

Interview With David Chatfield

By

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History Of Alaska

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Robert: David could you tell us a little bit about yourself and your family?

David: My family came from Ireland. They came over and settled in Washington. As a child I did a lot of fishing. So naturally I grew up in a Hunting and fishing environment. When I got older I came up and spent the summers working for a B.A.F and working in the canneries. I also worked as an assistant carpenter. I had a wonderful time and just never went back.

Robert: How old were you when you came to Alaska?

David: Well I'm not sure exactly it was in 1956.

Robert: It sounds like you had a good time!

David: I went back to Seattle for a couple of years in the winter times. I kept coming up here in the summer times and just finally stayed. Things have changed drastically since 1964. Back then there weren't cops to handle problems, since it was such a small community and everyone knew one another they settled their problems by themselves. Back then people would come in from fishing and drink all winter on credit because everyone knew everyone and trusted everyone. No one kept doors locked. They had open gambling, and open whore houses, and they girls who cruised the bars and everything was wonderful. The bars were packed busy, there wasn't near as much money as there is now, but it was moving around. It wasn't all centralized. Now the money is centralized to the point where about 200 people on the island have an absolute lock on everything and they dictate what will or won't be. It was a really nice and wonderful town as long as you didn't run off with somebody's wife or

pull an armed robbery. Things weren't any more expensive than they are now. The roads weren't any worse than they are now. There were only two cops for the whole city, the chief of police and his assistant. It went on that way for years. After the tidal wave they beafed up the government and thats when they got the borough. There were only small business. They had their king crab years where they went out and slaughterd the crab. They did the same with shrimp they didn't control it so they went out and slaughtered it and now they don't have any left. You have to have a permit paid in cash to do anything.

Robert: Since statehood have you seen anything good happen to Kodiak or Alaska?

David: Its brought many good things, we have better access, we have paved roads, we have a big hospital, but its brought a whole lot more bad than it has good. It has changed the people. Now all the people who were true alaskans and had a problem they used to work it out between themselves, now if they have a problem they call a cop and they call a lawyer. We used to have two cops, then one became a judge. Now we must have at least 40 lawyers. Everyone wants to become a lawyer or a cop.

Robert: What about the flood in Fairbanks, what year was that in?

David: That was in 1967. The pipe broke above the town, there must have been about 40 feet of water all over town. I had a print shop and the day before I was in there printing up some stuff and I came out in the morning and the building was gone. Everything was gone, my boat, my car, everything. After that I tried to fix up one of my cars and sold it to one of the kids at the gas station. I packed up my stuff soaking wet, and hitched hiked to Anchorage, put it on an alaska steam ship and went to seattle. I got a job with Bowing , worked as an engineer for a couple of years, then I came back. That was about 1969.

Robert: From the time you left to go to Seattle and the time you came back in

1969 after the earthquake, did you see a lot of differences and changes?

David: There was a tremendous amount of money these people got, two and a half three percent loans, disaster loans, and they opened up all these bars and construction. A tremendous amount of construction and reconstruction so everybody had big jobs and this place was really a boom town.

Unfortunately while everybody was parting and having a good time, they created the city council and a book of ordinances which was only about two pages. They created the Kodiak Island Borough a whole other lay of government. Now there are volumes and volumes of ordinances. Whenever they weren't fighting each other they were making ordinances. They only did it during the summer time. Whenever the fisherman went out fishing they would hold another meeting and make another ordinance, so when the fisherman came back there was another law. The city has bought more realstate than anyone here in town. There are about two hundred people on the island who can say something and actually have someone listen to them, the rest of us are just living here on the island.

Robert: What changes have you seen in the fisheries with king crab and shrimp?

David. Dutch Harbor has become like Kodiak was in the fifties. Everybody is going to be moving up eventually. Canaries can't afford to be here. They got a five percent sales tax. They got a raw fish tax. They have a personal property tax. They have a real property tax. We have more taxes around here you'd think you were living in New York. All these taxes are here to sustain a government that nobody wants. They can't even maintain the roads. Its a real sad situation. Government was supposed to be designed to do the things you couldn't do yourself. To get every- one big jobs and to tell everyone how to live.

Robert: Where do you think Alaska would be in thirty years from now?

David: Their going to beat the natives out of their land. They'll do that by making them pay taxes on their land and everything. The people who

are her now are more concerned about their own property and not any one else. They think they'll just turn it into one big park and let people come and take pictures once in a while. They'll be lucky if they don't just turn it into a wilderness.

Robert: How about the city of Kodiak, it seems people just come up during the summer make high wages then during the winter go back down to the lower forty eight?

David: That's how it has always been. Unfortunately people can't come up here and make high wages though because their finding out that the wages haven't changed in twenty years. Back before New England fish company went bankrupt they were paying \$6.25 an hour. Today the canaries down in the same place are paying \$6.80 an hour. The wages haven't changed at all and when you come up they've made all these laws . They finally made a camp ground to eliviate some of the problems but if you have to rent it will cost you about \$800.00 a month for a single apartment. Just about the only way to come up here is to get a job that pays you room and board. Kodiak is a very controlled environment. After retirement people move somewhere down south where you don't have to pay taxes and can save your money.

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