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NOVEMBER 5, 1992

INTERVIEW WITH CHLORA CLYMER
AT KODIAK, ALASKA

RA: Where are you from?

CC: Came from Great Lakes area, from German decent. Moved from California to Houston Texas. Worked from early age of 14, restaurant work. Met future husband when I was 19. Got married two years later. Houston was small town in 1941. Work was hard to find. You could buy coke for 5¢, hamburgers .70¢, cigarettes 11¢.

Article about Alaska in newspaper looking for workers to help build a base. Husband & brother hired on. I came up 14 months later after money was saved, it was during the war.

I wanted to come Alaska. It took 5 days by train to Seattle from Texas. Waited 6 weeks at Seattle because service people had priority. Worked at a bakery in Seattle, then caught a boat. the S.S. Yacinow. It took 12 days. We traveled in a convoy of 6 ships. Tight security, landed at Ferry dock, Erskine dock.

RA: What year was that?

CC: May 22, 1943.

RA: What was Kodiak like?

CC: Lots of people because of the war going on. Army, Navy, Marines and SeaBees. Wonderful people in Kodiak.

RA: Alaska was not a state when you got here?

CC: No. We were a territory. Juneau was the seat of government. We could not vote until we became a state. I first got to vote for President Kennedy. He was a fine man and a good President.

RA: What did the downtown area look like when you came to Kodiak.

CC: No sidewalks, just boardwalks, all dirt roads. With all of the rain it was always muddy. We needed rain gear and boots most of the time.

We listened to the radio in the evening and visited. The first T.V. was in Kodiak about 1955. I had the first T.V. in Kodiak.

The T.V. came through the base then later cable T.V. was available. The first night I turned the T.V., I had 17 people in the house. The only thing on T.V. the test pattern. We set around and watched it.

RA: You were here during the Tsunami, what was that like?

CC: I have never seen anything like it. It came about 5:30 in the evening. It was on Good Friday before Easter. I was working at City market at the time. We had compressor under the building. I felt the floor moving and the compressors were moving and coming loose. I had a new car and it was parked across the street. There was a truck next to it, the truck was buckling and moving.

It was dreadful, people were moving out of the downtown area to get home. I called my husband. He said water was coming and we had to evacuate the downtown area.

We had six or seven huge waves that hit the town. We spent the night on the hill next to the graveyard. We couldn't stay home because we were in a low area. We were able to go home about 2:00 a.m..

We had a mess in the house, lots of broken things. We had all kinds of company for several weeks staying with us. We cooked on a kerosene stove, no running water or bathroom facilities.

RA: I imagine the downtown area was a disaster.

CC: It was terrible, I can't describe it, There are no words for it. We opened up City Market a couple of days later. Krafts people helped us for 4 or 5 days. Krafts sold out of boxes until they could get set up better. It took lots of time, all the boats and cars had to be removed from the streets and a major clean up was underway.

RA: Changes at City Market.

CC: Yes, started in 1950, in 1964 we moved to the current location. My boss spent 7 years building it. He did a little at a time, on weekends and nights. We needed a bigger market. We got into the store in December and had the tidal wave the next year. The building was a disaster inside but it held up.

RA: Was the airport and everything in the same location?

CC: Yes, we had airlines coming in but we used boats most of the time. We used to get supplies in once a month. The milk and many perishables came in frozen. My boss Elaine Banks was the first person to bring items in by air. City Market first store to go self-service, even ahead of Krafts.

RA: When did the mall area come into effect downtown?

CC: When they were rebuilding the town in late 60's.

RA: There was not many places to shop was there?

CC: No, Krafts was the biggest store. Down the street, Donnely and Achesons was wiped out. Krafts had ladies wear and full line of goods.

RA: You said their was very few places to shop. Did you make things or buy from catalogs?

CC: The rebuilding took place fairly fast and bigger business with more inventory replaced the old destroyed downtown area.

RA: Did you see many changes after the war?

CC: A lot of people left because they were in service and work was not plentiful. I had to have a job when I got to Kodiak or I would have been shipped back because I was a dependent of a military person. I loved Kodiak and I have lived here for 49 years.

RA: Have you seen many changes in fishing?

CC: We used to be the King Crab capital of the world. At one time we were #1, now I think Unalaska is. This is a fishing town and we depend on it.

RA: Tell me about your parent?

CC: My grandparents come form Germany. They homestead in Missouri and got a section of land. It is still in the Miller name.

RA: Were there many fires here, or other disasters on Kodiak?

CC: We had lots of fires. City Market caught fire. Then old oil heaters caused many fires.

We couldn't get product up here, because of a strike our suppliers were cut off.

I ran City Market for 10 years as a manager. It had different owners.

I lived in Anchorage and then moved back. I missed Kodiak. Erskine store was owned by Alaskan Commercial. I worked for them for 4 years in the groceries and readywear department.

We lease land at Afognak Island and we had a hunting and fishing camp there for a while. I cooked for many people.

I also worked for Donnely and Achesons. I had a job with the Bear Cafe but it had burned down the night before I got to Kodiak. They sold foot long hot dogs and things.

I have many friends and have always loved Kodiak.