freezing up while I'm trying to solder to the other an antennae wire that was outside, and [Laughs] uh, taking the propane inside, heating it over a stove until, you know, for a minute or two, taking it outside, you know [Laughs], a five minute job turns into about a hour [Laughs]. At 50 below the efficiency goes down to about a third or something like that.

BCJ: And uh, this is early days of transistors and such, yes? So your, what kind of circuits, what kind of circuits were you working with?

RP: Oh uh, it was mostly radio work. Uh, we had uh made uh a radio beacon there, a low frequency beacon to guide the aircraft uh, into Site 1. That was a major uh, distribution point at the time. We had the longest airstrip aside from Prudhoe, and they'd bring the stuff in there, in the Hercules, and uh take it out in twin Otters to areas, drill sites and locations around there. And uh, so I'd be required to uh, [Coughs], be required to go up there to do uh, you know keep that beacon working. And that was an interesting flight once, I was going up in a C-46, guy said, and part of it just being a pilot on board, he said uh, get up there, hey I can't find the uh Sag 1 beacon. I know, that's what I'm going up there to fix. He said, "Oh my God." So we drove around while the sky was overcast. We finally found a hole which we dropped out of. Do you see anything familiar, let me know and we finally found one. Sag 1 over there [Laughs]. Flew around a lot in helicopters up there, bumming rides from uh, going from place to place. But uh, it was uh very active days and uh a lot going on.

[00:12:00]

BCJ: Sounds like it. What, what do you recall about when uh, when oil was first discovered on on Prudhoe?

RP: When what was going on at Prudhoe?

BCJ: When oil, when they first announced the strike, the find, do you recall the the news, or what the what the response was? Do you remember that time?

RP: No, that was on my off time. Oh, you know, I went to uh, a site up there and uh, and they had a big uh, map of Alaska, you know a cut-out map from a uh pipeline section, and all of our names of the start-up crew engraved in that, and uh, I thought that was rather nice, yeah. My small bit of immortality. But uh, I reflect on it, uh, it was important, you know, hey, we're pumping one fifth of America's crude oil, and uh, it took a bit of uh, you know, dedication to be working under those circumstances to bring that along and bring it on up, so it's been rewarding.

BCJ: And if we jump back a little bit before that time um, I didn't ask you about the earthquake. I wonder what your experience was at that time?

[00:13:24]

RP: Oh boy. Yeah, I recall that I was in a post office building downtown, uh and when that started, and it, somehow it was getting to be sizeable, you know, we get a lot of quakes around here, but wow, not this sizeable. Here was filing cabinets sliding across the floor, and sliding back again. And uh well, I knew we were uh, one of the strongest buildings in town, but I also knew that we were on a hillside. After about five minutes of that I said, "Good lord, this can't go on forever, you know, something's gotta give." Well fortunately, the post office building didn't move but, afterwards uh, we had the National Guard protecting Downtown Anchorage, but every span, every bridge span was dropped, and you know we um, the road department was really good good about, you know, getting that back, you know, pretty darn quick. But uh, it was a, all the sewer lines, the water lines were broken, and uh, I worked on that a bit, had my equipment working on that, uh, repairing those. So there was a lot of work to be done.

BCJ: What was the community spirit like during that time, the community feeling?

[00:14:48]

RP: Ah, Golly. Well we were busy, everybody was helping other people, you know, in similar circumstances. Uh, you know, uh everybody was you know cooperating, you know, neighbors, you know, and because we all had our problems, just trying to solve them. Sure, I'll help you along. And uh, the atmosphere was kinda like that.

BCJ: Sort of a working together feel?

RP: Oh, all together uh, I'm glad that there weren't more casualties than there were. You know, [Coughs] I was in the hospital with a young man there that uh, had both feet cut off. He was from uh, Valdez and down on the docks and uh, things happened, it happened, and a lot of people had it a lot worse than we did here in Anchorage. So if anything I was, you know, thankful that in spite of uh, you know, our losses, our, we came out of this uh, you know, whole. Our business friends uh, they took you know, big hits, but nobody had earthquake insurance. And uh, the banks made out great. And I remember one friend of ours, he went back to Greece to live, because the living was cheaper, until he uh recovered his assets enough to move back here. It's uh, a lot of people lost about everything they had, yeah. If you had some money in the bank you were more fortunate, but you know, major damage as you know takes some major money too, so it, it was pretty challenging.

[00:16:30]

BCJ: Was there a sizeable Greek community in Anchorage at that time?



RP: In which?

BCJ: Greek community at that time?

RP: Ah, yeah, there were still the remnants of a Greek community here in in town, but uh, we were uh pretty well thinned out by then too. There was a, you know, large Greek community here in Anchorage and that was left over from uh, railroad construction days, and uh, ethnic crews up here, the Italians, the Greeks, etcetera. And uh.

BCJ: How did, how did your your dad get up here? On the railroad? He worked on the railroad?

RP: How did he what?

BCJ: Did he come to work on the railroad?

RP: Yeah, my dad came up here to um, help build the Alaska Railroad, and uh, like I stated earlier, he, he worked in a lot section area where he just happened to be across from where he happened to have the opportunity to homestead and he loved the area so much that uh, he found the opportunity and yeah, did homestead. And we enjoy that, uh, the whole experience of, the whole time was uh, you know, we were busy, the family was intact, and uh, everybody was doing well so, yeah, we were happy campers.

BCJ: Tell me about your mother's family a little bit. She's from Ninilchik?

RP: Yes. I don't know much about mom. Uh, her mom, her mom was from Ninilchik and uh, but she was made, er raised in Kenai I believe. Her mother died when she was nine years old, and uh her older sisters uh, took her in. But uh, never got to know any of my grandparents. Of course, my paternal ones are in Greece. And uh, uh, she was Russian. Uh, I recall after Marg took her daughter down there, they stopped in for a visit, and the old guy about died of a heart attack. He said, "I a sashinka [?]" Looked at so my grandmother, so I got a hint of what she looked like anyway. But uh, very few photos available also. So uh, I don't know, I guess in small towns they didn't have as many cameras, even the little Brownie ones that we do nowadays, but uh, professional photos, there weren't many available.

BCJ: A lot of that had to be sent through the mail to get developing.

RP: Yeah. And you, you hope you get them back you know [Laughs].

[00:19:33]

**AA 7099 Ends**

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[00:00:00]

BCJ: OK, so, your, where we last were talking your uh, in Anchorage, the family's doing well. Ah, uh...

RP: I'm uh, I'm not getting that.

BCJ: I'm sorry, last time we were talking, you were telling me about the, the family was doing well, you were in Anchorage, and you were uh, working on the Slope for oil, doing electronics. Um, what was the next evolution of your experience uh, at that point, this would have been the mid 70s, late 70s?

RP: Yeah, well my second daughter was born uh, about that time, and I had started working there on, uh, for a oilfield service company, and uh, so you know, that uh, made the uh, well life, you know, more interesting, you know, you've got a second child there, and you know, we were hoping, for another one, didn't want to raise an only child. And uh, but I also was then staying at home then. I well wasn't travelling uh, up to the Slope, uh, nearly as much, and then later on, well, uh, later on, probably about 8, 10 years later, you know I did go to work for, uh, a company overseas. I was stationed there in uh Dubai and uh, worked on a couple of projects in the Middle East. And I came back to Anchorage and took a job with uh, Alyeska Pipeline, and uh, and same servicing the electronics of Anchorage and going out on the pipeline for, you know, on-site repairs and modifications, etcetera. Yeah...

[00:00201]

BCJ: So you had two daughters. Can you tell me the the name of your first daughter and when she was born?

RP: Yeah. Cynthia, and uh, Cynthia resides in Anchorage, and she's a, works for a uh local company here and for many years. And uh, her husband uh, is a trucker and he formed his own company here, and uh, so it's interesting, you know, they're growing and he's acquiring equipment and I'm, you know, saying these are good times, you know, and I'm glad to see you're doing well, and he has a good business hand, and things are going to be fine. And uh, it was pretty neat. And uh, well the daughter Dawn is uh, resides in Anchorage also, and uh [Coughs], she's in the accounting field and she's starting with a uh bank here in uh Anchorage Monday, and so, you know. Uh, my granddaughter Ashley and them, you know, my oldest daughter, uh, she started teaching school this year. So she's teaching elementary school, and in the summer she drives dump truck. So, you'll see a good-looking blonde a uh driving a side-dump, could be Ashley [Laughs].

[00:03:26]

BCJ: Wow, adventurous.

RP: Yeah.

BCJ: Alright, um, and so, uh, you were in the Middle East for a bit. Tell me how you came to be doing that

RP: I'm sorry.

BCJ: You went, how did you come, come to be in the Middle East? How did that come about? How did that happen?

RP: Oh, well uh, the job I had at the time was winding down and uh, I was putting out resumes and job apps, and uh, just one morning uh, a construction company, a big marine construction company out of New Orleans asked me if I was interested in a uh job uh, overseas. We talked about it and they brought me on down for paperwork and uh within a week I was on a flight going over the Pole, you know [Laughs], on my way. And uh, you know it was uh, very enjoyable, and uh did a lot of travelling to a lot of different places, and uh, it was enjoyable, most of it, and they, after you complete uh, one tour on uh, your job site, matter of three months, which ever comes first, they give you uh airline ticket to a uh major city. And so uh, I went to Bangkok and told my wife uh to meet me there. So she came around this way and I came around this way, and we met in Bangkok, and you know, we had a good vacation, and uh, yeah, good things.

[00:05:04]

BCJ: So uh, Marjory uh raised children. And did she, did she work outside the home, or or mostly was she...

RP: Ah, yes, she works outside the home. She's a preacher, and uh, started out with our church, you know, was a uh, she uh has found a talent for it, and uh, she's been requested a lot. So uh, basically she's a uh, works several uh small jobs and uh, you know, but her, her main thrust is being a minister, and uh, she preaches a good sermon, if I say so myself, but not at home [Laughs].

BCJ: What denomination?

RP: God knows. No sir. I have to go to church to get that.  
[00:05:57]

BCJ: Oh, I said, what denomination is she?

RP: She, she what?

BCJ: What religious order? What denomination?

RP: Oh uh, the Jewel Lake Parish. It's uh Methodist, Presbyterian Union church. That's been our family church for many years. Daughter was married there, you know, yeah. Some things are you know, pretty uh uh, old fashioned. It's a conservative group. We're a part of it.

BCJ: Did you retire from Alyeska?

RP: Yes uh, I retired in uh, what, '94, and uh, you know it was a doing a good, was a great job, I had a lot of good friends out there on the uh, pipeline and uh, you know, one big happy family, so, yeah, yeah. They treated me well. Uh, most companies give you your last check uh, wish you good luck, but uh, you know, they, they gave a good retirement package, and so, appreciate that.

BCJ: Let me ask you just a little bit about what it's like uh, what it was like to grow up on a homestead in Anchorage? What life was like for you? Um...

RP: Oh boy.

BCJ: Um, I presume you had a garden, uh in the summer? Um, but how did you get your food and did you hunt, and just what was life like at that time?

[00:07:36]

RP: Oh, we were a little bit unusual in the respect that we lived in uh, our government quarters there, uh, a section house uh, at Campbell Station, and uh, the food was purchased through the railroad commissary. So you put in your monthly order, and you know a week later it gets, you know, delivered to you, and uh, and uh fresh produce was uh you know impossible. And uh getting produce out on the uh, the railroad was, you know, not very, not very easy to do, and most of the stuff you got came up by boat from Seattle, so yeah, things were not very good when they got here to begin with, yeah.

BCJ: What uh, you told me a little bit about doing some hunting I think for rabbits?

RP: What place?

BCJ: Hunting rabbits?

RP: [Laughs] Oh uh yeah, my dad's homestead was a uh, great territory for rabbits out there and uh, you know, step out the door, take a five minute walk and uh, you're into rabbit country. And well, it was good fun, my cousins uh and I, uh, we'd go rabbit hunting often. They'd do a lot of visiting. I had three cousins that uh lived near us, an uncle that uh worked on the railroad with my father for a couple of years, and they were about my age, so we were all good friends.

BCJ: That's quite a bit of territory. Uh, I think you said 160 acres?

[00:09:23]

RP: Yeah, 160 and uh, there was uh the usual though. That was the limit of your allotment. And it was a little bit unusual that the Seward Highway cut on through it and uh, it left him a property on both sides of it. And he used to get terrific tax bills, oh, from the Muni, and he couldn't afford those, just a, you know, foreman with the railroad, and so he had to subdivide and uh, you know, but he still kept as much of it as we could, you know, for as long as we could. But uh, about the only thing that's left of it now is a couple of lots there and the original uh house that uh my uncle built, and it was an arrangement that Uncle Eli, my mother's uh brother. He built us a house, and you know, he was a bachelor and he, and he got a home for life, and he said, live with us. OK. Uncle Eli was a great guy.

BCJ: What was his, what was his experience here, Uncle Eli? Tell me something about Uncle Eli?

RP: About who?

BCJ: Uncle Eli?

RP: Well he was a bachelor. He was a uh Russian chap, you know, a big Russian guy, and uh he was from Kenai also, and uh, you know he was about, goodness, in his uh late 50s I guess when he uh, came to live with us. And uh, quiet uh sort and uh, yeah he, but well read, [Laughs], spent all his time in bed reading, but he was basically a carpenter, and that's how he, uh that was his uh, you know, career. And like I said he come build our house and uh, lived with us and he did a good job. It's still standing there, yeah.

[00:11:21]

BCJ: I heard a story about moving a home on the homestead, um, from one place to another. Can you tell me something about that?

RP: Well yeah uh, my dad sold uh a block of uh acreage and uh, he said well, we don't want to uh, you know, leave the house there and go buy up at uh, but we just did move it up about, oh what about, oh 200 yards maybe up on top of the hill there. So uh, you make the preparations, uh, the basement dug, etcetera, the utilities in, and uh, thing was put on skids in front of ours with a dozer, drug it on uphill and, settled in a place and, we helped uh, my wife and I uh, helped, you know, with the moving, you know, we got everything in place from one house to another. But, then it was moved again. Uh, I didn't get in on that one. I was uh working up on the Slope. But uh, they moved it across the Seward Highway, in it's present location. And uh, that's the last lot that we have and uh, I say we, the joint ownership of my sister and myself. And uh, you know, last piece of the homestead, yes sir, hash tag, Homestead Act, you know.

BCJ: Tell me a little bit about Georgia.

RP: Well Georgia, that was my sister 9 years older than me, and uh, she lived in Anchorage most of the time. Uh, she lived Outside for a while, married a chap and they moved to Germany for a few years, and then back to the US. And uh, she worked at the Native Medical Center in the pathology department, oh for many years. She retired from ANMC. And uh, she's 9 years older than me and she's still out there, you know, living in the uh family home. I think it's pretty neat. And her oldest son lives there also. David, uh, he's a bachelor, he uh, never has married. And uh, I think that's nice, you know, keeping the family intact, and uh, whatever.

[00:14:06]

BCJ: What uh, what what uh bits about Anchorage do you recall from those earlier years, from maybe the war years on? I'm I'm thinking about some of the big stores that you'd you'd maybe remember when you went shopping. Where, where did you want to go as a young man?

RP: Yeah, well, after the war years uh, Anchorage was a growing town, it was uh, you know, Fort Richardson and Elmendorf. They were growing. And uh, business or uh act, business activity in Anchorage, you know was growing like, you know, everybody else, at a great pace. And you know, it being uh, so remote, that you got to have building materials etc shipped up here. And I recall one day I went to build a house and, and uh, they sent us uh green lumber, it hadn't even aged properly, but you know I had to get it. Uh, so, you know things like that that you put up with.

BCJ: I've, I'm thinking about the time when when, I'm thinking of, as commercial areas moved further and further south toward you, out of Downtown Anchorage, I think one of the things...

RP: I'm sorry I missed that.

BCJ: I'm sorry. I'm thinking of uh, the times as as uh commercial enterprises like uh stores and malls, businesses moved further south, towards, towards the homestead from downtown. Like, like I know when Sears Mall went in, that was a big deal. Um, what do you remember?

[00:16:00]

RP: Yeah, yeah, like I suggest, the Sears Mall was uh the first there and I uh, was amused that they were gonna build a Dimond Mall, boy, that thing's in a swamp, and they drained the swamp and it's still there, and uh, and I could get in on running the video in that thing, so uh yeah. Met the owner, he he's a character, so it's a family owned place, still is.

BCJ: When you were young did you uh go for instance to the Bund, did you know about the Bund, the drive-in?

RP: I'm sorry.

BCJ: There was a drive-in called the Bund? Is that familiar to you? Maybe not?

RP: Missed it.

BCJ: No, I was, I was just thinking of places kids used to go and hang out or...

RP: Oh. Oh, or uh we as kids? Well uh, wasn't much here but the uh roller rink. And so we were [unintelligible] every Friday night. And uh, there was one movie house in Anchorage, old Empress Theater, and uh so it's mandatory that we go to the movies uh every week. Then the moved uh, built uh, Fourth Avenue Theater, um, Cap Lathrop had kind uh a gift to the city and state, and they premier of a movie up here and the stars were up there and I got a glimpse of them at the gala premier and you know, it's pretty neat. Boy was it a beautiful place. It's so nice in there.

[00:17:51]

BCJ: What was your reaction when you first went into the Fourth Avenue when it was opened? What it, what was it like to go into that that building? As fancy as it was, it was at the top of his chain, you know, Cap?

RP: Well, it was nostalgic and not, uh, certain things, you know, there was a big addition to Anchorage and you know, certainly it was impressive to me. Uh, kind of like remembering your first day of school, you know, stuff like that, it was uh, you know, major thing, and uh, Anchorage was still a small town then, relatively small, and there were two major movie stars up here. What's the movie? "Twelve O'clock High", and uh, yeah.

BCJ: Did you have television, when it, when it started?

RP: Not uh, yeah, we were a couple of years behind in getting a TV station, but uh, KTVA was first on the air and, and uh, it was black and white, and uh, KENI follows in very quickly, and then, the newest programs were uh, taped on a delay, they'd fly them up on Alaska Airlines, and uh, you know, you'd watch them the next day. But uh, you'd already heard the news on the radio, but so you know [Laughs]. It was some time before you got them, I don't recall when we got color, but uh, yeah. Well there were two stations, then three, and what we have now is great.

[00:19:30]

BCJ: Did you get used to uh, the commercials, or the holidays being several weeks behind, on television, on television broadcasts?

RP: Well sure, it was amusing, but uh, you know, uh, I said it was yesterday's news, and you know, a couple of days old, and uh, yeah.

BCJ: Along uh, the time of your life, did you have any uh um interactions with uh any of the uh sort of famous names that that people know or, you know, those kind of brushes with fame, those kind of ideas, you know? Anything that's...

RP: No, nothing that I can really attest to. You know, I met all the governors aside from uh Walter Hickel, and meet at one function or another. We would make a political contribution or two here, and uh so he, naturally get around, you know, and uh, meeting different people. And uh, besides from that, no I uh, had an opportunity to uh, meet a movie star that was coming into Fairbanks, my father-in-law flew in with him, yeah but uh, I told my wife no, I'd rather finish my salad early, so, you know [Laughs]. Aside from uh, that no.

BCJ: Did you have much involvement in politics?

[00:21:00]

**AA7100 Ends**

**AA7101 Begins**

[00:00:00]

BCJ: Just backing up just for a moment, um, thinking about that o...opening of the Fourth Avenue Theater, were there any big moments, uh like for instance, statehood, that uh...

RP: Oh boy. Statehood was a biggy, yeah. All of Anchorage erupted in a celebrations, and you know, and there were, everybody came out downtown, and uh, you know, uh celebrated in the streets, and uh, happy happy time, and, oh boy, there was a terrific bonfire on the Park Strip, and uh, I go over there and have the opportunity to throw a couple of chunks of wood on it too, but uh, watched a lot of that you know from uh, the vantage point of a big building there but uh, you know, when statehood was announced, you know, it seemed like everybody just flowed into town to, you know, needed to be a celebration, and be all happy about it. Well uh, I imagine the people who voted against it weren't happy, but, they were afraid that we wouldn't be able to support ourselves as a state, and uh, you know, depend on the US government. Well, didn't work out that way.

BCJ: Any other thoughts, of experiences or early life or anything that stands out for you about growing up in Anchorage, o...over these years, that you'd like to share?

RP: About who?

BCJ: Growing up in Anchorage, just your whole experience?



[00:01:43]

RP: Yeah um, yeah I recall that it was uh, kind of boring during my uh, teenage years. I wish there were, you know, more facilities or or things to do. There were no boys clubs, there was one movie theater, and uh, really, there was nothing for teenagers to do. And uh, we'd gather at the, you know, Lake Spenard in the summer, you know, for that and uh, then ice skating in the winter. But uh, really, there wasn't much at all. In fact uh, us kids got uh uh together and uh, held a meeting there at the um old Elk's Club, and uh, what could we do here that, and so my uh godmother uh owned a piece of property on uh uh, C Street, and uh they formed that into a uh, youth club. And uh, it was a grocery store or something we converted into that, but it was a start anyway, you know. Uh time never uh, no organized things, organized sports, uh, the schools didn't have uh, even have uh ball teams of any kind. Well they had a basketball team, but not football or hockey. So, there wasn't a whole lot available.

[00:03:06]

BCJ: So, what was the name of this youth club that you started? Did it have a name?

RP: Uh, the 1320 Club, from 13 years old to 20 years old. And uh, it had a little uh, fountain service, like that, but uh, nothing fancy, and uh, that's about it. But uh, jukeboxes and uh, intimate dance floor. But it was a start. It was something.

BCJ: I'm really intrigued by that, because it sounds like this is something that was organically coming up out of the youth, working, right? It seems such...did you, do you have any any further involvement in politics over the years? You as an activist?

RP: [Laughs] No, no, huh uh, uh, say we do a little bit of volunteer work on the uh campaigns, I'm uh not registered, you know, either party. Uh, neither is the wife, for Alaska Independence. And uh, but it's enjoyable. And uh, make contributions at different, whoever we would feel good about, you know, hope they do well, uh, walk the walk, and uh...

[00:04:28]

BCJ: Well, sort of wrapping up here, uh, I I'm always mindful that, that these recordings are going to be seen by people in the future, and I wonder if you have any thoughts you'd like to send to the people of the future?

RP: [Laughs] Yeah, don't worry about the future, it's gonna be good and it will take care of itself. No, I'm optimist, uh we live in the greatest in the world, in my opinion. And a lot of people agree with that, they all want to come here. It's a land of opportunity, and you know, do anything you're big enough to do. My father came over here because he knew that there was little opportunity for him in Greece. What am I gonna do, herd sheep, grow grapes? No uh, and he came over here, did quite

well. And uh, you know we, take inspirations from things like that. Yeah, so I feel good about uh, in spite of our problems, uh, the American people are fairly smart, and we're resilient. And uh, I won't be around, but uh, we'll do well. My uh, children, grandchildren you know they're, they're doing well, uh, now, and I think they'll be doing well in the future. Do what we can to guide them, and uh, about the best you can hope for.

BCJ: Well, Bob Poggas, thank you very much for your thoughts.

RP: My pleasure.

[00:06:06]

**AA7101 Ends**