

Jenny Stevens

on Kodiak

Darlene Port

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Kodiak College

Oral History Project

ORAL HISTORY

An oral interview with Jenny Stevens in her home
Alaska History - University of Alaska at Kodiak

Darlene Port

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JS: This is kind of funny. I guess this has to be a recent history, Darlene, because when you asked me I thought there were many other people that would be...have more Kodiak experiences but I have a few too, so...

DP: First of all I'd like to know when you came to Kodiak.

JS: I arrived on January, no, December 31st, 1971.

DP: And why did you come to Kodiak?

JS: I was offered a teaching job, I was. It was considerably more money than I was offered in other positions and I'd graduated in the middle of the year. And this was a music job and the other jobs weren't all music. It was considerably more pay and I wanted to come to Alaska. I had friends who had come here to teach and so I was curious too, and I figured I could at least come for a year. If I hated it, if I had to live in a tent and it was freezing cold, you know all the things that people who, who aren't, who've never been to Alaska imagine Alaska to be. I imagined all those same things having no idea where I was going and thought I could stick it out for six months and if I hated it I could always leave. And here I am, still.

DP: Still. So where was your first teaching position?

JS: Well, I was a music teacher. It was a shared position between Peterson Elementary and Main Elementary. Peterson Elementary at that point was, had just been transferred over to the Coast Guard, from a Naval Station to the Coast Guard, so the school was pretty large at that point, over 500 kids. We had, sort of, people stacked in closets at that point and I taught my band classes, that's what I did mostly was band classes, in the cafeteria. And then at Main Elementary I taught some general music and band classes. The band

classes were a riot because they were between the band room which also had classes, band of course, and a gymnasium, which had a class, 'cause it was like one of those gym, stage kind of deals. So I was on the stage, the band was behind me, the band room was behind me, I was on the stage the gym class was in front of me with a curtain between us, just the grand, and then there was another class above in a balcony kind of area, where the cafeteria was for the elementary school and there was another gym class, an elementary gym class in there so... I don't know how I did it, but I do remember at one point...it could get very frustrating because people were sharing facilities and so, sometimes. I remember one time, well, I gave my classes up a lot because there was no, you couldn't hear, or there wasn't something else was in there, they had an assembly or something and so sometimes I couldn't have my classes and it was very frustrating. But I remember one time this little girl from the high school, sweet little girl, cheerleader came down from the high school and said, "we're going to be having an assembly in half an hour, you'll need to move your class." I said, "I am not moving my class. You can send Mr. Byler down here and I will tell him that I am not moving my class." And they did not have there assembly. So, I was pretty new then. Just a baby! Getting to Kodiak was, was just, I had no idea where I was going. I think I'd looked it up on the map but I don't remember doing that. I had a vague idea I was coming to an island. I didn't know what that meant either. And, I'd stayed up all night, packing with my Dad. And we'd gotten to the Seattle airport, at that point, that time there was a direct flight from Seattle, was Kodiak..uh...Western Airlines, had a direct flight from Seattle, once a week, which sometimes got in and sometimes didn't, of course. And, I remember going to the airport just exhausted and looking out at the airplane that I was going to fly in to Kodiak. I'd only been in a plane once ever before that in my life and my father didn't even know about that. So...so I look out and there's...four props! And I said, "I'm going to Alaska, in that?" And he said, "You're going if I have to shove you on he plane and slam the door and I will not see you until June!" So.

DP: So, no chance to back out if you wanted to.

JS: No, he was not in any way, shape or form ready to let me back out. I wasn't serious about backing out anyway I was, I was up for the adventure. I had, the school district had connected me with a...a girl, here, a teacher, another teacher who needed a roommate. So, she met me at the airport. I came in a mini-skirt, those were eras of the mini-skirt. And there was lots of snow, it was January. They'd had...that was the fall there'd been a big... the big slide there by the Sea-Land dock, so the road was really at that point only open an hour a day so people could get back and forth. It didn't always coincide with the flight time

so the state transportation system had to implement a ferry system. So I came in on the airplane, Tam and her boyfriend met me at the airport, it was packed, the airport was. There were all the outgoing passengers for two or three flights and all the incoming passengers for Western Airlines and for another airline, I think it was Wien at that point, and, your baggage, they were re-doing the airport so your baggage went on a little cart from the plane and came around to the front side of the airport and was dumped on the ground; literally dumped on the ground.

DP: Outside?

JS: Outside. At that point there was snow on the ground. It got worse later that year when it started to turn to slush but, at that point, your stuff went in the snow, snow bank and then you, you know, retrieved your bags. And then we were at the wrong hour, of course, to get back across the road so you had to wait for that time, so there was a bus, a school bus the took you from the airport to Deadman's Curve and you climbed down this steep, icy road down to Gibson Cove...on the bus...and then you got a ferry which was a fishing boat, and you drove across the bay and landed at the boat harbor which wasn't finished from the tidal wave. And then the high school band director met me there because I was the fifth music teacher. So he met me as a, very graciously, and the first thing we did was go to the bar, at the Kodiak Inn. Was New Year's Eve, right? It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, So then we went home, I guess, and then Dennis showed up with the bags, and then it was time to go to Praznyk. And at that time, all the bars in town on New Year's Eve had hors d'oeuvres, mega hors d'oeuvres: smoked salmon, clams, just everything you can imagine, there were wonderful, wonderful, wonderful seafood. Scallops, halibut, anything you wanted, you know, crab, king, it was the height of king crab days, so, it was just fabulous. And so, we went bar hopping on New Year's Eve and went to all these different Praznyk's that was our dinner. And lots of people did it, I mean, it was a big deal. So!

DP: Social Event?

JS: Social event. And I remember I had very little money left to my name at this point because I was just like the gold miners that arrived in Haines without a penny to their name. I was metaphorically very similar. We went to...the last place we went was the old beachcombers which was a boat, that had a bar and a restaurant and like a floating, like motel. It wasn't floating it had been landed and was kind of a ratty old place, with lots of atmosphere and was crowded, again, very very crowded; wall to wall people. You

couldn't stand up. We were literally shoulder to shoulder. I don't know, I don't know why anybody would go there now, but it was quite an adventure. I had...and...we sat with a bunch of friends, mostly educational staff teachers and stuff and uh, we had a beer. Everybody ordered a drink, and the waitress brought it and then it was my turn to buy, because you bought in rounds like that. and the wait...and she told me it was 15 bucks for the group. Well, I think I had maybe 17 dollars to my name. And I remember my jaw kind of dropped 'cause I came from 20 cents a beer. Nickel a beer on Wednesday nights or whatever it was, you know, in college town. And...um...she said, "oh! You're new to Alaska aren't you?" I said, "Yeah." I didn't know the term "fresh off the boat" at that point but that's what I was, fresh off the boat. So, I had to borrow money from my roommate to pay my rent for that month. I had to pay her back and it was wall to wall people. It was the days of streaking. And uh...topless dancing. So, I must have been very naive but some girl took off her top on the dance floor and pretty soon somebody else took off their top on the floor. There were two or three girls dancing topless. And then there was this tall handsome blond guy who asked me to dance. So I went out and danced and, and then came back to my group of friends and I'm just like wide-eyed...I have...I am just totally wide-eyed there's no other word to describe it. Plus being really, really tired from being up the night before. It's just all sort of a blur. Swirl,...t's just like those dreams on TV swirling lights and swirling colors and just this sea of people, it was so crowded and noisy and...whoa! Just reeling. And then, I don't know, we finally went home I don't remember much after that. But, the next day Tam and I went to the grocery store to go shopping, And we are walking down this aisle, and this has been like the third time in my life that, in my very young life at that point, that I'd wanted to sort of change my whole- way of being, you know, just sort of make an abrupt change and be...get away from...um...the little town where I grew up where you have your own little niche, you know, your own little...place where...pigeon hole...where people put you and this was a new...new place to be and a..you know separate from any identity I'd ever had in high school or my little home town or college or anything, you know. So I was looking forward to that part of it and I'm walking down the grocery aisle and someone says to me "Hi, Jenny!" I was so angry. I was so angry!

DP: someone you knew?

JS: It was the guy that had danced with me on the dance floor the night before and I don't remember telling him my name. So he must have asked, somebody. I can't imagine who he asked except maybe someone in our party. So I was pretty snippy with him. I wasn't at all

in the mood to be recognized. And then we got around the aisle and my roommate said, "Jenny, he's pretty cute!" I Said, "oh yeah, right," went on my merry way. It was very cold that winter, very snowy. It was one of the...you know...you hear the old-timers talk about the bad winter, well that was one of the bad ones and we had, I don't know, I can remember four feet of snow on the ground at one point that winter. And a blizzard, I remember walking down town with...Dennis' car was in the shop and he needed to go pick it up on a Saturday so we all bundled up and walked down town. We just lived right on the hill across from the high school. And we got down there and he checked us all for frost bite because we were walking in a blizzard. It really was a blizzard! And it was howling and snowing and just like the...the Little House on the Prairie. You know as a new Alaskan it was really exciting. Then to be checked for frost bite, I felt I'd really arrived! And so that was a fun time, and then...um...oh gosh that first winter all kinds of things happened. I went to fur rendezvous, in Anchorage, and visited with some friends of mine that had moved up from...that were teachers in Anchorage and...uh...whom I've never seen again, by the way, but...

DP: What was the rendezvous like?

JS: Well, it wasn't that big a deal actually, it was pretty...I don't know I guess I'd have to call it sleazy at that point but we watched a parade and it was like...uh...people dressed in furs! I came from Daffodil Festival country, you know, and here's this parade in the middle of winter and it's ten degrees and...and there actually it was a little warmer it was like 30, it was just below freezing and...but you know, cold and people are...are out there and all their costumes are fur trimmed. I don't know it was, it reminded me of a...South Tacoma which is like the...oh I don't know it's like. I've seen them in the these kinds of streets in other towns where there's, cheap motels, and fast food places and...uh... places where you...uh...like mediums and you know just kind of a...a quick part of town. You know, a real commercial kind of district and that was my initial impression of...of Anchorage. Except that every sign had Yukon this or Cold North that or Alaskan this or Icicle this or some reference to the north and the cold and, and that's when I really realized that I was, really had the sense that I was in Alaska. That...hat I wasn't...uh...in Kodiak it was Kodiak and it didn't sound like Alaska and it certainly didn't...well it just...I don't know, it was when the...it was...

DP: Didn't fit your idea of Alaska?

JS: No, I guess not. It was that visit to fur rendezvous. While I wasn't all that impressed with fur rendezvous, I realized that I was Polar this you know and I was in the cold north.

DP: In the far north.

JS: In the far north, yeah. but I was glad to come home.

DP: Back to Kodiak.

JS: Yeah, yeah, And you know, winter in...in a city can be kind of dreary sometimes, you know, it's kind of, the streets are kind of gray from the. I don't know, it was...

DP: It's dirtier?

JS: It's dirtier, yeah and it was a weird feeling...I've you know. Big city and big, not by, you know, Seattle-Tacoma scale but bigger than Kodiak was at that point. There was more than one grocery store after all.

DP: So Kodiak had just on grocery store at that time?

JS: They had Krafts Grocery store downtown and there was a little hole in the wall. City Market was a little hole in the wall where you only went if you were absolutely desperate. Oh, what else happened that winter? Um. Grocery stores were kind of an interesting thing you could go to the grocery store expect...you could have, you could have lasagna on your taste buds and you'd have to have spaghetti because there were no lasagna noodles. You had to do all those kinds you know. You might have tuna noodle casserole on your mind...might not be any noodles. You might have tuna noodle casserole with spaghetti noodles because there were no curly noodles. You know, just all those things you had...

DP: Substitutions?

JS: Substitutions that you have to make that...that spring the kids around Easter time, all the eggs got bought up and...and there weren't...there was a Sea-Land strike so there was no...there were no ships coming in and some products were expensive to ship in so there were several weeks there where we had no eggs and no milk. And I remember running out of toilet paper one time. There was no toilet paper, for awhile.

DP: but there should be lots of catalogs in this area.

JS: And the things that they did ship in there were no...they shipped in by air during that Sea-Land strike and so supplies ran kind of low. Lots of things...the shelves were getting empty. And you could go to Krafts on Saturday and literally spend all day in the store because the lines were so long because fishermen were buying to go fishing for...that was the height of king crab days and so, king crab fishermen went in and bought, you know...I mean if you've been to, I don't know, old Krafts or Safeway when they're buying groceries for fishing boats, you know, and there's just cart after cart after cart after cart. You could go and spend all day in Krafts because that's how long the lines were. You tried not to especially if you knew there was an opening or something you just tried not to go there. Tried to find other times to go but sometimes it got pretty hard. And, you drank...fresh milk was a little harder to come by and people...the store ran out of it you'd...some people would...often had powdered milk. I mean it was sort of a staple.

DP: Well as far as the school then, you came in the middle of the year?

JS: Yes, I did.

DP: To teach. But now that you're teaching K-1 and 2, you've obviously...have done other besides just the band that you started out with.

JS: I'm not through with winter.

DP: Oh! OK.

JS: There was so much snow and cold that winter they, sectioned off the town and you were...the reservoir was frozen. So they were rationing water and you...your section of town only. We had one day a week when you didn't have any water.

DP: No water?

JS: No water.. so that was--- I mean I had the ultimate Alaskan experience that first winter. The other thing, the really funny thing that happened that first winter was, I got this

letter addressed to Jenny, c/o Kodiak Schools...Jenny the new music teacher c/o the Kodiak Schools

DP: And it got to you?

JS: And it got to me! It was the funniest thing. When I came that first week it was right after Christmas and the Post Office had this big sign that said "We don't give a damn how they do it outside." It was a very tiny Post Office, it was where KANA is now. Most people didn't even have boxes, have mail boxes. There was lots and lots of General Delivery. And, you could stand in the Post Office for an hour at a time waiting to pick up your mail if you had a package. General Delivery people stood in line easily an hour. But it was a social event when you went to the Post Office; you knew everybody who was there. And you just visited. So you just stood in line next to somebody that you wanted to visit with and waited for your mail. And we all laughed about it and we all got mad about it but it was the way it was. And they'd had such a...you know...Christmas...Christmas mail and it was such a mess and they'd had bad weather and so mail hadn't come and people hadn't gotten their Christmas things and you know. Worse than anything we could possibly imagine now they just put up that sign 'We don't give a damn how they do it outside'. And so they didn't, you know, there was no checking of slips. If you knew somebody and the box was addressed to and you knew they...they were your neighbor they just hand you the box and you took the box home. It was fun! I mean my memory of it's, my memory of it was that it was fun. I don't know that we thought it was so much fun at the time. And then I got this letter addressed to Jenny the new music teacher which would never happen now-a-days. And, it was this guy that I'd met at the Beachcombers the first night. And he was taking care of, Helgason's Bear Camp in Terror Bay and he was a winter caretaker and he was out there all by himself and, he just wrote me this letter and said he'd be, oh he...borrowed..at some point he had borrowed my flute or something. so...no I guess he was talking about it that he'd like in the letter. So I sent it to him in Terror Bay, I mean I hardly knew the man.

DP: And you sent him your flute?

JS: I sent him my flute! I eventu...I did...I got it back. We became romantically involved, later, but that's one of the most romantic moments of my life is getting that letter from the middle of the wilderness in the middle of the winter. It was fun. Again, an Alaskan experience, you know.

DP: Right. It wouldn't happen anywhere else.

JS: No. So I finished out that year and I...spring was my first experience with light. The light of Alaska. When it's light until 11 o'clock, midnight and it gets light again at four. And I had a friend who was working on the reservoir, the new reservoir. The road, they were building a new road to build a new reservoir out near the end of the road, which is our current water system. And so they were building that road and his job was to maintain the equipment for the road construction crew. And, so I would ride out...he didn't go to work until two or three in the afternoon. So I would ride out the road with him, to the shop and then the guys that were working the road would give me a ride as far out as the road went at that point. And I took my flute and a book and a fishing pole. I didn't know what I was doing. I walked out there all...lot of times that June and it was beautiful weather. I mean, just perfect weather. And I'd be out there by myself for hours at a time. I'd play my flute, I'd read my book, I'd fish a little, never caught a fish but I took a fishing pole. And then, when it, you know, when it started to get dim I'd hike...hike back in to the shop and Stosh and I would come to town. By this time it's 11, 12 o'clock. We'd go to Solly's and we'd have, which doesn't exist any more now, it'...it's not even Henry's anymore it's something else. Um...we'd have dinner and there'd it'd be crowded it was a bar / restaurant kind of situation and be crowded with fishermen. And we knew all the waitresses. And it was another social event. The night life of Kodiak and you were perfectly safe! We had a wonderful time! We'd, sometimes...we'd danced a little sometimes, we had a couple beers after dinner. And then we'd go to my place and sleep. He slept on the floor and I (this is the funny part) he slept on the floor and a...this went on a good portion of the summer. But the...I ren...my, I had moved out of my roommates house and I had rented this little house, which it no longer exists, next to Griffin Memorial Hospital, which is now the Mental Health Center which use to be the old hospital. I've been here long enough to know all this stuff. And...um it was a hungar...I rented it from a Hungarian man who lived out the road. And he was kind of a funny old guy. Very old world. He didn't want me living with anybody. Only I didn't really know that. Anyway, the Russian Priest, who had a drinking problem, lived right across the street from me. And he sort of kept an eye on the place. He thought, and this is what he told the landlord, that, my boyfriend was living there. Well, he thought my boyfriend was Stosh, who wasn't my boyfriend at all. He was just my friend, we kind of pal'd around together. 'Cause Stosh had kind of the hots for this girl that worked at...at Solly's. And I was his companion; I was his excuse to go. And so...and the construction crew house where he was staying was really crowded. So it was no big deal

to me, we were all just, there was just a whole bunch of us that were friends. So...but my boyfriend really was on a boat. The guy from Terror Bay had gotten a fishing job, and so he, when he came in he was really my boyfriend. Only Father Targonsky thought the other guy was my boyfriend and thought I was living with Stosh. Anyway, that and the fact that I had never operated an oil stove and didn't know that the soot in my house was because the fire pot had burnt out and caused a great big problem...then ultimately he told me I had to move. And that was about the time I was leaving, I was going to go outside anyway and...

DP: Well, before that, how far was the road that you said that they took you to the end of the road?

JS: To Pillar Creek. Well, the road, this direction out toward Monashka Bay. The shop was just past Pillar Creek, on the hill past Pillar Creek and That's where I got...that's where the construction crew would pick me up then and haul me out in some, you know. like a jeep or something out to the road where the en...where they were working on the...I mean the road was still raw. And so, it was just, actually a little farther ways out and the road ended. So they were still blasting and cutting the road out. So I would walk, I actually, by the end of June was getting to the beach at the end of the road. But, they were, you know, still working on it. It was still just like a dirt track. It was a nice, mellow June. We had, I remember we had, somebody brought, a, pile of King Crab and I ate myself sick on King Crab.

DP: On the Beach?

JS: Oh, we had a party and you know. And there was more than anybody could eat we had frozen king crab we had king crab in any way, shape or form that you could have for days. Piles and piles and piles of king crab. It was wonderful. Never to be seen again. OK, so then that was the first winter. And I...uh...went outside and met my roommate in Wisconsin, which was a tale in itself getting from Washington to Wisconsin. She got me a ride on a cattle truck that's a long 'nother story. It had nothing to do with Alaska. And we came back up the highway and by then I was sick. I had some sort of sinus infection or something and was violently ill and they gave me codeine cough medicine in the Yukon, where a nurse can administer it. She gave me this cough syrup and that put me to sleep until I got to Kodiak so I don't remember the trip.

DP: You don't remember the trip?

JS: I was...I do remember being in the Yukon. That was the one thing Alaskans were supposed to do so I did do that, but I sure don't remember much of...much of the rest of it. I kind of...I literally woke up when the ferry arrived on the dock. And that's all.

DP: Here in Kodiak?

JS: Yeah, that's all I remember except for being in the Yukon. And throwing up in...uh...Dawson Creek or something like that. That's all I remember.. My roommate wasn't too happy either 'cause she had to do all the driving. I don't remember the next year. I don't remember any significant things about the next year. I guess I..and I don't remember what year things happened in. I mean I'm getting old...my brains...Petrifying.

DP: You still had that same position at the school the following year? The Band?

JS: Oh, it changed a little bit. I think I was at Peterson full time. I had band and general music. Then that year and the next year. And then after that I went into the classroom. And...I started out as in third grade at...Peterson...and didn't know a thing about what I was doing actually but I had wonderful help. There was a reading teacher, Linda Haney, who really helped me get...who really helped me start to understand what I was doing. about teaching reading, which had at that point terrified me. I'd gotten my official certification from the State of Alaska to teach in the classroom but, I didn't really know what I was doing. But she was a big help. But then, there were too many kids in 4th grade, so they were...too many kids in a 3rd grade down town so they wanted to take the two 4th grades and put them together...to make a huge class and move one of the 4th grade teachers downtown to that 3rd grade job. But one of the 4th, the 4th grade teacher they were gong to move had just married a Coast Guard guy and she didn't want to drive the road. So, since I lived in town and was the new guy on the block, so to speak, they wanted me to do it. Well, anyway. It became a long, involved story about grievances and procedure and stuff like that but I did end up going to East that year and finishing out the year with that class. And I still see those kids around town. That was the nice thing about teaching in town was you got to see your kids grow up, you know. I still see those kids and that's kind of fun. To hear about them and know what they're doing. And then, a result of the grievance procedure was that I was transferred back to Peterson the following year then and that's when I ended up in 1st grade. So. And then I did that for several years and then I came

back and I was in a second grade at Main for a very short time. Then there was an opening in Larsen Bay so I went to Larsen Bay for three years.

DP: What was that like teaching out there?

JS: Well, in a way it was a little bit like going home. I grew up in a rural area in Washington. We had an 80 acre farm and there was no running water, you know. My parents were...so when I moved to Larsen Bay there were some of the amenities missing, sometimes. At that time there was one phone in the village which was in the community hall. You had to sign up to use it and you, sometimes you had to wait for an hour while, I mean we are back to waiting in line again. And everyone...you were in a little room but everyone in the hall could hear you, hear you conversation. It was not private. There was RATNET. We did have RATNET at that point so you could have TV. And public radio, KMXT, but there was no central electricity. Now they have a city power. But at that point you had your own generator. So here I thought was going to this quiet little village and it was actually very noisy 'cause everyone had their own generators going. As soon as it got dark. And, I know people talk about the bears in Larsen Bay but I never saw one when I...the whole three years I was in Larsen Bay; never saw one. People would say, "Well, a bear just walked through town." or, and I lived right on Humpy Creek! So in the fall you'd think I'd see bears on the creek but, I didn't. No, I never saw a bear in Larsen Bay. I don't know where they were but they weren't there when I was there. I had 23 kids, K-1-2-3, Mostly they were native kids, there were some white kids. I liked the kids, I liked, I guess one of the things I learned about teaching there was I really liked being a family. I liked having my kids for more than one year. I liked...uh...the fact that they were all related to each other. That they all knew each other, played together. You know, I liked that part. I loved the people. I really did love the people. It's hard to be a single person in...the village, I think. Especially when you're a...as a teacher it's hard to be a single teacher. There's just things you can't do you know and...and it's not private. but there were...I certainly relish the three years I was there. I...I...people talk about how there is no culture left...none of their culture left but I there's it's very much alive. My friend that lived in...I had friends that lived in Levelock and they would fly over, every one in a while, 'cause it's a straight shot across the Shelikof. And we would compare notes about Banya customs or...uh ...stories about different things, you know, or customs, or fixing seafood, or drying fish, or...um...it was interesting to hear the...even the language or what word they used. They have these little things that they swat themselves with in the Banya, in the steam bath. And the word was very similar. it was just a little bit different. Or fried bread, you know,

which is called one thing in one place and another thing in another place, but close enough that you can't see how...you can see...sort of see...it's very much alive. You just have to be part of the family. There's all kinds of little rituals that people do because it has become custom in the place that they live in. And that custom comes out of their culture. I think it's very much alive. Takes a little while to ferret it out but it's there. I enjoyed it. And I was ready to come back when I left. I had been there, actually, about 10 years before I went to teach there. I had visited a fish sight, of a friend of mine, which was outside of Uyak Bay around the corner down by rocky Point. The first summer I had gone there to visit him at his fish sight, he had two boys that came to stay with him at fish camp and a crewman, and I just came out to see what a fish sight, what a gill net sight was like. There was this big long beach, just beautiful. Razor clams that looked, you know, at the low tide of the year. One of the few places on Kodiak you can get razor clams. And, just treeless, you know. That area is treeless, just grass and Alders and Willows. It looks very much like a California beach except that it's colder. The cabin was very primitive; it was like camping out. Again, not far off from what I grew up with. In lots of ways, the first time and the second time were very much like coming home. Eating off the land, eating fish and getting clams. I'd done all that as a kid too. Deer...hunting deer, and all that stuff. Learning to sort of make due with what you have 'cause you can't get to the store. That same sort of mental set. Conserving fuel and conserving...'cause you don't know when you're going to be able to get the next supply. So then the second year, that next summer then, I asked Dennis if I could go out there and stay by myself before he came. So I did. I flew into Larsen Bay. I found a villager that would take me out to Seven Mile Beach and they dropped me off half way down the beach and I hauled my things down the beach on my back.. It took me two or three trips and it was about a mile and a half to hike on cobble stones kinds of beach. It wasn't a sandy beach or, you know, not the pleasantest place in the world to hike. I didn't know. I had gotten a gun, a 30-06, and a friend had taught me how to shoot it. I didn't know a thing about bears. So I was a little scared. but, nothing risked, nothing gained. So I went for it. It was really interesting to go and do that by yourself without any other human. And to not have radio contact...to just really be by yourself in the wilderness. It was a very powerful experience. And it's funny the things that go through your head and how long they go through your head. That first year I was scared of bears, certainly, and very alert. I don't think the alertness every went away. sort of planning what you would do if this event happened or that event happened or if the bear came this way on the beach or there was a steep cliff face so it was just the beach and the water and the bear and me if I saw one so I had to think of those kinds of things. And where to shoot the darn bear if I had to, which I didn't want to do. What if I ran out of food? One of the things I thought of was

the top of the beach was filled with driftwood which was a wonderful place to explore. Which I did for a time. I'm not the most coordinated person in the world so I realized if I fell and broke my leg I was in a world of hurt, for fooling around for just playing and so I finally quit exploring the beachwood pile until someone got there in case I fell and hurt myself. It seems kind of silly now but I knew if I slipped and fell while walking on a log I could really be in trouble. And how far could I crawl with a broken leg? I don't know all these things went through my head. There were river otters that lived in creek. So it was fun to watch them. They'd come up and talk to you. You could hear them splashing and making noise. They're not too terribly afraid of people. Eagles, certainly...but one of the biggest sounds...well, a couple of things. One morning I woke up and my head was throbbing! Why do I have this headache? And then I realized it wasn't me. it was this thrumming...this horrible noise coming from the beach. The cabin was down behind the beachwood pile, you couldn't actually see the beach from the cabin. So I walked down the trail to the head of the beach wondering, "What in the world?" Well, there was a storm coming and it was the surf on the beach, just crashing against the beach. It was just pounding! It was incredible, just like a bass drum--timpani, you know just howling. And we did get a rain storm, you know, a big storm, but that was how I knew the storm was coming. It was really nasty out there. Just big rollers, just huge, just like Hawaii. People could have surfed. The other thing that I learned about, when you face being alone in the wilderness...there's a little bird, now I know it's the Golden-Crown Sparrow but, it makes this...it goes "do-do-da-do, do-do-da-do" especially in June when they are mating and nesting. And that area is just like paradise to that bird. And so there are many, many, many, many, many of them and they do it from probably as soon as it gets daylight, in that area where there are no electric lights or anything, it gets light at least by 3:00. Sometimes even a little earlier so they would go from about 2:30 in the morning, all day, until about 12:00, 12:30 at night, So there was really very little time that you were not bombarded with this bird. I just remember thinking, "gosh, would you guys just shut up!" Sometimes you even talk to yourself. I read constantly which was one of the reasons I went out there was to read. I did a little sewing. I'd taken some hand sewing along.

DP: How long were you out there?

JS: I was out there about two and a half weeks by myself.

DP: And no bear encounter at all?

JS: No bear encounters, never saw a one. I also wondered what would happen if...I had this little fantasy about if a boat went by on a storm, like that storm came up, and I thought, "gosh, what if a boat was out there on Rocky Point and floundered, you know, got caught on, hit the reef and, was there any way I could help these, help people who were, you know...of course there wasn't you know. Did I have enough food to feed everybody when they came in and what about hypothermia and the whole nine yards. It was amazing what goes through your head. Or what would I do if some fisherman saw the smoke from the wood fire for instance, and came in to investigate and here's this single women and, you know, weirder things have happened in the wilderness. You get kind of paranoid after a while. And in some ways part of you gets just a little bit weird, being by your self like that.

DP: Did you stay then after the rest of the people arrived?

JS: Yes, I did. I did. I sort of came back to normal. It was a really good experience. And then I think I got a fishing job that summer. That was the summer I got a fishing job on a Seiner. An old Aleut guy. And I was the only woman and I was the first woman he'd ever had as crew. And that was an experience. Seining is, I think, the most romantic kind of fishery there is. I did everything that you can do in the Salmon fishery that summer. We fished the capes. we fished inside the bays. we fished Mush Bay which is huge, a huge school of fish. Fishing boats fighting over the tide change to get the flood of fish coming in. We went across the Shelikoff Straits to the other side and fished over there. I saw whales and I saw porpoises, and I saw tons of fish. And I brailed fish. And I saw wet, dry sets with no fish. And I saw phosphorous in the water at night as you're plowing through the water. So I really had...we were on an old wooden boat that leaked...so maintaining a vessel...going to the cannery at Uganik and getting ice cream. They had a soft ice cream machine and it was like ambrosia. When you've been on a boat for weeks and you get sea legs and they you get on land and you can hardly walk. Then you get, you know, if you're on the land for awhile and you get back on the boat you have to get your sea legs again. Seasickness. I certainly had my bout with seasickness. The skipper got sick and I had to take the boat to Port Lions by myself and land it and get him to the doctor. I mean I did everything that it's poss...stink like a fish. Those old wooden boats that leak. This was before the days of icing fish and before the days of tanking down and running chilled water tanks and so the fish just laid in the bottom of the boat and sometimes they are a little ripe when you got them to deliver. And then all that gurru goes down into the bottom of your boat and you can't pump the bilge out entirely, ever. So we have to put bleach in the bilge

and by the end of summer fish gurry is pretty rank, that little bit that's always in the bottom of, in the very bottom underneath the hold. And what you smell like when you get off a fishing boat.

DP: Well, what made you decide to go out and do fishing for a summer?

JS: How could you live in Kodiak and not go fishing? I just can't imagine anybody would do that. Not go fishing. That's what Kodiak's about is fishing of one kind or another. I wanted to go. And at that time women on a boat were 'bad luck' and you know there were a few.

DP: Then what made him decide to take you on?

JS: I have no idea. I have no idea.

DP: You approached him and said "I want to go fishing" and he said "O.K, let's go"

JS: No. I got a message, delivered to the cannery, which got delivered to me, on the tender at Dennis' fish camp that said, "Bill needed a crew, did I want to cook?":

DP: so you went on as cook?

JS: Yeah, but that isn't your only job when you're on a salmon boat, in my case I plunged on the deck. When you set you put this plunger in the water to scare the fish into the net, or not let them through the hole between the boat and the net. You have clean-up duties and you have duties for pitching fish. All the cooks job means is you have extra work. That's all that means.

DP: You have to have food on the table, too?

JS: Yes, you have to have food on the table, too. I was young, and healthy and strong...could certainly do it and there's lot's of women in the fishery now. There were a few women then. Mary Jacobs had her boat. she was fishing and she had an all women crew. It wasn't a total...and there had been lots of families who fished. Reimnitz has had the whole family on the boat crew. Oliver and Eva had crewed together for years, so women were not strangers to fisheries. Just women who weren't married were strangers to

fisheries. I had a wonderful experience Salmon Seining. It's hard work. It's long hours sometimes. It's hot temper sometimes. But it was very romantic. You see the sun rise, you see the sun set. Sometimes you're fishing in rough weather. We did that too where I was scared. Everything that could happen to a Salmon fisherman happened that summer. There isn't a thing that didn't...I got to see a lot of country from the south end of the island to the north end, to Afognak to the other side. Cape Igvak was wonderful. I got to see old time kinds of fishing that don't even exist anymore. And I got to see people who were more modern and updated in their approach to fisheries. I was right on the hinge of change. I was on, like I said, an old wooden boat and most of those are gone now. Most boats are fiberglass or steel. So I feel really enriched to have had, been lucky to have had that experience. The skipper was an Aleut from...he had been born and raised on Afognak. So he had lots of stories too. He used to talk about an Olock. An Olock, it's like our version, an Aleut version of an Abominable Snowman. He used to talk about how Olocks were people who, people who committed crimes in a village, were charged by the Village Elders either to be killed by the Village Elders or given the option of being sent into the wilderness with no tools and no clothing. So, people who chose that route, then grew hair, grew larger, and they became...they were the Olocks, the sort of phantom of...but they were not bad. Part of their...part of their recompense for their crime was to help people. People mostly stayed out of their way, 'cause they were kind of like mysterious too but, Bill talked about when he was a little boy they had rowed in a big boat to...big row boat...you know...big boat to Ouzinkie for winter for supplies. But they didn't get very far before there was a storm. And they couldn't they were having trouble getting the boat beached in the surf to spend the night on the beach. And an Olock came down out of the hills and picked up the boat and turned it over on the beach so they'd have shelter. And the next morning when they woke up it came down again and put it back in the water and they finished their journey. He had stories like that. He talked about going hunting with his father and leaving...it was the custom to leave gifts of tobacco or little, some little tidbit of civilization for the Olock in outlying hunting cabins. And then there were stories were people would go back to those hunting cabins and they would find a little reed cross that the Olock had made.

DP: And left for them in exchange?

JS: Yeah. So, see what I mean how rich it was? The...in some ways my going back to Larsen Bay to teach jelled a lot of those things, of stories of Bill's and my experience at the

fish site, being by myself and my own background as a child in a rural setting. You can see why it was like coming home.

DP: So, after that you came back, you had spent three years and then you came back here to town to teach?

JS: What have I done since then? Well, recovering from a relationship, a dissolved relationship, and decided I needed to do something that involved people, especially after living in Larsen Bay. And so I kind of went, I went to a concert at the college. A young man had started a community choir and it sounded good; had a little orchestra. It sounded really good and I thought I'd like to participate. And I knew someone in the choir so she told me to come when they started up again at such and such a time so I went. I tried to sort of hide my light under a little bushel basket 'cause I didn't really want to be involved on the executive level but, it wasn't long before someone could figure out you could read music, you can sing. So then I got to know the person that was directing pretty well and got involved in that part of the process. His roommate was this little short guy from North Carolina, kind of older, a little older than me. And I thought he didn't like me. We used to go have pizza after rehearsal or something and I thought that this person didn't like me very much and I couldn't figure it out. Well, when Bruce left town and I inherited the orchestra and the choir, Joe called me every night for a week. And I started going to the radio station to do a classical show with him. So that's how I met my husband. So, there it goes, you know. So I'd kind of taken a break from the arts and music after college. After I stopped teaching music I didn't do much until I got involved with community choir and orchestra and then after that first fall, when I'd...I don't remember exactly the sequence of events, but I remember Gerry saying to me something about "do you like...did you like the Sound of Music?" I said, "Oh, I love the Sound of Music!" And he said, "good, then you won't mind doing the vocal work for...directing the vocal work for the sound of Music." And that was the beginning my involvement with it, with Gerry Wilson and the Arts council and Community Choir and community Orchestra. That was about eight years ago...nine years ago. And so that became another section of my life. That's where I am now. Who would have known?

DP: I think it's all very interesting myself.

JS: Then I didn't tell you about Whale Island. That was another whole...Whale island...when I went to live at Whale island for two summers in a row. And take care of

their house and garden while they went fishing. Oliver and Eva Holm have a homestead on Whale island and after my hermit experience at Seven Mile Beach then I wanted more! So for two summers then, I went to Whale Island and took care of ...Whale Island. They had a barge, like a little house on a raft kind of thing that they had moved onto land. That was their first little house. I lived in that the first summer. The second summer they'd built this big log house out of Spruce. And they'd moved into that and so that's where I stayed the second summer. And I did have radio contact with...I could talk to Anton Larsen, I could talk to Raspberry Straits. There was an old guy that lived in Raspberry Straits that I checked in with every day from Raspberry Straits. But, like I said you get weird when you're there all by yourself. I remember Molly McIntosh and her husband and their kids and their weird dog Winston, pulling up inside the bay and I hadn't seen people for about a month. not no one, I hadn't seen anyone. And they get out of the boat and I'm so excited. I can't talk, and my knees are shaking, because I haven't seen a human being in a month. It was so weird. I didn't know what to say to them. I literally could not talk. I can understand now why when people go to visit somebody that's been in a remote area that that person seems ungracious. Because sometimes you just don't even know what to say to that somebody. Language is almost...it's kind of gone. And I had regular con...that was with radio contact t with somebody. Imagine when somebody doesn't have radio contact. You sort of lose communication skills, you're just overwhelmed. And then coming back to town. One summer I came back to town with Oliver. We'd been...I'd been at Whale Island, I needed to come back to town but we'd gone on a fishing expedition, subsistence fishing expedition first. So we'd gotten all these fish and so we came to town and I was going to...I was helping him process them. We were almost done. We had gotten like fifty salmon or something. A lot of fish. And it was just Oliver and me and even the kids hadn't come to town and his parents were gone and we were at his parents house. We were almost done processing these fish and getting them ready to freeze. And my hands were just frozen! I said something about I'm glad it's almost over my hands s are so cold and he said, "Turn on the warm water." Well, I'd forgotten there was such a thing as running warm water. Then the phone rang. And I answered the phone and I said, "KRG4909." Which was the call sign for the CB. And then I said, "Whew, can't see in here. " And he said, "Turn on the lights." I forgot about electricity. Like I said you can get pretty weird out there.

DP: It doesn't take long either, does it?

JS: No. It doesn't. But I did lots of reading and I had some sewing projects. Mostly I read. I worked in Eva's garden a little. I had a little boat so I could kind of putt around the outside beaches. There were two outside beaches outside this little cove. So I would either walk out to the beach or take the dog and the little dingy and go out to the beach. Sometimes you could see boats going by and I'd wonder about humanity out there. And you'd listen to the radio and you'd try to solve the world's problems. I did a little writing. I guess I really found those times to be growth times for myself. They were real important for me to do. I liked them. And I'd always wanted to go to a remote, like lighthouse site or a cannery, be a cannery caretaker. So this was sort of my doing that.

DP: And it was the whole summer, just the month or?

JS: No. It was probably the second week in June until the second week in August. It was about eight weeks.

DP: I want to say thank you very much for doing this because it was very interesting.

JS: You're welcome.

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