

**Call number: 94-13-11**

**Name and place: June McDonald interviewed by Margaret van Cleave**

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**Summary created by: Varpu Lotvonen**

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**Series: Pioneer Tapes**

Margaret introduces the recording and tells that June has spent much of her youth in Selawik and other bush communities in 1920s and 1930s.

Margaret says that June's parents are of the generation that came to Alaska primarily for mining, and asks what the circumstances were that brought June to Selawik. June tells that at the time, her parents were living in Candle. The superintendent of the schools lived in Kotzebue and had 5 to 11 villages that he was the superintendent over. He asked June's parents if they wanted to teach in Selawik, and after some consideration they decided to go. That was in 1928.

June's parents' names were Irus Purkeypile and Sarah-Ellen. June's father had been in the country off and on since 1904 and her mother came to Candle in 1917. She had come to visit her brother, Joe Whitehead, in Candle. Irus was mining there at the time, and they met.

They were married in Nome in 1918. They came back to Candle where they lived for a while and later they went Outside where June was born later on.

2:25 Margaret says it took them a while to get into teaching, and June agrees.

Margaret asks how one could travel to Selawik those days. June tells that people traveled by boat or by plane. Her parents went by boat. They had a family that consisted of June, her parents and two sisters, and they all took a boat to Kotzebue and from there they took a larger boat that went up the Selawik River. They had to cross two lakes, Cobalt Lake and Selawik Lake and then go up the Selawik River to where the village was. Margaret says it must have taken quite a

while, and that June was only a year old. June says she was three at the time but she still doesn't remember the trip.

Margaret asks if June remembers the house they lived at in Selawik. She says she does since she was there until she was 13 years old. They were at a schoolhouse with two rooms that were attached to the living room quarters. They had a nice living room and a kitchen, and their father had an office where he had the medicine that he used to help the sick Eskimos. "He was almost like a regular doctor." The closest doctor was at Kotzebue and Irus had to take care of many medical conditions until they later got a traveling nurse who helped June's father. She came by twice a year.

4:43 Margaret asks if dispensing medicine went along with the teaching job. Lola tells that it did, and then they had the post office there too. The school and the Friends' Church were the two gathering places for the community. They had a general store too.

The only white child that June remembers was the general store keepers' boy. They were the only other [non-Native] family that June remembers. There were other shop keepers too, but they were from Selawik area.

Margaret asks how many people lived in Selawik then, and June tells that there were 300 people at the time. When they went back later on, the population had risen to 700.

6:30 Margaret asks if June's mother taught the lower grades and father the higher ones. June tells that her mother taught 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and her father taught 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>. The rooms were connected but one class couldn't hear the other one. June's mother had the larger class with many little ones. The number of students was around 60 students and most of them were June's mother's class.

They had two students who went through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and to high school in Aklutna. They didn't have any correspondence school options at the time.

Margaret asks if most of the students spoke English, and June tells that they did. They were supposed to speak English at home too in order to help their parents

and elders learn it. Many parents spoke English but the elders didn't. They spoke Eskimo, and the children could speak both languages. June's sister became very good at Yupik language and was her dad's interpreter.

9:05 Margaret asks if school started in late August. June says it did, and then it would wind up in April when the Eskimos left to their fish camps where they would cut logs, fish, and hunt muskrats for fur so they could buy things from the store.

June tells that her parents planned the school in a way that the school was out when people needed to leave to the fish camps. They took their dog teams while there was still snow on the ground.

10:23 Margaret asks if June did lots of recreational activities like sledding and skiing. She tells they didn't do much skiing but they sledged and made snow houses. The snow houses were very sturdy because the snow packs hard during frequent blizzards and high winds. They could walk on top of the snow without any problems. They played a lot in their snow houses.

Then they had neighbors and the children played together every day. One time they had a snow storm and when it was the time to go home that was three houses away, they couldn't see a thing. Two of the Eskimos got a rope, one took one end and the other took the other end and the kids were in the middle, holding onto the rope and that's how they took the kids to the school house. Otherwise they would have been blown away with the wind.

12:44 Margaret asks if June's folks used dog teams. June tells that they didn't have other than pet dogs but they could hire sled dogs if they needed. In the summertime their transportation was a boat that June's father had built. They called it Keenuruk. June's brother [David] was born in Selawik and the Eskimos named him Keenuruk, who in Selawik was "the hero of the village from way back." That was a special name for him and Irus named the boat Keenuruk too. The boat was their mode of transportation.

Margaret says that June mentioned that her brother was born in Selawik, but that there was no hospital at the time. June tells that there was a lady there who was

married to Archie Ferguson. Archie was a pilot around that area, and she helped deliver June's brother with Irus. They were praying for a brother because they already had 3 girls.

14:34 Margaret asks what time of year it was, and June tells it was November 22<sup>nd</sup>. He is turning 65 now.

Margaret asks what June remembers of Thanksgiving and Christmas, and she tells that she remembers one time when her mother had invited a neighbor from across the river. He was a Greek taxidermist from Athens who never cleaned himself up much or washed his hands. They all sat down at the table to eat a corn on a cob that came in cans. That was a special thing June's mother had saved for the thanksgiving dinner. Their Greek neighbor decided to tell them a story that happened in Athens and picked up the corn cobs, demonstrating the pillars in Athens with the corn cobs that were all over the table. The kids' faces dropped because he had handled them and they were unedible.

16:47 Christmas was a very special time for them and the whole village entered Christmas spirits. They had a Christmas tree at the school and the men would go to Upper Selawik where the big trees were. That was 50 miles out of the village, but the men brought in the tree. It was a special thing because around Selawik there were only willows and no trees. Having a tree that extended from the floor to the ceiling was really impressive for June. The children would make all the decorations for it and they never bought decorations.

After the tree was decorated, the villagers would come and they would have a special program. The mothers would have a Christmas story that was played out by the villagers. The parents were always delighted to hearing their children take part in the program and in the verses. The gifts were put around the tree and after the party they had things like Christmas cookies and hot chocolate.

18:58 The other big day was at the Friend's Church and that was the only church in Selawik. Their Christmas was different than what they had at the school house. They had gifts that they ran on wires across the school building. Nothing was wrapped. The gifts were all homemade, like mukluks, and parkis, and mittens.

They made their own tags that were made of birch bark, according to June's sister. June couldn't remember that part. They were always fancy and looked a lot nicer than their manufactured ones. People strung berries in summer time and gave gifts of berries. June's mother was given salmonberries in a seal poke [?].

They never had a tree at the Church and the one at the school house was the only tree in town. All the school children decorated it by making things out of paper. They made paper chains, cranberry strings and popcorn.

21:21 When June thinks back on those days, nothing looked as nice as the Christmas tree in Selawik. The tree was spruce.

Margaret wonders what things they had to buy. June tells that they ordered things from a catalog, but mostly they wore mukluks in the winter and in summer they wore shoes and summer parkis that were made by the Natives out of calico. That's what they wore too. The Native people would wear furs on top of their calico parki and in summer they just didn't wear fur. They didn't need that much.

Margaret says that people got by with lot less those days, and June agrees, adding that they didn't miss things either.

23:16 Margaret asks if Irus did any hunting, and June tells that he did. He also taught June's older sister Muriel how to hunt and she did lots of birding. They had ducks, geese. They didn't have caribou but they had reindeer. Irus was superintendent of the heard and in a certain time of the year they would bring the herd close to the village and kill some for taking care of the village.

They had to order their groceries a year ahead of time. There was only one boat that came to Kotzebue and they went to get the groceries and took them to Selawik by boat. The food had to last them until almost the next summer when they would again go pick up groceries. They had to think ahead.

25:09 Margaret asks if June lived in other villages too, or if she stayed in Selawik. June tells that they moved away from Selawik in 1928. Their father had purchased a store in Ruby and Poorman area. It had a roadhouse and a post office attached to it, and that's where they moved.

Poorman was a mining town and their father was interested in mining because that's what he had done in Candle. They had mines there and they lived there. June was there in Poorman only for one winter and then she came to Fairbanks to go to high school.

Margaret asks if there was an elementary school in Poorman, and June tells that there was no school. Their mother taught them through a correspondence course. When June came to Poorman, she was 13 and had to finish her 8<sup>th</sup> grade by correspondence. Then she came to Fairbanks for her first year of high school. Margaret asks if that was in Old Main, and June tells that it was called Fairbanks Public Schools, but also Old Main. It was the toughest building in Fairbanks.

She came to Fairbanks in 1938. They boarded with Mr. and Mrs. George Hicks who boarded other children too. June's sister Norna was with them too. She was finishing her junior year when June was a freshman. They stayed there until the following fall, after which they went to Seattle.

28:02 Margaret asks if the Territory would pay the cost for students who had to travel away for high school. June says that she doesn't think there was any of that, and Margaret mentions that they did that later. June's parents thought that it was expensive for them to live in Fairbanks and sent them to their aunt, their dad's brother's wife and their family, in Seattle. That's where June finished her high school and graduated from.

June says she didn't see her mother in all those three years until she graduated and went back home to Poorman.

Margaret asks what it was like to go back to Poorman and June tells that everybody laughed at them because they got lost in Poorman. They got there and the airfield was little bit above the town. They had to cross a little path to get across the Poorman River to where their family's store was. They came in a little earlier than what they expected so their family wasn't there greeting them. They decided to try to walk home by themselves and got lost. Everybody wondered how they could have got lost in a little town like Poorman.

June graduated in 1942.

30:05 The war had started. June and her sister came back by Alaska Steamship, and at that time they had to blacken all the windows and lights because they were afraid that the Japanese, who were already in Aleutians, would see the lights. June and her sister came to Valdez and took a bus to Fairbanks where they stayed overnight, or maybe two nights, at the Nordale Hotel. They waited a bush plane to Poorman.

Eva McGovan was there to make sure everything went well for them. Margaret says that Eva took many people under her wing, and June agrees: Eva was always helping someone.

June continues that the flight to Poorman happened once a week, but there were flights to Ruby and other areas and the planes were always moving with the several pilots that they had. Jim Datson [sp?] ran the air service to the bush in Fairbanks. Eddie Staiger, whose sister Olga is, flew down to Poorman too.

32:40 The air planes landed on old Week's Field that is now a housing area. The big hangars were there. The Pan Am[erican Airlines] hangar was where the bowling alley is now. They could walk to the Nordale Hotel. June walked everywhere since they didn't have cars to drive.

June's mother's father lived with them in Selawik and he was always going up river to go fishing and hunting and he loved that part of it. When they moved to Poorman, their grandfather wilted because he loved to get out hunting birds but there was hardly anything in Poorman area and very little fishing. Grandfather wasn't happy living in Poorman.

34:06 Margaret asks how Poorman compared to Selawik in terms of size and facilities. June tells that Poorman had more facilities, but Selawik had a traveling nurse, Elma Carlson, who came in twice a year. June's father and the Eskimos built a little cabin for her so when she came in, she could have her own place. She would go to the other 11 villages too, and after 18 years she retired from that job.

Margaret asks if things like diphtheria were still a problem, and June tells that all of those hard diseases like measles and all those things were really bad.

They didn't have any bad epidemics when June was a child. They had wonderful care with their mother and father taking care of them but, there was a whole family who died of tuberculosis. They were friends to June and it was sad that the oldest girl and their mother were the only ones from the whole family of 7 [who survived]. They all ended up with scars in their lungs but if it hadn't been for their mother's good care, they would have ended up with tuberculosis too.

36:40 Margaret asks if June stayed in Poorman. She tells that she stayed there for several months before coming up to Fairbanks. June's youngest sister, Audrey, and their brother David were still in school so they rented a little place together.

June got a job at Ladd Field. She had several jobs there but the most interesting one was working at the Mail and Records with Marcella Coulp [?]. She was the head of the office and June worked there for 3 years. It was an interesting time for her.

Their rented house was quite close to where the power plant of the Municipal Utilities is now, but on the opposite side of the street on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue.

38:19 Margaret wonders how June got to work since it was quite a commute. There was a bus from downtown that took all the people who worked at Ladd Field. They went to the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> and Cushman and the bus took them to Ladd Field. One would walk from home to there since people walked everywhere. June tells that she was in much better shape then, than she is now. [Margaret says something unclear.]

Audrey took the [bus?] run and then Billie Root had a run, but June mainly remembers [Paul] Greimann. They had several buses since there were lots of people working at the base which was the main source of employment at the time. Margaret and June agree that it changed Fairbanks a lot.

Margaret says that with so many new people, Fairbanks seemed like a bustling community. She asks if Fairbanks seemed different during the war, and June tells that it did. She had been to Fairbanks during her freshman year and it was a small town with 2000 people or 2500 at most.



40:15 During war years, lots of people moved in from places like Poorman. June's parents moved to town when Poorman mining was shut down. People all came to Fairbanks to live. June's father started working at the Base and later they returned to Poorman to settle things there before coming back to Fairbanks. Margaret says the mining shut down completely. June says that lots of the people who worked at the creek were young men who were taken into service.

One of June's brother-in-laws was taken in and he had to go to service. Another one had to go to Aleutians and he was working there without being at the service. He was married and had a family at the time. Later on he came back to Fairbanks.

Margaret asks how June met her husband and if he was in Fairbanks during the war. He says he was in detached service from the [Corps of] Engineers. His group, with whom he served with, went Outside, but he was kept in Fairbanks because he was a heavy equipment operator who cleared the runaways in winter and in summer. They kept him in Fairbanks and on his days off he taught one of the officers how to run a Caterpillar tractor.

42:45 June met Colin the first time when she was in the first year in high school, and didn't see him until she came back to Fairbanks. They met at the USO [United Service Organizations Inc.] where they were chaperoned by several town women. They had dances there a couple of times a week but people also traveled to Big Delta and Northway for entertaining the soldiers.

Margaret asks if the USO was the old building close to where the Golden Heart is on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue. June continues that once a week the townspeople would give the soldiers a special dinner and all the people who wanted to, could contribute to the dinner. Time after time people brought food there, wanting to help the war effort by having something there for the soldiers. Dances were upstairs.

44:50 Margaret says they probably had a live band there, since Fairbanks had some good bands, but June says they sometimes had just taped music. They had the old-fashioned dances: one night they had schottisches and polkas, and then another night they would have modern dances like the jitterbug and the other types of dancing. Colin never played for the dances, but that's where June met

him again after high school. He asked June for a dance. June and him had a dance and then they had a date and their courtship started. Later he told that he rarely ever went to those dances.

They were married in September 1945 and he was in his uniform. Following spring he was out of the service. He was born in Anchorage but came to Fairbanks when he was 2 years old, and he was raised in Fairbanks. Margaret says that his father was Donald McDonald who was the builder of the Alaska Highway. [Unclear talking.] June says he worked for the railroad too but he was most noted for the highway.

47:02 Margaret says that after the war, June and Colin settled down in Fairbanks for good. June confirms. They bought a little house and lived in Fairbanks off and on ever since.

Margaret says that after the war, there was another change with people coming, and asks what the other changes were that happened in the early 1950s. June says there was a bit of a sump after the war, but many buildings went up during the war, like Penney's Building, and the Northward Building. There were office buildings. Ken Murray's Insurance used to be where the Key Bank was. That was above the First National Bank, and that's where June worked for three years after she left the base.

48:46 There were lots of changes and at the time, it was only June and Ken at the office but later he had lots of people working for him.

49:02 Margaret mentions the couple of bad fires that happened. June mentions the Nordale [Hotel] burning down and says that also the Lathrop had a bad fire.

Margaret remembers that 1946 was a bad year for fires. June tells that there was a one at the Co-op and Colin took some pictures of it and film. Lots of those places have changed names and June's husband knows every building that was there or what there is now. June has suggested that he should write a book on it.

June worked until 1953 which is when her first boy was born and then she stayed at home while her children were there. She was busy raising the boys.

Margaret says that the Salvation Army was instrumental during the 1967 flood and that June was involved in it. June tells that she and Colin got involved in 1970s. Her husband and she were going to the Corps, but they also had a religious section. They started going to meetings at their chapel and became Salvation Army soldiers. When the pipeline was coming in, the captain Ronald Emery asked Colin if he would like to get a shelter going because there were all the people who came to Fairbanks when the pipeline was going strong. Colin took over running the shelter that had 26 rooms for the people who didn't have any place to stay. Later on they were asked if they wanted to run the Salvation Army when the previous officers had left. They were going to become captains in the Salvation Army and had to take correspondence courses which were equivalent of 2 years in the college. They both had to take the course in order to be able to be in charge of the SA in Fairbanks.

53:51 They went in and worked with that. June says she doesn't know how they did it since she was close to 50 and her husband was 51 or 52. It was very interesting work and they wouldn't have changed it for the world what they did there, but June thinks that they retired at a good age. Margaret asks if they were both involved and June explains that Salvation Army takes people as couples so they both have to have the same education. June ran the women's group that they call the Home Bake [?]. Also, they have a group for children that they call the Sun Beams and it had a bunch of little girls. June's husband had a boys' group whom he took a care of. Then they had Sunday School and Colin ran the chapel service while June helped with that too. He was the one bringing messages and working in the community. They had stores and they had a main store downtown and one at College and one at North Pole.

The SA International headquarters are in London and the U.S. office is in New York. Margaret asks how the ranks are. June tells they were both auxiliary captains and had the same rank. They couldn't go to the training school in California because they were too old. They have a cut-off age of 35 or 36 and June and Colin was too old for that so they took the correspondence course and became auxiliary captains. Nowadays in 5 years they would become regular captains. They only started that after June and Colin retired.

56:20 Margaret says that some people make a career out of SA. June says they move around and the captain who took their place was in Fairbanks about 5 years, but usually people are only for 2 years, or only a year before moving to other areas. June and Colin stayed in Fairbanks because that's where they wanted to live and they saw the need for SA.

The SA shelter was originally on Gaffney [Road] but when they built the new one, it used to be a funeral home that was converted into an apartment house and then the SA bought it, converting it into rooms. They built a kitchen and had a little area for offices. It was in a big scale during the pipeline days. Later the Fairbanks Rescue Mission came in and took over. Between the Rescue Mission and Salvation Army shelter, they took care of a lot of people.

58:25 Margaret asks if lots of the people who were housed were young men who came up to be employed with the pipeline. They came for work and families [came with them?]. The women were housed in the upper floor and the men were on the lower floor so that there would be no problems with single people. There were lots of people in town that just boomed and June isn't sure it was all for the better for Fairbanks since they had lots of problems and troubles.

Margaret asks if people had [unclear]. June says that a lot of them worked in the thrift store, shelter area, kitchen or office.

Margaret asks if June ever went back to Selawik, and she says that she did. They made a trip there in 1988. Her siblings and she decided that they wanted to return after 50 years of being gone from the village. In August Colin, June's three sisters, Muriel, Norma and Audrey, and her brother David, and two cousins decided to take a trip to Selawik. Cousins Blanche and Loretta came from Newark, New Jersey, but they fit right in with everyone up in Selawik.

1:00:58 Margaret asks if there were anybody they knew. June tells that the place they stayed in was pre-arranged with a lady they had known and gone to school with. She was Marie Clark and her maiden name was Marie Burnette. She had two houses there and she put June and others up in one of them, fed them and

was a really lovely lady. From there they went around the village, visiting places they remembered.

At the time when they had lived there, there were no bridges around the river. One would go by boat or walk across it in winter time, but when June's family returned there in 1988, they had built 2 bridges across the river.

One of their nephews, Phil Anderson, who works for earth movers, had helped with building bridges up there and told June's group about Selawik.

1:02:35 June says that there was quite a contrast to the earlier trips into Selawik and they flew on a commercial airline. They flew with Alaska Airlines up to Kotzebue where they changed to a smaller plane with which they flew to Selawik. Her brother flew his own plane with his wife and June's son Allen flew with him all the way to Selawik.

June remembers seeing all the water around the Selawik village and hadn't remembered that there was so much of it. They had always previously gone to Kotzebue by boat.

In a way it was sad to go back because many of the people they knew had passed away. They did find people who knew their family and enjoyed time visiting old acquaintances. They only stayed over the weekend, leaving on Friday and coming back the following Monday. It was enough time to get to see everything they wanted to see. The old school house was torn down and the only thing that was left was the school bell in front of which they had their pictures taken.

1:44:55 They had a brand new school that was built back further. The school house that June knew was built close to the river but maybe it eroded and became dangerous. They had built the new school house further. The town had grown to seven hundred people or more and it had quite changed.

One of their old friends, William Sheldon, took them for a boat ride which was very exciting. They went up the river and it really brought back memories. [Margaret says something unclear.] They were all satisfied that they had made that trip. Since they had been back, many of the old people had passed away and

they were very fortunate to find some of them still there. June says that their old nanny, Cora Lake who is now Cora Clay, helped June's mother raise them while her daughter lived in Fairbanks. They had kept in touch with Cora and think she's now in Kotzebue, visiting her son. They got to see her often and she was good to them and helped their mother.

June thinks that it was a special time to have been raised in Selawik and she talks about it often.

Margaret thanks for the interview.

[End of the recording.]