

Call number: 94-13-10 PT. 1 SIDE A

Name and place: Lola Colette interviewed by Margaret van Cleave

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Margaret van Cleave introduces the recording and tells that Lola's family's association with the University of Fairbanks goes back to the beginning. Lola's father was one of the first professors who were hired by Dr. Bunnell. She asks Lola what she remembers having heard of those early years.

Lola begins her story by telling that they came up to Seward with a steam ship, and she remembers that it was a rainy night. Her father had some things on his back and he slipped and fell. One of the things was Lola's [unclear] that her grandmother had made for her. It was broken but not too badly because she remembers that her father was able to mend it. It was also her brother's birthday on 16th of August and he was 3 years old that day.

They stayed overnight in Seward and came up to Fairbanks by railroad. They stayed overnight in Curry because the train didn't travel at night. They got back to Nenana and had to cross the river by boat because the standard gauge [railroad] track extended only that far and a narrow gauge went to Fairbanks.

2:00 They got to Fairbanks where they had a house at 2nd [Avenue] and Cowles [Street]. They spent a year there. The first winter was great and they didn't mind it. They had never experienced snow before. When Christmas came, everybody was really good to them because they were always good to each other and especially to newcomers. It was because "Christmas away from the rest of the world was different."

They had fur collars and muffs in a package [for Christmas presents?] and Lola remembers getting 4 or 5 of those in a package. Waterman gave them things, and

everybody who delivered anything to the house was very good. They had a great Christmas. They were given a rabbit that used to chew his way out of the box.

That first winter Lola went to kindergarten. Helen Lindberg, who lived across the street, took Jack [Wilbur], her brother, and Lola to the kindergarten.

3:49 After the first winter, they moved to 8th [Avenue] and Lacey [Street] where their parents had bought a house. That house is still there. Next year, Lola went to school.

Their lot went all the way from 8th to 9th [Avenue] so they had a garden and a little log cabin that they rented out to one of the university teachers. Mr. [Leslie] Marshan was an accomplished violinist and they used to listen to him practice.

Margaret asks if Fairbanks had lots of accomplished musicians. Lola tells that it did, and people were generous with their talent. She remembers listening to Mr. Marshan, but they were forbidden from going into his cabin.

Margaret asks if they went to school in the old school building that burned down in 1932. She continues by asking where the kindergarten was held, and Margaret tells that there she doesn't remember exactly, but it was in a little building towards Cushman [Street] from the main school. She doesn't remember the teacher, but says it might have been Johnny Kelly's wife. Johnny Kelly was an accountant in town.

5:53 Margaret asks if Lola remembers her classmates. Lola mentions Barbara Lindberg and Jack Wilbur. They are still around, as well as Carl Erickson. Jam Runyon came from Nome during the second year but she lives in the States now. Ruth Joy lives in the States now as well.

Margaret wonders how Lola's father, who was working at the University at the time, commuted back and forth. Lola explains that they walked those days, but there was also a little car that ran on the railroad tracks. That was called the Toonerville Trolley. They walked along the tracks because it was about mile shorter than along the road. Margaret adds that it was clear of snow too.

There weren't many cars running back and forth. Margaret says that people put their cars up [for the winter] in the 1920s because it was difficult to keep them warm enough. Lola says they didn't have headbolt heaters those days.

Lola doesn't remember riding the Toonerville Trolley, but presumes that she probably has done it a time or two. She wasn't out at the campus too much, but her mother went there to teach short courses in weaving. Lots of the women from town took an advantage of that. Lola's dad once walked to campus when it was -40 below and didn't realize it was that cold. He didn't have his ears covered and had terribly frozen ears.

He did lots of walking and felt that it was good exercise. In the summertime, he went out to the bush and did surveying. He taught civil engineering, mathematics, and anything else that was needed.

8:39 Margaret says that she saw on William Cashen's book that Bunnell was looking for people who could teach French, mathematics, and any number of things. Lola tells that Bunnell was trying hard to make UA into a good school. Of course the first year the 6 professors sat down with 6 students and worked it out so that they would have a graduate each year. They made sure that the students got all the courses they needed for graduation.

First year's graduate was Jack Shanley who was quite the character. Then there were the three Loftus boys and two LaCombe boys and it "was quite the circus." Margaret asks if they actually had a graduation ceremony and Lola tells that they did. She heard her father talk about all the antics that those boys came up with. They learned quite a bit, since 15 years later when Lola's father "came back up here," there were still some of the old students around and they used to laugh about the things they did back then.

10:09 Dorothy Loftus was in on that. She and her sister were going to school at the same time.

10:24 Margaret asks if Lola attended the railroad opening ceremony with the President [Warren G. Harding]. Lola tells that all the school kids lined up and shook hands with President Harding. "I'm sure he didn't appreciate it too much, but we all thought it was great."

Lola doesn't remember where the ceremony was held but she remembers standing in line and everybody telling each other to behave themselves.

Margaret says their family left in 1946. Lola tells that they bought one of Bobby Sheldon's stages, a 1924 Studebaker touring car. Sheldon used to drive a touring car between Fairbanks and Valdez, and the family drove one to Valdez. When they got to Valdez, the water was high [the roads were flooding?]. Lola's father didn't know where the road was, but he drove close to the bluff and fortunately that was where the road was.

12:33 They shipped the car to Seattle and their cousins there thought it was wonderful since nobody in the family had a car. They would sit in the car and pretend they were driving. The cousins were living with their grandparents because their father passed away just before the youngest one was born. Their aunt finished her education and got a job. The three cousins, Lola, and her other sibling caused "quite a circus around there," but their grandmother was really good to them.

She lived right in Seattle and had everything on her little property. She had chickens, and orchards, and berries in the garden. On one of the first days she brought eggs that she just got from the chickens and cooked them. Lola and the others just played with their food and Grandmother asked Lola's mother what was wrong. Mother told that they got their eggs in the fall and used them all winter and that the eggs "had a flavor." The kids were used to the old eggs.

14:36 Margaret mentions that the boat eggs were 6 months old by the time they were eaten. Lola agrees, and says that her grandmother's eggs were too fresh to have flavor. Their mother used to put down silicone in crock pots [to seal them?] that kept the eggs fresher. Then they were put into a root cellar. Lola's basement was a hole with a furnace and they had room for a few things like that. Their mother used to make pickles in the crocks too.

They had a garden and most of the crop was canned. Some things they froze when it got cold but they weren't prepared like people do nowadays. One could always buy the essentials, like potatoes, all winter long. Fresh fruit like bananas were a rarity.

16:25 They used quarters, but nickels, dimes, and pennies were thrown aside by the stores since they were too small to use. The stores tried to have necessities, but they didn't have fancy things like they have now.

Lola says that they ate "all right," and made their own ice cream. They had a hand-cranking freezer. Their father loved ice cream so he always kept testing the ice cream until it was all gone.

Archie Truesdell, Lola's father, was one of the 6 professors to come up alongside with LaDessa Hall, who later was known as LaDessa Nordale, and who was one of the early professors. Margaret asks if they knew LaDessa. Lola tells that they did. The professors used to come for dinner sometimes.

LaDessa taught business subjects, and Miss Kirkpatrick taught home economics. Earl Pilgrim and his wife used to come for dinners too. Lola doesn't remember Pilgrim's wife's name, except that it was Kathy, and tells that later Earl Pilgrim married Marietta.

18:51 Margaret asks if Lola's home was the social hub, but Lola says that everybody [from the early faculty of UA] was away from home, so they did lots of entertaining by themselves. They weren't as clicky as later, when Lola came back to University.

Margaret says they didn't have faculty housing at the time so the faculty lived in town with the townspeople. Lola says that there were a couple of houses "out there" [at the University]. Stergils [sp?] lived in one. He was a sort of a maintenance man, and there was another house too but Lola doesn't remember whose it was. When she came back, there were more houses.

She remembers Dr. Bunnell, but she remembers Jean, his daughter, better because there weren't many other youngsters around. She was quite a bit older than Lola – probably in high school then. Then there was Mrs. Bunnell whose first name Lola doesn't remember, but nobody called her by her first name anyway.

20:25 The president had a nice home at the University. They used to go out there for activities, although Lola doesn't remember now what they were. Mrs. Bunnell was very nice and did quite a bit of entertaining too.

21:07 Lola's grandmother lived in Washington state and her father had been at the university of Washington the year before they came to Alaska. His family had moved from Kansas to Vancouver, Washington, and him and his sister went to University of Washington. The rest of the family moved to Seattle. Four out of five went to the University [Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines]. One sister graduated from Oregon.

Margaret says that that was just before the Great Depression, and asks if Lola's father had a job in Washington. Lola says he didn't. Their family was also glad when they returned from Alaska and visited Seattle, after which they went to Idaho to their mother's family.

His dad got a call saying that there was a job in Seattle, and that's where he worked at Puget Sound Bridge and Steel Company –Lola isn't sure about the name. They bought a home in West Seattle and got all new furniture since they didn't bring things like that from Alaska. The children went to school in Seattle. Lola's brother was on 2nd grade and Lola was on 4th grade.

Lola's brother used to wake up crying that he wanted to go back to Alaska. Lola read a geography book and there was a half-a-page about Alaska with a picture of an Igloo, and writing about Eskimos and missionaries who lived there. She objected that and told that she knew better, but the teacher told her to read her book. Lola went home and found her parent's pictures of Alaska, their garden with cauliflowers, flowers and such [since nobody believed that anything grew in Alaska and many Alaska pioneers made a point to boast with their beautiful gardens], but their teacher just told her to read her book. The following day her brother came home really mad. He told that his teacher had asked him to sit down and stop singing, and that he wants to go back to Alaska.

24:02 Of course they thoroughly enjoyed Alaska. [They returned to Alaska?] Lola's mother's health improved, so they thought another 4 years was well worth it, although their relatives thought it was terrible.

They did lots of shopping through catalogs and were looking forward the train every week. Margaret says they had a lifeline to the Outside. Lola agrees, and says that that's why it was called Outside. They were Inside. Margaret tells that when she first came to Alaska, she didn't understand what Outside meant.

Lola says that they thoroughly enjoyed the snow and in summer it was nice and hot. They didn't have fancy things to play with, but they did lots of things by themselves. They were more interested in doing things than kids these days who want everything done for them.

25:57 Margaret asks about sports, and Lola tells that they played a lot of hockey. When they went to States in fall of 1926, it was the year when the Green Lake [in Seattle?] froze over. Lola's cousins took them there and they skated and skated while their cousins sat on the shore since they couldn't skate. They tried to learn to roller skate, but that took them a long time. Neither Lola nor her brother was good at that, but everybody in Seattle roller skated. In Seattle, they could roller skate on concrete.

Margaret asks about the depression time. They were in Seattle for two years, after which their father got a job as a bridge engineer for the city of Tacoma where they stayed for 4 years.

28:08 Lola says she had problems in school. One of the first things they did in school was to write about the nice things they did during the summer. Lola's family had gone up to Mount Rainier and Lola wrote about how a bear got into their food during the night. Her teacher gave her an F because they don't call Mount Rainier Mount Rainier in Tacoma but they call it Mount Tacoma. Lola didn't know that, and she was ready to go back to Alaska.

Margaret asks how long it took to get back to Alaska, and Lola says it took 9 years. By the time Lola got back, she had finished high school. When she got to Seattle, she was away from the school most of the year because she had measles. Her brother got it first and when he got out of quarantine, Lola got the measles. Then after the month of measles, she got mumps and was sick with the flu. She didn't go to school that year but was still ahead of the other kids. That's when Lola was on 4th grade. Then she skipped a half of the 5th grade and went to the second half of the 5th grade the following fall. She switched from 5th to 6th in the middle of the year.

30:12 They were in Tacoma for 4 years, but in 1932 their father was out of a job again. They had rented out their house in Seattle but the people who rented it had lost their jobs and couldn't pay the rent. Lola's family was renting a house in

Tacoma with the money but they lost the houses. They moved to their acreage at Henderson Bay where they got by a ferry across from Tacoma. They built a little log house, but Lola stayed in a tent until the end of December. It was cold by then.

They were over there for a year and a half until their father finally got work. He worked for a road crew for a while and got a job in Olympia. By that time, some friends asked Lola to come work for a room and board in helping their family. They had 6 boys and a girl at that time. Lola went over there and finished her high school there. She had to go to some extra semesters to make up for switching grades. They were trying to save money and Lola had to walk about 3 miles every day to get to school. Some friends helped them and Lola went home with a shopping bag full of groceries every night. They weren't as bad off as some people. Their dad had a duct in Tacoma that he was building and they used to go out there and visit him on weekends. There was a garbage dump there and Lola saw people foraging for food there.

33:45 Margaret says it probably helped their family cope that they had lived up in Alaska and knew how to improvise. Lola says that it did, but they had what they needed. She says she doesn't feel like a real pioneer because they never lived out on the creeks where they would have had to do without lots of niceties. They always had electricity.

They had a honey bucket toilet and a little door where they could pull the bucket out. Someone came by and picked the buckets. Reding [sp?] who writes in the Heartland told that he got a job with Pop Weiner [sp?]. They did the honey buckets first and after that they went around to pick up garbage and then he went to school.

Most of the people had water delivered in 5-gallon buckets and they had a stove inside a tank of water to keep it from freezing.

35:16 Margaret mentions the -60 below days that they had lots of. Lola says they didn't think anything of it but just put on another layer of clothes. The distances weren't long either. Their school was only one block away, on 8th [Avenue] and Lacey [Street]. They were lucky.

Margaret asks how she got back to Fairbanks. Lola says she took a steam ship to Seward and the boat wasn't going fast enough for her. Her brother moved around

and his last year he moved to Olympia for a while, but then his school was interrupted and he only continued when the family moved to Anchorage. Lola's father went up to Alaska in April and Lola, her mother and brother followed in July. Lola started the University in September. She didn't like Anchorage but wanted to go to Fairbanks.

37:31 Margaret asks if she lived in a dorm on Campus, and she says she did. The old women's dorm is long gone now – it was a frame building. They had lots of fun there.

Margaret asks who were living there and if any of her old school friends were there. Lola tells that there was the problem of changing her classes in the middle of the year. She had to pick up an extra semester because she had missed one visiting relatives [?]. Some of her college friends were: Barbara Lindberg, [who became] Barbara Brewis, Margery McDonald [sp?] who had gone to school with Lola, and she met some people from Anchorage, like [Unclear] and Florence Allen who was from Haines. Florence was in the same train with Lola when she came up and they've been good friends ever since. She's Florence Holmes now.

39:18 Margaret asks if Fairbanks had changed, and grown since Margaret had been there the last time. She tells that it had, but she had changed much herself too. At that time, the campus was a community in itself and the town too. There wasn't the interaction that there is now. The students, who lived in town commuted between town and University by bus. It was Paul Gorman's buss. Margaret went to town every once in a while to do shopping but they usually entertained themselves at the College.

The boys had basketball games and the girls went to watch, and they had dances quite often. There was quite a bit of skiing but Lola didn't do much of that. There was lots of hiking.

40:33 Margaret asks if most of the students worked, and Lola tells that she got a job working as a secretary to Mr. Gasser who was the director of the [Agricultural] Experiment Station. Lots of the girls waited tables and there were a few office jobs. Florence Holmes worked in the post office. Then they had a little store with candy and chewing gum and things like that. They [the University administration] tried to give the students as much help with room and board as they could.

Their tuition wasn't very high but it helped to have the room and board. Lola recalls that it was about \$60 dollars per month for room and board. Room was \$20 dollars and board was \$40. That was in 1935.

Margaret asks if they had a central cafeteria or if they had a separate place for women to eat. Lola tells that they all ate at the basement of the women's dorm.

During the summer, they didn't have heat or hot water until the fall when the school started. When they turned the heat on, it felt like luxury.

42:22 Margaret asks if it was still pretty cold when they got out of school. Lola tells that they always had a cold spell in the middle of May when the heat was turned off already. They managed, however, and there was always a good group of people who were compatible and had no problems. Sometimes they went out to the Harding Lake and they did lots of walking and hiking.

[End of the recording.]