

IRIS NG FATT BROOKS

FROM JAMAICA TO ALASKA

By Dianne Palmatier

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U.S. Coast Guard Support Center
Kodiak, Alaska**

**KODIAK COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
ALASKA HISTORY COURSE**

This interview is for the oral history project of the Alaska History course taught at Kodiak College. Today is Thursday, March 28, 1996, at 4:30 p.m. My name is Dianne Palmatier, and I'll be interviewing Mrs. Iris Brooks here in the Administration Building at the United States Coast Guard Support Center in Kodiak, Alaska.

Mrs. Brooks has offered to share some of her life experiences focusing in particular on the years she's lived in Anchorage and Kodiak. Let's start at the beginning of your life, Iris, and then jump to when you first moved to Alaska.

DP: The first question, on what date were you born?

IB: I was born on the 21st day of October, 1926.

DP: And, where were you born, and in what city and country?

IB: Lucea (that's the town), Hanover Parish, Jamaica, West Indies

DP: And what were your parents names?

IB: Mr. and Mrs. John and Mary Ng Fatt

DP: And what nationality is that?

IB: Asian. My father came all the way from China. He was full blooded Chinese, and my mother, West India.

DP: What is the primary language spoken in Jamaica?

IB: The language is English.

DP: How did your parents make a living?

IB: My father was a grocer, and mother, homemaker. All of us worked in the grocery stores, it was a family type thing.

DP: And how many, like, sisters did you have?

IB: One sister and one brother that grew up. They had other children who passed away.

DP: What do you miss most about living in Jamaica?

IB: Friends, close relatives, and the weather.

DP: I can relate to that, although today is a sunny day.

DP: Would you briefly describe the city you grew up in?

IB: To be honest Dianne, my father, the grocer, he was an adventurous one. He would move from place to place as he saw bigger and better grocery stores that he would purchase. So, we children moved around the Island from place to place. I really didn't settle into one spot for any length of time until I became a teenager, and we came to Kingston, which is the capital of Jamaica.

DP: And that's kind of where you spent your teenage years?

IB: Teenage years in Kingston, but before that I was a country girl. He had grocery stores in different areas, remote areas. One time, he found a grocery store that was located in an area where we could ride horseback to get to it. Just a trail to get to it.

DP: Okay, now we're going to kind of skip here and get into how you ended up coming to Alaska. Where did you meet your future husband?

IB: A friend of mine gave him my address and introduced him to me. Well, she introduced him to me by correspondence, without me meeting him. So after he started writing, we corresponded for three years.

DP: And you hadn't met him?

IB: Just his pictures and letters but through a friend I knew he was a person I could trust. And then, after 3 years of corresponding, he came to Jamaica, and proposed marriage.

DP: That was the first time you actually saw him in person?

IB: Yes.

DP: Wow. Was it a difficult decision to leave the country you grew up in to move to the United States?

IB: No, not for me. I thought that moving to Alaska from Jamaica was something planned by God because I had no idea of what Alaska was like. It was not in our Geography at school, it was not a state, so I knew

nothing. I came like someone blindfolded, but accepted it with an open mind.

DP: Wow, that's incredible. I forgot that Alaska wasn't a state back then.

IB: Because that was in 1957 when we got married.

DP: Okay. When did you leave Jamaica?

IB: I left Jamaica on the 14th day of January 1959. The reason why I did not leave sooner was because of the red tape to get out of my country into the United States.

DP: Between '57 and '59, when you actually got married?

IB: We got married December '57, and I left January of '59.

DP: It took two years to get the red tape cleared?

IB: No, it was really a year.

DP: 1958 was the year. Okay. What route did you travel to get to Anchorage?

IB: From Kingston, Jamaica, flew into Miami, which is the Port of Entry, go through Customs, and then from Miami to Chicago, Chicago to Seattle, and Seattle to Anchorage. Arriving in Anchorage on the 15th day of January.

DP: Do you remember any of your initial impressions upon arriving in Anchorage on January 15th, 1959?

IB: Yes, I had never seen snow in my life, and it was stacked high in Anchorage when I arrived.

DP: Did you have any snow clothes with you or anything?

IB: Fortunately, I wrote and told my husband, or we talked over the phone, and I told him it was impossible for me to buy weather gear in Jamaica. It was not available. I came with a cashmere sweater to Chicago, and he airfreighted a coat down to me. So I picked it up on my layover in Chicago.

DP: Where did you live in Anchorage?

IB: I lived on 19th Street just off Gamble. When I came, he had a couple houses there. He had already established himself in Anchorage.

DP: What did you spend your time doing for the three years you lived in Anchorage?

IB: Oh, I did odd jobs because I was not an American citizen, and I wanted to see how Americans lived, so I babysat, I house cleaned, I served at dinners for prominent people in Anchorage. Then I went to community college and took a couple courses there, and finally got a job with a company that moved in. It was a surgical supply company, I got a job as a secretary.

DP: What was your husband's name?

IB: Robert Brooks

DP: What did he do for a living?

IB: He was a carpenter by trade.

DP: Okay, you had mentioned to me previously that he was some sort of a, in the political spotlight or whatever?

IB: Oh, he loved local politics.

DP: Could you tell me some of the political people you met?

IB: I met the first Governor of Alaska, Governor William Eagan, Bill Eagan and his wife, and I met the Senators, Gruening and Bartlett. Those two were the Senators at that time.

DP: You mentioned that you arrived within 2 weeks of Alaska's officially being admitted as the 49th State of the Union in 1959. Do you remember anything in particular pertaining to statehood as far as when you met these individuals? Was it pretty much just parties because of statehood, or?

IB: It was because of my husband's association with local politics. And he told me, which I'd seen paperwork, that he had run for Councilman at that time, but he was defeated.

DP: The population of Anchorage was 44,000 in 1960. Was this a larger or smaller city than the place you'd lived in Jamaica? Say, like in Kingston.

IB: Kingston - smaller size. Anchorage was more spread out. Kingston was heavily populated because it's a tourist resort, and we have a lot of people in small areas. It's crowded. When I left Jamaica, the population there was about a million and a quarter on the Island, and by now it must be about 3 million.

DP: In 30 years, right. Do you remember when you saw your first moose in Anchorage?

IB: Yes, it was a few weeks after I got to Anchorage. After church, on a Sunday, we usually drove to the Portage Glacier, Soldotna, Homer, most of the outlying areas, and that's when I got all excited to see a moose, I'd never seen anything like it before.

DP: Did you know what it was when you saw it?

IB: But my husband was with me, and he pointed it out.

DP: I remember my first moose, and when it came crossing the road. They're pretty large animals. Did you happen to visit any of the local sites such as Denali? I heard you mention you visited Portage Glacier.

IB: Some of the outlying areas, we'd drive around. I went to Talkeetna by train, but I didn't go to the Park. Cause we were busy people, and only on Sundays that we would take car rides.

DP: Okay. Why did you want to become a U.S. citizen?

IB: Because I wanted to get involved. I didn't want to be an alien or an immigrant all the time. And, I wanted to work, not just day work. I wanted to have permanent work, and I wanted to be able to vote, and because it was my home, it was going to be my home. So, I thought that would be the best thing to do.

DP: Was it difficult for you to obtain your citizenship?

IB: No, it wasn't. I didn't know what to expect of the examiners. So, I prepared myself, and I enrolled at the Community College in Anchorage, and took a semester in American History, so that I could be prepared to answer questions. I didn't have anyone to tell me what I was going to be faced with so I prepared myself for it. And, I got through very easily. On the 31st day of May, 1962, I received my citizenship.

DP: Well, congratulations!

IB: Thanks.

DP: That's quite an accomplishment. Do you remember any of the topics of political debates during the years you lived in Anchorage?

IB: I wasn't the political type. I voted, but my husband, he was wrapped up in the politics more so. And, I worked, and I got involved with the church with the ladies group. So, I would visit the sick and go to the hospitals, or make food baskets for the poor, and if someone was sick, we would maybe clean their house or haul water. There was one lady who didn't have running water when I came to Anchorage, and that amazed me because I thought all Americans had. I didn't know that.

DP: Yeah, I would have thought in Anchorage, that's a larger city. Why did you and your husband decide to move to Kodiak?

IB: Oh, being a carpenter, carpentry is a seasonal type of work because of the weather. And it slowed down in 1961, I think, it was winter and they offered him a six week temporary job here in Kodiak. Which he accepted thinking it would just be temporary, and after he came, the carpenters were very scarce in those days. Everything just kept on going, going, going, and our phone bill, in those days we would talk every day, so I decided to come over and visit, and I fell in love with Kodiak.

DP: Really.

IB: I did. The mountains, the peace, the serenity, and when I came, it was in the summer of 1961, and all the wildflowers were blooming on the side of the hill, and things like that. So we decided, well, we have so much work here, that I'd come over, and we would rent our house in Anchorage, and then try to find something here to buy.

DP: How did you travel to Kodiak when you moved here?

IB: By plane. There was no ferry system at that time. It was Pan Am.

DP: Right. They're bankrupt and out of business now. Do you remember what date you moved to Kodiak?

IB: I came and visited. Then, I went back to Anchorage, got my citizenship, and then after citizenship I decided, "Now, they cannot deport me. I'm an American citizen." So we decided to take a trip to Jamaica for the first time after three years in the United States. And we loaded down, we bought a brand new Bonneville station wagon, loaded it down, and starting from Anchorage, headed for Miami?

DP: You drove down?

IB: But during the time we were headed toward Miami, it was at the time when Cuba and Russia, and the United States had that confrontation, and President Kennedy warned them that if they don't behave themselves he would call the troops out. So, my husband got a little scared, and he said, "Well I think we should skip going to Jamaica, you know," and I said, "No, I want to see my parents." So instead of flying over Cuba to Jamaica, which is a short distance, they took a longer route over Haiti to avoid Cuba. But, we went out and stayed. We were going to stay a few weeks, and then he got cold feet, and said, "Let's go, let's leave this place. We're too close to Cuba." So, we left a little earlier than we had previously planned. And then we picked up our station

wagon, and we went down through the southern routes, and then we came back through California, where he was brought up and lived for awhile. We put 18,000 miles on that car before we went back to Anchorage.

DP: And how long were you gone approximately?

IB: A few months.

DP: That's a lot of mileage. At least it was the first time you were able to see the lower 48. What were your first impressions of Kodiak in comparison to Anchorage?

IB: Anchorage, after I got there, I started watching some teenagers who would joyride in cars, and break into liquor stores, and things like that. When I came to Kodiak, it seemed quieter, more peaceful, and I grew up during my youth very peaceful, very quiet, where I didn't have to worry too much about crime, and a lot of robberies, and things like that, so I chose to come to Kodiak.

DP: Where did you first live when you first moved to Kodiak?

IB: Oh Dianne, that's a good question. There wasn't much of any place to be had. When my husband was here by himself, he lived in a boarding house. And when he knew that I was coming to visit, he saw an abandoned place, and he went to the owner, and asked him if he would let him restore the place and get it functioning again. And he agreed so, but it was just a small place, they call that shotgun or something here, you could stay on the bed and look at the stove. It was kind of an efficiency type thing, with an old oil stove and things like that.

DP: And where was that located?

IB: That was on Tagura Road near the KEA operation back then.

DP: What is your address currently?

IB: 306 Cope Street

DP: Do you still enjoy living there?

IB: Yes, it's been good. It has a magnificent view of the boat harbor.
It's an older house but I try to maintain it and keep it updated.

DP: I understand there's like 55 stairs going up to the house?

IB: Yes, but thank heavens, I have an alternate route up on Hillcrest. But it deadends right against my lawn, so in the summers I go up there. In winter it's too icy back there, cause it's not maintained by the city. It's not a city street, it's a private area. But, so far, I have no trouble getting up the steps. As I grow older though, I start thinking about climbing those steps.

DP: Yeah, I wouldn't want you falling down them, that's for sure. What was your first job on Kodiak?

IB: My first job was. Well, I didn't have a first job then, but when I came to this little house, my husband was gone all day working. And sometimes when the weather was good, if he had roofing or something like that, they had to roof for 16 hours a day if the weather held good, cause the weather was so uncertain like it is today. And I got kind of lonesome locked up in this small house. Didn't have a yard to plant flowers, or go out and do anything for myself. So, I put an ad in the local paper to take in ironing which I really liked to do at the time. Through this menial job, I got lots of nice people bring their clothes to be ironed, and it was a lady, who was the Classifier on the Naval Station here, who came, sat with me, talked with me, and told me how to get into Civil Service. So, you know it has its rewards.

DP: Where did your husband work? You mentioned he's in carpentry.

IB: He came down for a job on the Alaska Ice and Storage facility by the pier, and then he got all kinds of different jobs. He put a roof on the old school. Everybody wanted him to work. He built houses. He helped put a lab in one of the canneries. All kinds of jobs.

DP: Okay, so he primarily worked in the City of Kodiak?

IB: Yes.

DP: The Good Friday earthquake struck southcentral Alaska on March 27, 1964, at 5:36 p.m. This earthquake registered a magnitude of 8.2 to 8.7 on the Richter Scale, and is the most devastating quake on record in North America. Do you remember where you were, and what you were doing when the earthquake struck Kodiak?

IB: I do. I had left work that afternoon. At this time, I was working for the Navy, and I had just gone into town, shopped for something, and headed up to my house, which is 306 Cope Street. I was living there at the time. And I proceeded to start supper. I remember I was cooking halibut steaks, rice and spinach for dinner. My husband was hanging some curtains, we had just recently bought the house and was remodeling it. And we had no idea that an earthquake was expected, cause we didn't turn on the radio, we got busy. Then, we got a call from some people downtown asking us if we were going to be home, they wanted to come up, and I said yes. They were the ones who brought the news to us. As soon as they arrived, the quake started shaking and we stood in the doorway. That little house just rocked a little, rocked a little, and I didn't lose a thing. Nothing off the shelves or the cupboards fell. So, but I stood up and watched the wave go out, and then when the second one came in, it did the devastation.

DP: So, did you actually see the wave hit the boat harbor?

IB: Oh yes. Because we have this view, and at that time, that place was not built up. It was just alders and things around us. So we had a very, very good view of the downtown area and the boat harbor. Now, you have a lot of big homes, new homes, which have blocked some of the view, but I still have a fairly good view.

DP: What was your reaction when you saw the waves hitting the boats?

IB: I tell you, I was stunned, I don't know. I just took it, I was helpless, and at the time we didn't even have a camera or anything like that. We were new in town, and I have learned to accept one day at a time, so I don't get rattled too much. I accept things as they hit me, and try to do the best I can with what I have.

DP: Your friends made it to your house okay?

IB: Yes, and we didn't have to evacuate because we were so high up on the hill.

DP: And did they stay with you?

IB: Sure. One good thing about the old house is that it had the old oil stove in it, and it heated the place, and it, you could cook on it. So, we could still cook, although the electricity went out. And my husband when back in the back of the hill, and there we have water flowing, so he made and put pipes, and led water so we could do things which is better than just all electricity. That made us think when we started taking out that old oil stove, that we should have two energies in the house instead of one. So, I now cook with propane gas and still have a backup if it happens again.

DP: Because your house was located up so high, and you overlooked the boat harbor, did you also see any of the damage in the local town, like the buildings, theatre?

IB: Yes, I could see a boat washed up and sat on dry land in the town. I saw buildings floating downstream. Boats, lots of the boats people, they would get their boats started so they could go out to sea because they told them it would be better to be at sea than to be in the harbor at the time. Here I watched a lot of the places float down stream.

DP: And they just washed away?

IB: Yes, you could see the tops of like Donnelly and Atcheson building, and things like that. You could see just the top you know, it was washed away. The whole town was washed away. I'm surprised we didn't lose more lives.

DP: Did you know anybody that died in the earthquake?

IB: There was a couple up on Cope Street which I didn't know them well. I knew who they were because we were new in the area. But they were beachcombing out in Chiniak, and the waves caught them out there. They were school teachers too. But, as far as I remember, only 13 lives were lost here, and for that big a wave, we've been blessed. It could have been worse.

DP: How was your life affected by the earthquake and damage to the town caused by the tsunami?

IB: Not too much really because we didn't have a lot here yet, and being new you know we were just beginners. But we had enough to eat, and like I said, we could cook. We would cook beans and all the one-pot-stuff you could do on the stove. And didn't, really feel, we weren't hungry, and we didn't lose anything, and there was no disaster where we were on the hill.

DP: Now did you have water? You said you got water off the back of the hill.

IB: Yes.

DP: And the electricity was out for how long?

IB: I'm thinking, maybe, I can't remember the exact time, but I would say maybe a few days.

DP: Was there telephone communication?

IB: That was gone. Cause lots of people in the lower 48 thought our city had sunk. After things cleared up I heard from a dear friend of mine, and they wanted to know if we were still around.

DP: Was there radio communication?

IB: I would think that the shortwave people could, but we couldn't.

DP: Was the road system still open to allow you to drive out to the Naval Station?

IB: No. We had to catch boats to get to work in the mornings for about a week, or a little more.

DP: Was it a Coast Guard vessel?

IB: One of the Kodiak boats, like National Marine Fisheries had theirs, and one morning, I rode on one because I had a friend working over there but it was one of those open boats with seats where we could sit and talk.

DP: So all of the employees that worked out on Base and lived in town had to go by boat.

IB: Yes, for a few days.

DP: Were there groceries or any dairy products delayed from Seattle? Was there any impact on food supplies to the grocery stores?

IB: Oh yes. We had shortage of food but as these people say in the paper too. (Reference Kodiak Daily Mirror dated 27 March 1996, 32 year anniversary of the earthquake.) They, Krafts store, had salt water flooding the freezers and things like that so they dumped all that frozen food and people went to the dump and picked it up and used it. Frozen chicken, frozen ham, everything, all the meat products, and nobody got sick.

DP: I guess there were some benefits.

IB: Yes, I didn't go, but I know some people who went and collected lots of meats.

DP: Was the building where you worked at the Naval Station damaged?

IB: It had water in the basement but where we worked on top was not affected at all. We could see the water mark left when it drained out. We continued to work in the building.

DP: Was the damage at the Naval Station better or worse than the damage that occurred in town, in your opinion?

IB: Oh, the town's damage was worse, cause all the homes and businesses were washed out from the downtown area.

DP: To help restore Kodiak after the earthquake was a period of rebuilding called the Urban Renewal project. Do you remember what buildings, stores or restaurants were rebuilt as a part of this project?

IB: Krafts was rebuilt. We had a bakery here at the time, the Norton's Bakery, that went out. I used to work just for a while at the only realtors place here in town, and they put up a temporary building but by the time they did that, I had already been called for work on the Base, but lots of the stores, like City Market, it was in a different location, and they rebuilt it that way. They had to raise the road system higher cause it had sunk. You see that rock work coming across from Sealand, that was built up too cause it was washed away by that slide area.

DP: Are there any hotels in that area?

IB: Yes, there were a couple old... There was one big hotel downtown, and then they built the Westmark. It wasn't the Westmark at the time, it was the Kodiak Inn, KI. It has changed hands several times but that was built after, the Shelikof, all those were built later.

DP: Do you have any idea about how many years it took to restore the downtown area of Kodiak?

IB: I would say three to five years.

DP: What was life in Kodiak like back during the King Crab heydays of the 1960's and 70's?

IB: Kodiak was like home to everybody. It seems like everyone knew somebody and would stop and talk at the Old Post Office where that, let me see,

what is in that building, now it's right across from the museum that was the Old Post Office, that building, it's a Native. Right across from the Baranof Museum, across from...

DP: Oh, is that KANA? Is that where their offices are?

IB: KANA, that's where they are now. But everybody know everybody. We would stop in the grocery stores. We'd talk, we'd say hello. We know people by names. And then, I never bought fish and crab, and yet we never fished much. We were more in the real estate business. My husband liked to buy old houses, remodel them, and things like that. But we had supplies of fish. People would catch it and just give it to you. Just beg you to take it, and the King Crab, oh, that was plentiful when I came here. Now I can't even get a leg of it.

DP: Did you attend the Annual Crab Festivals back when there was actually crab to eat at the festival?

IB: Yes, I'd go down for a little while but like I say, we kept real busy. My husband was a workaholic, and we did a lot of remodeling on the place we bought cause it was an older house, and we had to do it after we finished our regular work during the days. We worked until late nights especially when we had those long days. Oh, sometimes, I'd be going to bed at midnight and hitting the deck at 5:30 to come to work on the Naval Station.

DP: The Coast Guard took over the Naval Station in 1972. How did this changeover impact your job?

IB: It didn't really bother me because I phased in with the Coast Guard. I phased out with the Navy and right into the Coast Guard at the same grade, so it didn't bother me. Some people were wondering if they were going to be RIF'd (reduction in force), and things like that, but I'm still here.

DP: There's about 2,500 Coast Guardsmen and their families today. Is this a similar population size from when the Navy owned the Station?

IB: We have more people now.

DP: We have more people now? It's a larger facility?

IB: Yes, less civil service workers but more military.

DP: Is there more family housing?

IB: Yes, cause they've knocked down some of the old ones but they've rebuilt some. I think so.

DP: Have you observed increases or decreases in personnel over the years? I think as far as civilian employees.

IB: Decrease. Yes, we had one hundred and some civilian workers less than we have now.

DP: There are so many newer facilities and housing units now that it is difficult to imagine the Base back in the 60's and 70's when most of the buildings were World War II vintage. How have the changes on Base impacted your job? Were you always a Housing Assistant Manager?

IB: No, not really. I applied about 1979 to go to Housing. I was the Secretary to the Public Works Office, and there was this opening which would have given me a step up, a grade increase, so I applied for it as Housing Assistant Manager. After being there for a few years, they had housing inspectors that would come and go. In fact, we had two men that filled that position. By this time I was Assistant Housing Manager, and to my surprise, my boss at the time, the CO (Commanding Officer), the XO (Executive Officer), and the Admin Officer, they got together unknowing to me and decided that Iris Brooks would make a good housing inspector because she is a permanent resident of Kodiak and it would have continuity on the job. So, I was a little peeved when they called me and introduced this new position description to me, and told me what

they were doing because they took me off guard. But, after awhile, I got over it, and I'm still a Housing Inspector, and I enjoy it sometimes, I really do.

DP: Was that the same grade then?

IB: They didn't increase it at all just the responsibility.

DP: How have the changes impacted the facilities available to you as a civilian for shopping, eating out, recreational facilities for your use? I know that we have all of these new buildings here, and were they always here even when they rebuilt the bowling alley, theatre? Do you use any of these?

IB: No, I don't use them much because I'm not a bowler. I don't go to the movies much these days because I don't like some of the movies they show, so I prefer to watch it at home. And when I was younger, I was crazy about the theatre, the movies, because in those days I liked what I had to choose from. Now, I enjoy my little home, and I help people who are less fortunate than myself. I go shopping for shut-ins (elderly) and things like that. I have some friends who can't get around as well as I do, so I'll do for them, and I like to garden. I don't have a whole lot of land but I love to watch the flowers bloom, and my lawn mowed, and so on, so forth. I love to cook too, so I don't eat out a lot.

DP: Well, it's kind of expensive in Kodiak.

IB: I love to cook my own food.

DP: Are there other things you like about living in Kodiak?

IB: Yes, the summers are gorgeous. I like the daylight, the long days when it's so light out. Sunshine has a good affect on me. Now, as I grow older, the dark, cold days, I relish less now. When I was younger, it didn't bother me but I really wish I could afford to live here during the summers and go someplace in the winters.

DP: Well, maybe someday you'll be able to do that.

IB: Yes.

DP: What is something you don't particularly enjoy about living in Kodiak? Is there anything besides the dark, dreary, rainy days?

IB: That, and the ice under the feet you know, and as long as I'm able to take trips. Otherwise, I would feel locked in, you know because of, having to fly out and can't drive. That's what I liked about Anchorage, when I lived in Anchorage, was that you could get in your car and go places.

DP: How many years overall have you worked for the Federal Government:

IB: 33 years. I came to the Base on the 4th day of November 1963. It's just over 32, I'm headed for my 33rd year.

DP: Will you retire here in Kodiak?

IB: I would love to but I have no relatives, no real dear friends here in Kodiak. I have lots of people that I know and lots of associates, so, and weatherwise as I grow older I would like to go to a place where it is warmer, and to be closer to my relatives.

DP: Do you plan to go back to Jamaica?

IB: No, I don't. Some place in the lower 48. I have a brother in New York but I don't want to live in New York all the time either. I have a daughter-in-law in Long Island, New York, and that area is really nice but they had a deep freeze this winter, and I really would prefer not to be in snow country.

DP: You're going to have to go further south.

IB: Oh yes.

DP: One other question, you meet a lot of Coast Guard families who have just set foot on the Island. Some wanted to be stationed here and others didn't. You moved from Jamaica and obviously enjoy living in Kodiak.

What advise would you give someone new to Kodiak about adjusting to their new life here?

IB: My advise is to enter any place, any new place, with an open mind.

There are some of these youngsters who come with their minds closed, and as they get off the plane they said, "Oh, this is the Rock!" And then, you know, they don't broaden and open up to things. I came expecting to put into the area a little bit instead of taking everything out. So, I've been healthy, for which I'm grateful, and Kodiak has been good to me. In fact, all of Alaska has been good to me. I hardly know how to uproot myself because having spent 37 years in Alaska, it is hard to pull up stakes. And, although I'm dreaming of warmer climate, right now it is just a dream, and a lot of talk, but no action. And, I am trusting the master up above to lead and direct me. Because of myself, I think I am complacent, and so happy and so comfortable in this peaceful environment. So time will tell.

DP: Well, Iris, I know there are plenty more questions I could ask but the experiences you have shared will be enough for now. I want to thank you for participating in this oral history session to help document what life has been like during the years you have lived in Alaska. This is Dianne Palmatier and Iris Brooks signing off.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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