

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

Name and place: Lola Colette interviewed by Margaret van Cleave

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Series: Pioneer Tapes

Margaret begins the B-side of the tape that was recorded with Lola Colette by asking if she went to Anchorage during the summer. Lola tells that she stayed at campus, working as Mr. Gasser secretary. She stayed in the dorm but they used only about a half of the dorm at a time. They all ate together at the commons, which was at the basement of the girls' dorm. It wasn't full [during summer time]. The food was pretty good although they had radish tops, which were terrible, for greens and Lola has never eaten them since and doesn't intend to. They were prickly going down even though they were cooked.

Mr. Gasser was a superintendent of the Experimental Station and Lola had a year-round job. It didn't pay well but she got room and board "and a few extras."

Margaret asks what they did for holidays and if Lola sometimes went home for holidays. Lola says that she was at the University only for two years and that she stayed in Fairbanks for the first year because she was too broke to go anywhere. The following year, the 9 of them chartered with one of Gillam's planes down to Anchorage. It took them 3 hours and it was Lola's first airplane flight. The windows frosted up because it was so cold. Boys got razor blades off from their luggage and scraped the windows with them, hoping to see something, but they didn't get the windows clear enough.

They got to Anchorage fine. Lola didn't know where her parents lived and she hadn't let them know that she was coming. One of the boys knew where they lived and took Lola there to surprise her parents.

They didn't get to fly back because Gillam went to Cordova and had to stay there. He just gave the people money for train tickets, and they got back to school in time.

2:39 Margaret asks about Lola's teachers, like Lola Tilly. Lola tells that she took a home economy class from Lola Tilly and learned to bake bread. She is still baking bread.

One day her granddaughter came home from school and asked if Lola ever had Mrs. Tilly as her teacher. Lola said she did, and her granddaughter told that she [Lola Tilly] told the whole class that she had taught her grandmother. She was teaching the third generation, although Lola tells that their second generation was all boys. Margaret explains that Lola Tilly has retired but is still substitute teaching.

Margaret clarifies if Lola was at the University for two years and if that's where she met her husband. Lola tells that he was a student there when they met, and her husband went to work at the university power plant. They lived at campus after they got married and had a little house there. The house was [unclear], but they managed. They had to keep the furnace going, but they didn't think much of it as it was just something that had to be done.

4:27 [Unclear talking.] Lola tells that they had a little house on campus. They were students and then staff, so the teachers had nothing to do with them. The professor next door to them never spoke to them. Now it's much more relaxed, but that time professors kept to themselves and had nothing to do with students. There were few teachers who were friendly and sociable.

Margaret asks if campus power plant came with housing since it was considered a strategic operation. Lola says that her husband was on call 24 hours a day. He worked a swing shift which kept them from socializing with anybody. [Unclear question.] Lola explains that swing shift was from 4pm to 12 am. There were three shifts and swing shift was in the middle. They managed and Lola's husband had a car so Lola could go to places.

6:38 Food prices were the other reason for baking bread: It cost \$25 cents for every package that came by a bus and it was much cheaper to bake the bread.

7:02 Margaret asks how long they lived on campus, and Lola tells that they were married in December of 1937 and they moved away from campus in January of 1941 so they lived there for just a couple of years. They bought into Fairbanks Laundry and moved to town where they had a little log cabin. They couldn't keep it warm so they fixed a little garage into compact living quarters. Their boy was 1 year old when they moved to town and the three of them managed fine in the garage.

Lola kept her plants behind the stove but they froze [at the original house?]. The weather wasn't that cold either. That was on the corner of 3rd [Avenue] and Lacey [Street]. When they lived on 8th and Lacey, they had the Hering family kitty cornered from them. They lived between Melville and Lacey. Walter, who was lost at sea during the war, was on Lola's class and Hering auditorium was named after him.

Margaret says that there were two Hering families. There was Patricia Rogi's family and then Dorothy Beistline's family. The fathers of those families were cousins. Lola's neighbors were Pat and Angus, Walter, Tom and Betty, Arthur and Tom. The older ones, Muriel and George were gone already. Walter was in her class and Tom visited them in Seattle. He was in sanitarium one winter and he fell back in school, so he attended classes with people Lola had gone to school with.

10:05 After they started the laundry, they got busy. At first, Lola wasn't doing much with it but she started doing some of the book work and then in August, their second boy was born. In December, the war broke up and turned everything topsy-turvy.

They had started Ladd Field [later named Fort Wainwright] and in fall of 1939 they were doing quite a bit of construction out there. Their oldest boy was born in December of 1939 and they were still living at campus.

Their laundry was the only steam laundry in town and they were as busy as can be and they got even busier when the war started. Lola says she left in April to go to

States with her boys and there everybody wondered why she came down since she was better off in Alaska. Everybody [in Alaska?] knew Alaska would be hit but didn't know when or how. Everything came up by steamship and they were unsure if the services would keep going. Margaret clarifies by asking if they were afraid of the shortages. Lola tells that they were. She came back as soon as possible, in July, and was glad to get back. They were so short of everything that Lola did everything she could for a dollar per hour. They had rationing and everything.

12:24 Margaret asks if quite a few women left Alaska to go to States, and Lola tells that they did. Lots of families left because they were afraid that Alaska would be attacked.

The gold industry shut down and Lola tells that the miners were absorbed by the construction of Ladd Field. Some of the young fellows got drafted and sent to war, and some others were drafted to continue doing the same jobs that they had done previous to war. Lola's husband didn't go to service because he had two young kids. He was running the laundry, which was deemed a "necessary business." They did a lot of work for Ladd Field. They had lots of work to do, their equipment was breaking and they couldn't get the help they needed.

14:05 Of course the construction was "cost plus" so the more expenses they had, the more they made. Some of the fellows came into the laundry and volunteered to work because they were sitting in the bunk house with nothing to do. They got some help that way, but the men didn't stay long. [Break in the recording.]

Those days they didn't have baby-sitters as such, but their boys did well and the older boy watched over the younger one. They had rules how far they could go from the house and they never overstepped their boundaries. There was a woman at the Federal Building who used to call Lola to tell her where the boys were. They were always on sidewalk which was fine with Lola. They weren't too clean when they came home after playing in a coal bunker. [Break in the recording.]

15:45 Lola talks about how everybody knew the boys. They would have a bath at night and clean clothes in the morning. [Unclear talking, quiet recording.] One lady criticized the dirty boys but Lola said [or thought to herself?] that she should see them at 8pm when they are all clean. The boys had no other place to play except for downtown. [Unclear talking.] The whole community watched over them.

When her youngest boy was 3 years old, he ran his tricycle down after his nap and sang "Happy Birthday to Me." The crew felt bad for having forgotten his birthday and the next day he had a birthday party.

18:04 During the war they had blackouts where they had to cover their windows and not let light shine. That was terrible at the laundry because it got really hot there. Margaret asks if blackout meant that they had to cover their windows at certain time of the day, but Lola says they had to do it all the time. They couldn't open the door because light showed outside. [Unclear talking.] Lola says that they felt like it took forever. They had ventilators in each room but had to plug them so the light wouldn't shine. They also couldn't have street lights, headlights or anything. Of course they weren't driving anyway so that didn't make a difference.

Margaret asks if people didn't drive in wintertime, and Lola says that they didn't do that much. During the war they couldn't get cars.

19:34 Margaret asks if they did any laundry delivery and Lola tells that they did. They delivered in daylight. Ladd Field people picked their own laundry up.

Margaret asks about housing shortage. Lola remembers being so busy with laundry that they didn't know what was going out outside. [Unclear talking.] Lots of people turned their houses into rooms. They had the bunk houses at Ladd Field and they had housing there. Lots of the contractors had their own bunk houses too. They kept Lola's family really busy and lots of times her husband didn't get to bed until midnight or even later. It was a hard job and they never took a day off. They didn't do laundry on Sundays but they were always doing something that day.

21:58 Margaret asks if Lola saw many of the Russian Pilots in town. She tells that she didn't, but she knew they were in town. She went to Gordon's store one time but didn't have much time for shopping, but some Russian aviators came in with their U.S. money. The clerks all served them because they had money to spend and a lot of items like perfumes, lingerie, silk stockings and such were sold out.

Margaret says she remembers them running out of some items and asks if they had rationing during the war. Lola tells that they didn't, and they were welcome to buy anything from the stores. Sometimes they ran out of salt. One doesn't realize how important that is until one runs out. Other than that, they were used to buying in large quantities and to have a supply ahead. They managed pretty well, and then there was moose and caribou. They didn't have all the fresh stuff because airplanes weren't flying much and they depended on freight lines, such as boat and railroad, or trucks that came from Valdez. Since that time, they have got a good supply through air and highways. The highway was finished around 1946.

24:23 Margaret says it was built in 1942 but perhaps not used commercially until later. It was strictly for military use for the duration of the war. She continues by asking how they celebrated the end of the war. Lola doesn't remember. She was walking downtown and by that time her brother had been killed in England which really affected Lola. Quite a few boys from Alaska were lost, but everybody lost people from their lives. It was quite a happy occasion for lots of people [when the war ended?] because nobody wanted boys overseas. They had lots of young boys first time away from home.

They kept the boys busy "down there" [at Ladd Field?] and young girls were hostesses. Quite a few of local girls married soldiers and left town and live somewhere else now. Alaska was quite a ways away for a lot of them [Ladd Field soldiers].

Lola's brother was in England, but he wrote letters home quite often. He told about things and wrote that he'll tell them later when he gets home, which he never did. He seemed to have enjoyed his time, and flying was his "cup of tea".

26:42 Margaret mentions that lots of young Alaskans learned to fly in Fairbanks. Lola tells that her brother [Floyd] enjoyed it especially. He was in Alaska when Pearl Harbor was attacked. He came by plane in -40 below because one of his friends wanted to see a girl in Fairbanks, and after Pearl Harbor was hit, they weren't supposed to fly small planes. It was too cold to taxi on the air field so he just took off and flew to Anchorage where they were greeted with guns. They were asked if they knew that Pearl Harbor was hit and they said no, so they got off the hook. They weren't supposed to fly for security reasons and he never filed a flight plan because it would have been refused.

28:56 He joined the Canadian Army and had English and American Wings. When he got to England, he was in an air-force forerunner, Royal Canadian Air Force. They were there for 9 months before U.S. sent their air force there and the brother joined them. He was there about another 9 months.

They had a "brown alert" which means they couldn't use any lights when they were flying and during this time, his plane collided with another one.

30:51 Margaret asks about the time after war. Lola tells that they had a bad fire down at the co-op area and people thought the whole block would burn, but Mrs. Ford had a firewall between her building and the co-op, which stopped the fire from going further. The coop was gone, although everybody helped with extinguishing the fire.

Margaret asks if it was pretty cold that night, and Lola says it was very cold. They built the place back and it was a good thing to have the fire wall there. Margaret says there had been previous fires that took the whole business section, and the buildings that burned were frame buildings, but then they started building concrete buildings, starting from the coop, or the Empress Theater. Lola tells that it was a concrete building which stopped the fire on that end and there was the firewall at the other end.

32:49 Margaret wonders what businesses were lost in that fire. Lola says that the co-op went at least, and another building, but says that she doesn't remember.

Co-op was had a soda fountain, a drug store, and it was right next to the Empress Theater that they now call the Co-op.

It was a bad fire because the business had been successful. Margaret mentions that it was hard to fight fires in winter. Lola remembers that the NC-Company used tooth whistles to let them know what area it was in and they used to stop and listen every time they heard the whistle. If it was in their area, they hurried home.

33:57 Margaret asked if there were a 2 glass [?] for one section of the town and maybe three for another. Lola tells there were different whistles for different areas so they would know where it was. It was a bad thing to hear the fire whistle.

They had a couple of bad fires in the laundry. None of them put them out of business, but slowed them down for a while. Fire is bad especially in wintertime when it was common. Now the buildings are better and they have fire hydrants closer too.

One Christmas Eve fire was a bad one. That was when the telephone company that was part of the NC-Company burned, which disconnected their telephones for about 6 weeks. On Christmas Eve Lola stood by the window and ate all her favorite candies from the candy bowl watching the fire – kids thought Santa had done that. By that time, they had moved to another area where their house was right across the street from the laundry. They had mostly new equipment there. They built it in summer of 1945 and moved into it around Thanksgiving in 1945. That was on 2nd and 3rd [Avenues], which was the present Big Ray's building. The building didn't burn down but they had a couple of fires there.

36:33 During the fire of 1946, they were "down here" in a new laundry building that was a block away. They were still pretty close. Lola tells that after they moved, one of their partners said they would start running it, and Colettes were glad. They had another boy in fall of 1946, so Lola started working for 6 weeks before he was born while the other folks were running the laundry. Then they had a chance to sell and they did.

37:23 Lola's husband worked for a friend who had the Pioneer Express, and after that he worked for the railroad in freight shed. Then he got into construction and worked various construction jobs. Lola didn't work until her youngest was in 8th grade. She went to work down as a bookkeeper at Northwood Drug which was in Northwood Building and doesn't exist anymore.

Margaret asks if Lola was working there during the year of the flood. She tells that she was. Coming back home, she had to cross Dunkel and 4th since water was so high. She never believed it would flood like that. The family who was living "here" came running over and told that water was coming down 3rd Avenue, and it was. Lola still had a house on 2nd Avenue that they had rented out, and when Lola went to see how they were doing, it was like from a movie when people were coming and going and carrying things. Their tenant was all right. He was a trooper.

[End of the recording.]