

AN INTERVIEW

WITH

Lynn Saupe

ON

THE 1964 EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI

By

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KODIAK COLLEGE
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The following interview was held on April 24, 1996 with Mr. Lynn Saupe, a long time resident of Kodiak, Alaska. The interview was held at the house of Lynn Saupe. The interviewer is Olivia M. Brito, a student of the Alaska History Course.

Olivia: I am here today with Lynn Saupe and I will interview him about the 1994 earthquake and tsunami that hit Alaska.

Olivia: I guess my first question would be is where are you from?

Lynn: Well I was born and raised in Iowa on a farm, grew up there and went to school and Seaside Airfares, spent part of my air force time in Alaska and I've been here ever since. A total of about forty-three years, thirty-seven in Kodiak.

Olivia: Did you live in any other place in Alaska besides Kodiak?

Lynn: Yes I did. I spent some time in Anchorage several years all together and then a few months at King Salmon and a few months at a place called Kalakaket up in the interior a few months on St. Lawrence Island and about two years in Bethel, almost two years in Bethel and then thirty-seven years in Kodiak.

Olivia: What brought you here to Kodiak?

Lynn: Well I worked for the White Alice Communications System when I was in Kalakaket Creek and in Bethel. But I had come here first in 1957 for a few months for a temporary assignment on that project and it was so nice here that summer that I couldn't forget Kodiak and I kept trying to get back here. But there were no openings for a long time. Finally in 1959 there was an opening and I made a bid on it and I got it. It happened I got transferred here one week before I was planning to get married to my wife whom I had met in West Seattle where she was working as a public health nurse. So I transferred here stayed two days and made a few temporary arrangements and went to Seattle and we got married went on our honeymoon and we came back here and we've been here ever since.

Olivia: So during the time of the earthquake where were you at?

Lynn: We were living in a house that we had bought two years before up on the side of Pillar Mountain. The address up there was #5 Hillcrest, but there was no street there, it was just a convenience address I guess. There were three houses way on the top most layer of houses and we lived in the middle one. One of them is since gone, it slid down the mountain in the mud slide a few years ago, but there's still two of them there and we lived in one of them for eleven years. We were there during the

earthquake and tidal waves. That was about I think it was about 220 feet above sea level so we were safe when the tsunamis came and we had a front row seat to watch the whole thing.

Olivia: So you were at home at the time it happened?

Lynn: Yes, I just got off work and I had a day off the next day. It was in the evening, we had just finished our dinner and I was taking a cup of coffee into the living room to turn on the TV and watch the news and the earthquake hit. We grabbed our two little kids, at that time we just had two little kids one about three years old and one just a year old I think. We ran out of the house. By that time the earthquake was so violent that we couldn't go any place. We did get out of the house and down below on a little tiny flat lawn we had out front. But then we couldn't go any farther, we couldn't even stand up for a while hanging on to each other and hanging onto the kids. We watched the ground along the mountain side there it was just heaving the waves on the ocean, two or three foot waves. It was scary and like I said we couldn't stand up on our own we had to hang on to something. Then we were afraid the house would come down on top of us because we were directly in front of it and below it. Then it was so bad that we thought maybe the side of the mountain would slide down you know the over burden of rocks and stuff, but it didn't. Apparently it was just dry enough to hold in place.

Olivia: So there was no rain at all?

Lynn: No. The day had been fairly nice, partly cloudy and we had some sun that day it was pleasant and calm. It was in March, late March, the 27th. It happened to be Good Friday and 5:30 or 6:00 in the evening that the first earthquake hit, the big one.

Olivia: The big one, so were there several after that?

Lynn: Yes there were. There were at least two fairly big ones later in the night and I don't remember the times of those, but it seems to me that a couple of hours after the first one we had another pretty wild one and somewhat later that night maybe five, six, seven hours later or early the next morning we had another one, but they were nothing like the first one. The first one at the time or soon after they reported it was 8.3 on the Richter scale on a scale of ten but they later revised that with reports coming in from South central Alaska to 8.6 and then recently just within the last year or two read scientific reports on how they have revised that again and now they call it a 9.2, which is extremely violent, the most violent one to hit North America apparently. And it probably was partly because it was so violent in so big of an area. From Yakatak in the east to King Salmon in the west and north to south it was like halfway to Fairbanks, Talketna

and then down here to the south in Chignik, so it covered an immense area.

Olivia: Where about was the epicenter?

Lynn: The Epicenter was up in the upper Prince William Sound not far from the town of Valdez and near the Columbia Glacier. And it also happens to be just a few miles from the sight of the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill which was at Bligh Reef just I think 5 or 7 miles east of the quake epicenter.

Olivia: Did it cause a lot of damage here in Kodiak?

Lynn: Well it caused damage to breakwaters around the boat harbor but they were smaller than they are now. The rock rip-rap that they built the breakwaters with was mostly much smaller rocks and boulders than they used when they rebuilt it, but they were in the same location. The earthquake was so violent that it shook them apart. So that after it was over only about a half or a third of each breakwater still showed above the water. The rest was just scattered under the water some place. So later what was left of the breakwaters didn't give a whole lot of protection against the storms when they occurred until it was built a couple of years later. There was a few buildings around town in those days that were made of concrete block and I think that there were some houses that had brick chimneys or concrete block chimneys for their fireplaces and those were damaged. Any buildings that sat on concrete foundations, not all of them, but I think they were subject to some damage with the quake itself. Most of the buildings in those days even down town were wood frame buildings and many of them, including our house and a lot of other houses around town sat not on concrete footings but on pilings set down into the ground into bedrock and then the house sitting on top of it. So when the earthquake hit even though it was so violent, those houses mostly bobbed on the surface like corks. Many of them were not damaged. Our house wasn't damaged, things fell out of the cupboards and glasses and dishes and bottles of stuff and everything fell out of the cabinets and broke all over the floor. TV's fell over and the refrigerator fell leaning into the breakfast counter. The structure itself was not too badly damaged. The main problem in our house and I think a lot of houses was that after the quake we had a lot of trouble opening and closing windows and doors. They used to hit and catch and rub and couldn't be closed and they couldn't be opened.

Olivia: Yeah, I used to live in that house, the same house. Last year we rented it for the school year. We did talk to your wife about it and she said, "Yeah, we were up here at the time of the earthquake." So I can imagine the view that you had of everything and how scary it must have been way up on that hill too.

Lynn: After the earthquake scare when we thought the mountain would slide down on top of us then it was a good place to be up there because we were way high above the water. So when the tsunamis came in we were safe enough up there.

Olivia: So when the Tsunami hit how long was it after the earthquake had hit?

Lynn: I think it was 33 minutes. The first earthquake occurred at 5:36 pm in the evening and it seems to me that it was 5 or 6 minutes after 6:00 when the first tsunami hit here. The epicenter, like I said was in upper Prince William Sound, and that's about 350 air miles northeast of here so it took a while for the water motion to reach here. It's a good thing it did take that long because if it had been a shorter time I think there would have been a much greater loss of life here on the island.

Olivia: So people were warned about the tsunami?

Lynn: Well after a quake that bad and you live along the coast you could expect that there might be a tsunami. We didn't know that there would be one, but a lot of people were aware that it could happen. The people that were down in the low-line areas most of them ran away and got to higher ground. A lot of them started climbing up the side of Pillar mountain. They went right on past our house. A lot of others got in cars and drove up the road on the back side of Pillar Mountain to get to higher ground. Others went to places in town that were a little higher than along the shore. Then there were a lot of other people who were down town who were shopping or in restaurants in bars, stores, and business people themselves. That's a low line area. Troopers and Police and soon after that the Shore Patrol from the Navy base tried to evacuate everybody from the low-line areas. They had their sirens going and warning people to get out of there. But a lot of people wanted to get their boats out of the small boat harbor in case of a tsunami they would be able to save their boat and get out to the open water.

Olivia: Were the Troopers letting the people do that?

Lynn: Pretty much for a while anyway. I think that everybody was afraid that there would be a tsunami. Before the troopers could get organized to evacuate everybody a lot of the people ran down there to the boat harbor to get their boats out. Many of them did but some didn't and that's why we had a considerable losses of life here in Kodiak. It wasn't from the earthquake. I don't think anybody was killed or injured in the earthquake itself that I know of, but there were a number who lost their life during the tsunami.

Olivia: So it was still daylight when the tidal wave hit?

Lynn: It was daylight it was getting evening it was partly cloudy. I took a camera and I tried to take some pictures but the light was poor and in those days the film wasn't nearly as good as it is especially for 35 millimeter slides you have to have pretty good light for that. So most of them didn't turn out real well, but I kept them as a memento.

Olivia: Did you see the tidal wave actually come in?

Lynn: Yes! Yes we...

Olivia: What did you feel at that moment?

Lynn: It was pretty awesome pretty spectacular and scary. When I first realized that something was happening was after we had got back into the house 10-15 minutes after the quake we started straightening things out. I stepped out on the over hanging front deck in front of the house and was watching all the activity down town and below us and I glanced over to the far end of Woody Island, and we had been out in the Islands many times in our boat so I knew what I was looking at. I saw this spray on the breakers hitting the point over the far northwest corner of Woody Island. And it startled me because the spray was considerably higher than the bluff there and I knew the bluff was a fairly high one at that point. I couldn't believe what I was seeing so I yelled at my wife who was inside. And a neighbor lady had came over. They were trying to warm up some dinner on a oil fire range we had in the kitchen. I got that lighted again and going that was the only heat we had. So they were busy in there and I yelled at them and I said maybe there's a tsunami coming, we called it a tidal wave which is inaccurate. So they came running out and watched it and by the time they had got out to the front deck it had come down the channel. It was very high water it made the channel look like a river running down hill. And it swept down the channel and took everything along with it, buildings, stores, canneries and just ripped them all out. Then the high water reached the boat harbor and a lot of water swirled right into the boat harbor and all of the boats in Piers Docks got ripped out by the force of the water pushed into town and that was when the real scary part started...was watching that...just total destruction, just everything just went.

Olivia: And how was the noise?

Lynn: Ahh...I never heard a noise like that before...everything cracking, breaking...wooden very noisy...everything... like a bulldozer running over your house while you're in it. Like I said it ripped every structure and pushed it off to the lower town area. The water washed in as far up to the

intersection of McDonalds and the Village Market and the Police Station and that area. That was about as high as the water got there. Of course, other low-line areas were like that. Some of the biggest heaviest boats that got pushed into town got left there when the water receded because they didn't move as fast even though the water washed out very fast and took a lot of boats and buildings with it. One of them was a big old boat called the Selief, it had got washed up to Peking Restaurant where Dr. Guy's office is. Well about where his building is the boat stayed there on the side of the hill. Just above that where that big apartment building is was where the old school used to be. And then down the slope just below the school where about where Dr. Guy's place is now there was the ole' Selief sitting up there. And it was loaded with crab, they hadn't got it unloaded.

Olivia: Oh! Loaded with crab? So what what happened with the crab?

Lynn: They rotted. And that was one of the urgent things to be done there when they have boat odors... to clear it up some sort of a pathway down the street so they could push some of the boats back into the water. They had to get rid of that crab because when it warmed up it would be so stenchy. I think what they did with it was unloaded it and took it away and dumped it some place.

Olivia: About how much crab was that?

Lynn: I think they said 4000 King Crabs, but maybe it was 4000 pounds, but I think it was 4000 King Crabs quite a few. It's a shame to waste all that good King Crab. There were some other boats left up in the town scattered all over. There were several small pleasure boats and skiffs that got washed up behind the old Donnelly Building which is now the Kana Building. That used to be be the Post Office and behind that was for some reason a bunch of small boats got pushed into there and a boat I used to own was one of them. It sat up there for the next few months.

Olivia: Was it damaged?

Lynn: Yes, but I had sold it shortly before that, but it was damaged. And apparently it was never fixed up because I never saw it after they cleared out the down town. I think it was probably damaged beyond compare or something. Several other large fishing boats were sitting around town for along time. Two or three of them down there about where the Harbor Master Building is now and NBA Bank and along the harbor and water front there. There were a lot of down town buildings and stores and things too that got washed away when the water went out again. Some cars that were parked by the Harbor Master. Cars that people were not able to get out in time were washed out to sea. It lasted for a while I would guess for

about 7 minutes to 10 minutes from the time the water washed clear into town to it's maximum level until it went back out. In all that time the wind was grinding noise and cracking, smashing.

Olivia: The wind was just moving everything and taking it with it?

Lynn: Yeah.

Olivia: Were you separated from any loved ones or friends during that time?

Lynn: Well of course my immediate family was two brothers and their families. One of them lived in Anchorage and the other lived in Seaside in Seattle or Redmond and a few other relatives back in the Midwest. The communications were out and so they were quite concerned when they heard about the Alaska earthquake. And especially when some of the news reports indicated that the Island of Kodiak sank. Some of Gretchen's (Lynn's wife), relatives in Europe and some of our friends in Norway heard in European broadcasts that Kodiak Island had sunk and they didn't know what that meant. I guess they imagined that the whole damn island just went under the water.

Olivia: It put people in a panic.

Lynn: Some people were very concerned and like I said we couldn't communicate with them for some time.

Olivia: So the power immediately went out?

Lynn: Yes, and then they worked...and fast to restore it. It took- a couple of days before they had any restored. And then where we lived for some reason that was the last section to get any power restored, I believe it was on the 5th day that we got power up there.

Olivia: So you mentioned earlier that you had a stove. Did this put off any heat for you? Was this your only source of heat?

Lynn: Yes, it was and it was the only source of heat for anybody on that slope. It was an old fashioned kitchen range with a flat cast iron top and it was oil fire, but the fuel was kept in the barrel up behind the house and it was gravity free to the stove; it just went down hill to the stove. We didn't have to use any electrical pumps like our furnace. So the furnace was useless for heat but I got the kitchen range going again not too long after the quake. I had to take the line apart because some crud had shaken up in there and plugged it up. So I had to take it apart and blow through it and clean that junk out of it. Then I put it back together and we got a fire going in that old range and then it turned out that was the only heat or

cooking facility that was usable up there. So our neighbors on both sides - my wife invited them to come over and cook their dinners, bring pans of vegetables or whatever, in order to cook them. They did that for several days. We were lucky because a couple of hundred feet from our house on the side of the mountain was a spring and we had occasionally used water from there if there before was any problem with utilities and so we ran over there and got jugs and buckets and things and got our water from there. So did several of the other neighbors. It was just a little spring but it was enough to furnish water for everyone and that was very good water, too. It was good water too, it came from a deep underground spring so it wasn't full of silt or anything from the shaking and commotion. The people up there on the hillside were in pretty good shape. Later on that evening when it was getting dark I noticed that there was a car...came up and parked in our little tiny parking lot up there. There was only room for three of us neighbors, but this other car had pulled in there and was half hanging over the bank. I went over to it and they were just sitting there in that car. It was a couple we knew that lived down by the water front and they had got out of their house, of course and were looking for some place higher ground. They had driven up Cope street and then up to our little parking lot and I guess they were just going to sit there all night. So I told them to come up in our house and they did and they spent the whole night there. And a couple of other people came up, walked up, climbed up, and we invited them to come in. So did our other neighbors, too. People were coming from down town, low-lying areas and it wasn't bad weather, but it was too cool to sit outdoors all night.

Olivia: Right, in March it's still cold. So you were lucky, you had heat and water and up on high ground. So did any of your friends get caught up in the earthquake?

Lynn: Well, my brother and his wife and his family in Anchorage suffered in the earthquake, but their house was not damaged. I think he said there was a crack that crossed the entire lower floor, a concrete floor and concrete walls on the lower level and there was a crack, but it never caused a leakage or structural problem or anything like that. Other than that they didn't have any damage. But in Anchorage there was a great deal of damage. A spotting, one area everything was pretty well destroyed or pretty badly damaged and other areas, even not too far away, were relatively undamaged. Down town on 4th Avenue, the north side of the street for about a block and a half stretch; it just collapsed - just sank for about 12 or 14 feet. You can still see pictures of that every once in a while. Half of the street just collapsed, cars, stores, theaters, bars, and so the Theater Marquis - after the building sank, the Marquis stuck out down at the level of the remaining part of the street that didn't collapse. And right across the street those bars and everything remained at higher level and that was one area of severe damage. The Penny's store was fairly

new at the time and the fixing collapsed on it. The store was very badly damaged. But there was a new apartment building under construction - big concrete structure about 9000 and H or G or K or somewhere out in that area, where the Park Strip is now - it toppled over; the whole building came down at an angle. It was kind of a four seasons apartment but it wasn't - it was under construction. And the McKinley Building, the tallest one in Anchorage at that time was up on East 4th Avenue. That was badly damaged and it's never been repaired since. Still stands. And at Turnagin by the sea, a suburban area between downtown and the airport along the Knik Arm, a very nice residential district, one of the nicest residential areas in Anchorage - and that suffered terribly - the whole bluff gave way and slid down into the bay. Many, many homes were damaged and destroyed out there. Like I say, some of those were among the nicer homes in Alaska.

Olivia: So after the quake and tsunami, did you ever think of leaving Kodiak?

Lynn: I thought seriously of sending my wife and kids out when we had transportation again but then they didn't; they hung out here until the summer when they went out anyway to a place on Whidbe Island where we used to take the kids out there. And we already had made plans to build an addition on our house, not a large addition for that house, and we had the materials coming. We were committed and so we thought of canceling that and walking away or at least not trying to build in those conditions, but then things started to calm down later on and so we went ahead with that project. It caused extra difficulties because the freight facilities were devoted to restoring the town, down town and the businesses and things.

Olivia: And how long did it take for the rebuilding?

Lynn: It was a long time. I think the down town, where the down town is now, the main mall - it was about 1967 - summer of '67 before the new permanent buildings were put up down around the mall area. In the meantime, this part of the island had dropped to about 8 or 8 and a half feet below what it was before, so that meant that every high tide we had - at least the higher tides - would come right into the town and come across the main road. So if you were about where Kraft store parking lot entrance is on Rezonoff, from that point on you couldn't come to this part of town and vice versa - during high tides. And that continued for quite a while until they were able to haul enough filling to build it up, in that low area where the water came in so far. But there were many times when I'd come off the mountain from work and come down the back side of the mountain and park our big trucks out there in the Aleutian homes and then I'd get in my car to come home. But if it happened to be a real high tide, I couldn't go home, a couple of hours or longer sometimes.

Olivia: So you had to get down before high tide?

Lynn: Yeah. And that continued for a while. Right after the earthquake, they had to clear out all the trash first, for safety and health reasons and to just get some kind of traffic flow through the town again. And when they did have a street opened up so you could get from one side of town to the other, then those people that had to go through town had to get a pass and there were National Guard and police and so forth would check. When I'd go to work, if I was going to work at night and had to go through the downtown, I'd show my little pass about down where KEA was, where the Westmark is now. And then you'd go on through, roughly about Marine Way, that area, they had a street pushed clear. I could drive around there about to where the Elks Club is and from there I'd go through the Aleutian homes or to other parts of town. But the most damage, of course, in the downtown district where there was a concentration of stores and canneries and of course, all along the water front were canneries and businesses. And another area that was hard hit out there where the Salvation Army is - the old original Beachcomber was an old log building that sat about where the later Beachcombers was rebuilt and that was destroyed, and some other homes and things that were along that low stretch of water. And then some other areas out at the Coast Guard Base; and there's another area where some lives were lost in first tsunami. Probably because this part of the island sank 8 feet or so, the water level rose very fast - not violent, not like the tsunami later, and it was very fast and came up high enough that in low lying areas it dumped trash all over. And out at Kalsin Bay, the road used to run from the bottom of that big hill just this side of Kalsin Inn - it turned back on itself and down to the beach and followed the beach - very low-lying there, and then when the water rose it threw a whole bunch of drift wood on the road so you couldn't drive across it.

Olivia: Kind of barricaded the road there.

Lynn: Yeah, there were pieces of logs and things laying all over the stretch of road about a mile or more right along the beach.

Lynn: There were some people that were out beyond that in the road system, including two good friends of ours and close neighbors - who were drowned there. They had been out at Pasagshak there. They both had the day off because of Good Friday. He was a music teacher at the school, band instructor and so forth and she worked for the City as a clerk and they both had the day off. They loved to go outdoors and hike and beach comb. They went out in the morning and they invited my wife to go out with them and she would have gone, too, but she couldn't find a babysitter to come in the morning and stay all day and so she didn't go. I

was at work and then, as it happened, they were still out at Pasagshak when the earthquake hit and when that happened, they jumped in their jeep and headed back to town and they got as far back as the far side of Kalsin Bay. There were some cars stopped there on the high area on the east side of the bay and they couldn't go across on that low-lying area. So then the men in the group decided that they would take a couple of the vehicles and they would go along and get out and move these things by hand, these logs and things, and open up a route so that they could get the cars through. They started doing that. Our friends, Gene and Rose Schultz, Gene was going to go work on that, too. And then Rose thought since they didn't have any children or anything - and she could drive the jeep - she thought she could help by driving one of the vehicles. So, she did. But the other women and some children stayed with their cars there to wait for the road to be opened. Then the men got down about half-way along. There were six men altogether and Rose. That happened just 33 minutes after the first earthquake, the big one, when the first tsunami hit. And in Kalsin Bay, because of the funnel shape of the bay, it built up and was very high and violent and it caught them (the men and Rose) about half way along and they couldn't escape it. Those seven people were killed there. I believe three more were killed in the first Tsunami at Old Harbor and then the ones here in town. I think it was a total of 29 in the island altogether. The ones in town, and the 7 in Kalsin Bay and three in Old Harbor. I'm not positive about that, but I think that's what I read later.

Olivia: And this was all from the Tsunami, not the earthquake?

Lynn: Yeah.

Olivia: Devastating.

Lynn: One of those deaths might have been a heart attack that same day or night or something and might not have been the Tsunami itself. So I'm not sure about that. And there were 139 (deaths) state-wide, all over. Because Alaska is was so sparsely populated - if that had happened in California or Puget Sound, there would have been thousands.

Olivia: Oh, yeah, definitely, as violent as the quake was.

Lynn: Well, anyway, you asked if our friends - if we were separated. We were. Especially concerning communications, for some time. Even through our communications station, White Alice, on top of the mountain. The guy that was on duty at the time - he managed to get the power back on. We had an emergency power of our own up there. He got that going and got the communications system equipment restored to service. But it didn't do any good because we transmitted and received to and from the next

station in the net which was at Homer, a place called Diamond Ridge. But, of course, it was out of service, too, and so was Soldotna, which was the next one on up and then Anchorage, which was wiped out, the facility there, and that was one of the main hubs. King Salmon was still in service or got restored right away. And all of the rest of the stations around, westward and northwest and close to the interior, they weren't affected. But it didn't do much good as far as we were concerned, because we couldn't get through to the main hub at Anchorage. And it was a day or so until we were finally able to transmit and receive through part of the system - not including Soldotna and Anchorage, and all in that area. But we were able to talk to ham radio operators in Nome. I knew one of them. He worked at the White Alice station there, and the mountain station and he wanted to know if we wanted to send messages by ham radio operators - if it would work. So I gave him the messages and told him if he could get a hold of my one brother in Redmond or a cousin in Sacramento or aunts and uncles or cousins in Iowa; any of those places or my other brother in Anchorage. And of course he couldn't get to Anchorage either. And then it happened he did. He was able to get through. He spoke to a ham operator near San Francisco and who ever that was, he called my brother in Redmond long distance where ever it was and my brother there, when he got the news that we were okay, notified all our other relatives and friends.

Olivia: How long did that take, after the earthquake?

Lynn: It seems to me it was two days.

Olivia: So they (relatives) had no idea what was going on?

Lynn: No. No, they didn't - but they did find out that it wasn't true that the island had sunk. But they also heard there was much damage and loss of life.

Olivia: So you were able to communicate with your relatives - that's great! I can just imagine what they were going through - not knowing. So during the rebuilding months, what did you do? You mentioned you worked and you had to have a pass to go through.

Lynn: Yes, I continued working. The day after (the earthquake) was my scheduled day off and it was almost impossible for me to get to work anyway that day from where I lived. But then the next day, before they got a street opened through the rubble and so forth, I wanted to go to work because I knew that they had to have everybody that they could get up there. But to get to the truck that we used to get up and down the mountain, it was over in the Aleutian homes. I couldn't go through town and I couldn't even walk through town - It wasn't allowed. So I climbed up on the side of the mountain above our house and made my way

through the brush and the grass and the mud and the snow all around the hillside. And from there dropped down into the Aleutian homes and went to get the truck. And then coming back the next day, I had to climb up the mountain and go the other way. I did that for several days - several nights- because I had changed shifts from the day shift to the night shift at that time and so scrambling along the mountainside in the middle of the night and then again in the morning when I got off. But I continued to go to work and later I got a pass and I could take my car through the destroyed area to the truck. And the other people who worked up there lived on this side of the downtown area. A couple of them lived in the Aleutian homes and different places. They were all on this side of the downtown area, so they didn't have that problem, but they had plenty of problems, anyway. But then a few days later we finally got the communications system restored enough so that we could operate again through Soldotna and Anchorage and the other ones in the valley area - the other stations - and we got some communication restored throughout the state. But I just continued then and, of course, everyday we'd see a lot of excitement and commotion downtown where they were trying to get things cleared away. And then they'd start filling in ... because of the island recession of 8 ft. or so. Before they could do anything else, they had to raise the level so as soon as they could they started hauling in rock fill. And the whole area where the Mall is and the whole downtown district had to be refilled in to make up for that 8 foot drop.

Olivia: That's a lot.

Lynn: Yes, its as high as this roof. That's on the average - some places were less, some places were more. So they hauled in an average of 12 feet layers of fill to bring it up safely above high tide level. Then later they rebuilt the boat harbor breakwaters; same location and same position and everything, but much bigger, much more breakwater then they had been before. They opened the small boat harbor in the same place.

Olivia: And how did they get all the materials they needed? - You said that took up most of the freight.

Lynn: Yes, they put a lot of emergency measures into effect. First of all to get food and things like that into town - although there never was a real emergency as far as food was concerned. But for quite a while there was little or no fresh produce or milk or anything like that. But as soon as they could, they brought in what was needed in that way and then later on, of course, they started bringing in all kinds of rebuilding materials and some contractors came from other parts of the state and got some...a lot of work.

Olivia: So was there Federal aide?

Lynn: Yes, in a number of different ways. One of the important ones for this town was SBA loans, very low interest, 3% interest.

Olivia: What is that, SBA?

Lynn: Small Business Association or small Business Authority or something like that. And they made money available - loans for business men who had suffered damage and wanted to rebuild. And many of them did - took advantage of that cheap money and rebuilt their stores eventually, like I said, it took a while - 2 or 3 years to build permanently. But Blackbergs Jewelry, Ardingers, Normans, several of the bars, Mecca Bar, Tony's, Sally's, Wodlingers Drug Store, lots of businesses down there, a couple of banks, and the Elks Lodge was built during that time, although I'm not sure if they got SBA money. I think they got a loan through the Elks National organization.

Olivia: So, was anybody covered with insurance?

Lynn: Not that I know of. There may have been very few that had some kind of earthquake or tsunami insurance, but what we heard around town that such a thing was almost unheard of and I guess it was available in those days, but very, very expensive. People had insurance for the usual things like storm damage, wind, fire and things like that. To this day nobody, or very few people have insurance against earthquakes or tsunamis. I don't know if there is such a thing. Maybe its covered by Flood insurance. If they do, I think they must be paying through the nose.

Olivia: Yeah, I can just imagine. So how did people feel after the disaster? Kodiak seems to always pull together - all the people here? Was it like that back then?

Lynn: Yes, very much so - I do know that people who had food or something that they thought somebody else needed, made it available; like for instance, some of the people on our hillside were without power for several days. They began to lose what they had stored in the freezer, we didn't. We lucked out that way. Of course, we didn't open the freezer - we might be out for a while. But people were very helpful that way with their neighbors - making supplies and things available to others that might need them through the emergency system. There were some people in the High school for a few nights and people in town made bedding and food and all kinds of things available to them. Oh, and they helped care for kids whose parents had to go rebuild or work or whatever. Yeah, there was a lot of mutual help among citizens and like I said, there was emergency help to from Federal and state aide also.

Olivia: What about the schools?

Lynn: I think they were closed for a while but I don't remember how long. But it had to be closed for a while - you couldn't even get to it.

Olivia: How about mail?

Lynn: That too, took a while. I don't remember how long.

Olivia: Did you have a newspaper?

Lynn: Yes, but it was wiped out. Soon after the disaster, the publisher at that time put out an emergency newsletter. He didn't put them out everyday but he made them available in the stores as they began opening and in the post office when they were working again and you could pick one up. We still have a number of those. I was looking through them not long ago and I didn't have the entire series but I had from number 1 to 27. They're still quite interesting to read. They were just a few pages long with notes, well for instance they put a notice in there that tetanus and typhoid shots were available and anybody, which included all the children should get them and also different notices and messages that you would find in newspapers, but it was a very abbreviated one.

Olivia: Yeah, just the facts right. So did they have any aid come in, as far as nursing, any hospital aid for those injured?

Lynn: I don't remember that we had a lot of injuries, there was some deaths like I told you about. Probably were some injuries but there may have been some temporary help, but it wasn't a real big thing here. I think in some places there might have got a more urgent need for that kind of help than we had here.

Olivia: Did you have anything you wanted to add?

Lynn: I can't think of anything.

Olivia: Well I think you answered all of my questions. Your story was very interesting and I truly enjoyed it. Thank you very much for your time.

Conclusion:

The memories of the 1964 earthquake and tsunami are something that many people of Kodiak will never forget. To some it was a terrifying event and changed the lives of many people. However, it is fascinating how one can bring the history and the stories back as if were just yesterday. This oral history project is a way to keep some of the history of Kodiak alive. And therefore, I am very thankful to Lynn Saupe for keeping this story alive and giving others a chance to read and enjoy his story.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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