

ROSA WALLACE

ON

UNGA AND KODIAK ISLANDS 1950'S-1980'S

AND

Native/Norwegian family life

Urbanization

1964 Earthquake

St. Marys and Kodiak Christian Schools

By

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On April 5, 1996

At Kodiak Christian School

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The following autobiographical interview was held on April 5, 1996, with Mrs. Rosa Wallace, an elementary school teacher at Kodiak Christian School. The interview was conducted at the school by Kim Robinson.

KW: Today is April 5, 1996. My name is Kim Robinson, and I am interviewing Rosa Wallace. And we're sitting in Kodiak Christian School, in Kodiak, Alaska.

Rosa, why don't you tell us a little bit about your parents' story- about your mom, and her first marriage, then how she met your dad, and what they did after they got married.

RW: My mom was born and raised on the village of... the village of Unga, Alaska, which is part of the Shumagin Islands (which is about 250 miles from Kodiak), which is part of the Aleutian Chain, by the way.

She 's of Aleut-Russian descent, and she was married when she was 14 to her sweetheart, Mr. Brandal. And they had 14 children, of whom three of them died before... I never met them. And her husband died also. In 1950, or something like that, she met my dad. He came up there to go fishing from Kodiak. And he's originally from Norway and he'd lived in Alaska a long time. And my dad was 59 when he met my mom, and she was 39. And they got together because my dad said he felt sorry for her because she was a widow with so many children, which, I know he loved her, but that's the story he liked to tell. Anyway, they got married and had four more- four children- of which I was the oldest.

KW: How long did they stay in Unga?

RW: We moved to Kodiak in 1959. When I was eight years old we came up on the boat called *THE EXPANSION*, which some old timers may remember. It was kind of like a mail boat, a moving boat, it

moved things around. And that's how long we stayed, and we moved to Kodiak then.

KW: When you were in Unga, Alaska, did you have regular mail service, and roads and cars, or any conveniences like that, or was it pretty rural?

RW: Unga, Alaska, was pretty rural. We got our mail from the fishing boats. I guess they brought them over. And we had board sidewalks and dirt trails, and once a year we ordered our groceries from Seattle. They came up on the barge, or whatever it came up on. I remember having to go down to the beach and take the wheelbarrow, and we had to wheel all the groceries up to the house, for the year's supply of groceries. And usually it was just canned goods, and nonperishables. You didn't have fresh produce, unless you- just what we had from the garden. That was it.

KW: What was your first impression of Kodiak when you came on the boat?

RW: Actually, I had been to Kodiak prior to that because I broke my hip when I was four years old, and my first impression of Kodiak was the hospital here: the first time I had ever been on an airplane, first time I had ever seen a car, first time I had ever seen streets paved. And it was kind of interesting and scary at the same time. And first time I had ever seen a doctor, or a nun. And I had to stay in the hospital for a whole month. My mother only could stay for a week, and I stayed there by myself for a whole month. And she had friends that would check in on me regularly, but I had to stay suspended with my leg up in the air, and I was sure I was a delightful patient! (chuckle) In fact, Dr. Bob Johnson's father was my physician at that time, Dr. R. Holmes Johnson.

KW: Had you gone to school at all on Unga?

RW: Yes, we had a, what you call a one-room school house, grades one through eight were there. And Unga has an interesting history, which I can't go into detail, but, it seemed like a little city within a little town- a little village. Because a lot of the settlers there were of Norwegian descent, more than the Russian influence. So everything was done like they do, did, in Seattle. They even had their dances, and parties, and clubs and everything there. For more information, read Unga Island Girl. That helped me.

KW: So when you came to Kodiak, where did you go to school?

RW: Our first year here, our dad decided that we should go to Saint Marys, primarily because of the transition from village school to a... a public school. So he thought it would be better to go to a smaller school until we're established in the town and knew what we were doing here.

KW: Now at that time Saint Marys wasn't in the beautiful new building it has,- where did you go to school

RW: Saint Marys was downtown, right across from, right where Fish and Game building is now, uh, right across from the Russian Orthodox Church. And the school I was in, first through third grade, was in a quonset hut, actually. And Saint Marys old chapel, which is now their little store they have, was the other building. And, so, first through third together, or not first through , but it was, I believe it was third through eighth grade were in one room and had a sister for our teacher.

KW: Then you transferred and went to Kodiak public schools?

RW: Yes, we went to the main elementary for my fourth grade, which is now the middle school here. And then fifth and sixth grade was

downtown in what is called the little red schoolhouse they had downtown, which housed first through sixth grade, I believe. And I went there two years. Then transferred back up to, in junior high, to the main building, which had K through high school in one building at that time.

KW: How big would you say the town was around 1960?

RW: Small. It was just kind of like a sleepy little village town, of, I think, no about 3,000 people, maybe, 4,000, I'm not sure.

My environment didn't extend very far from our streets because we had to stay within our own neighborhood.

KW: Did you find it fun to have more stores to shop in? Was it different from Unga, or did you not pay much attention?

RW: I guess I really didn't pay much attention. In Unga I don't remember us having a store to shop at. I don't think we had a store as a matter of fact. We did have a library, but, I'm sure,... there may have been a little store, but I was too young to remember anything about it. But it was, kind of, I suppose it was a culture shock, but, not really. When you're young things don't shock you as much as I think when you're older.

KW: Well, and, you know after you went through your experience at age four- it probably helped. Tell us a little bit about your church experience here, your church affiliation.

RW: Our first year we went to the Kodiak Bible Chapel, which was at that time called Kodiak Christian Center, which was originally designed for military men to come and have a place to go to that wasn't under the influence of alcoholic beverages, I believe. And we went there, and then, across the street from where we

lived was a tiny Church of God, affiliated with Anderson, Indiana. And that's where I grew up mostly. We went there for about 25 years. Which was now the building, in fact it has pulled out since from Kodiak, and that building now is the Monashka Bay Baptist Church. You can see it on 12th Street, or Baranov Street, I'm not sure which. And now I'm affiliated with the Church of the Nazarene.

KW: What did your, what did your mother's family think of her leaving and going to Kodiak?

RW: Actually one of the reasons we did move to Kodiak was primarily for my mother's health, because she was having health problems. I'm not sure what they were exactly. I suppose after having 18 children and she also had a four-pack-a-day habit of smoking cigarettes, she may have had cancer, we didn't, don't know. And other problems, health problems, that I wasn't aware of what they were, because I was too young to know what they were. And plus my sister wanted to go to high school, my older sister. And that's two reasons we moved to Kodiak, basically. And my dad, had lived here prior, before, during World War II.

KW: Did your dad continue fishing here?

RW: Yes, uh, well actually my dad retired. When we moved to Kodiak he retired from fishing, because he was in his sixties. And, so, he was a stay at home dad after that.

KW: Let's go back and think again a little bit about what life was like for you as part Native American and part Norwegian. How much of your life really expressed the Native American culture?

RW: In the village I grew up in, I believe a lot of the Native culture was squelched because the Norwegian influence was there,

so heavily, that, uh, I don't remember ever doing anything, ... other than the traditional food gathering, where they ate off from the land. There, I don't remember any Native culture things going on in my village. And then, we weren't really from Kodiak, so I didn't, we didn't affiliate with the Natives in Kodiak too much. Our dad's Norwegian influence: we kept in great contact with our relatives in Norway, but [only] up until my father died, I think because a lot of the cousins were second cousins. And they were quite older than we were. And then when I was in my 20's my second cousins were in the 60's, so they were all, there was uh, ... I think we grew up just an average American family with the American traditions, because I noticed that in the village of Unga, that we did the Mom and apple pie sort of thing, fourth of July. I don't remember any Native celebrations at all.

KW: But you were in Kodiak in 1964. Why don't you tell us about what the experience was like for you during the earthquake and the big tsunami.

RW: Hmm, at that time it was Good Friday, like today. Yes, and I, uh, ... it was a beautiful day, I remember, and everybody was home because at that time schools were dismissed on Good Friday. So everybody was home, and I was over at my brother's house going to babysit for him because he and his wife wanted to go out to dinner together. And the earthquake started. I was sitting, and I thought I was getting dizzy. And my brother, who had been in a tsunami before in Unga, understood that it was going to be a tsunami because he went and looked down at the ... For some reason he could figure it out by look- going down and looking at the water, staring down at

the beach- his house is right on the water front.

And so he said there was going to be a tsunami, so he had me go home. And I lived right where Saint Herman's Seminary is right now; our house was right there on that lot. And so he sent us home, and my dad told all of us to go up....

And, oh, the earthquake, I felt the earthquake. And it rattled and shook, and you could see the telephone poles swing and the trees bending. And I wasn't downtown where all the mess happened, where all the sidewalks cracked or anything. Because most of Kodiak had dirt roads, Rezanov was not there yet; it was just a rolling hill of field grass and basically, Kodiak was centered from the... Mill. Mill Bay Road and Mission were the main roads, and where Benny Benson and Cutoff were, that's where Mission Road went up to Mill Bay Road, and there wasn't any houses or anything out there, out past Rezanov. And you could take Mill Bay Road out to Abercrombie and out to Monashka. That's where, uh,....

Anyway, to go back to the story of the earthquake, the earth quaked all night long. I can remember sittin' in the dark. There was no electricity and we were at our house. We let our brother and his family stay at our house. My dad figured that if the water was going to come in, we could get across the street before it got us, because it was just a matter of just going up the neighbor's stairs, and you're up on another level. And it was up above the hundred foot mark, I believe. So, it was scary, to me, because you didn't know what was going on, and you heard all kinds of rumors. And my dad

had one of those old fashioned radios where you could pick up the news from out in the rest of the world. And they were talking about Kodiak having sunk, and I was just going- *what were they talking about?* ... And it just this tremendous fear I felt there. And then after a while I went.... (pensively) Before the sunset, my brother and I and his wife went out in the car, and we could see the little island, I don't remember the name of it, out beyond the boat harbor. Down by the boat harbor, you could see it going under the water, and then the water receded,... and coming out, and then, you could see houses floating out in the channel, and, you know, people on them. You couldn't do anything about it. And I could see the water rising up over on Near Island. And I believe it went up to the fifteen foot level. And all those kind of eerie things. The thing that struck me about the earthquake was before it shook, it was very still, and eerie. There was,... you couldn't even hear birds twittering, and it was just like nature was prewarned it was going to happen. And, just, it was a scary night, but the next day, you know, there was still trembling going on and everything, but you were just glad you were alive. Your family was altogether, and you were safe, and our house was still there. And we were just thankful it was in its place, and when we looked around town and could see the damage; it was horrendous. But we were just happy that we were alive, and the hospital was still there, where it was, that building was still standing there. It's just really interesting to me, you know.

KW: How did, how did ANCSA affect your family?

RW: Alaska Native, uh, well before ANCSA came there was Urban

Renewal, which affected our town. After the earthquake, they came in and put in Rezanov Street. The ferry system came in, the Tustamena, which affected the growth of the population of the town. And ANCSA, Alaska Native Land Claim Settlement Act, kind of gave us ownership to our land. It gave identity to the Natives that wasn't there before, especially I think to the Aleutian Island Natives, because they're kind of, they're,.... I think there's people around, in the smaller villages on Kodiak, that were more connected in their unity because they grew up in their little villages with.... But the people in Kodiak-well, I think it's a mixed bag- I believe that there really are not any true Natives because they've been all intermixed with the Russians or the Norwegians. But there's like partially Natives I find, and a lot of others along there- the Aleutian Chain, coastal areas. But it kind of gave a unity to the Native people, and I think also gave them some pride. And I know it gave them power, because all of a sudden they had this money to deal with, and a lot of it was not dealt with in a wise way, I think. And especially because people, they have a tendency when you get money- you want to spend it, not save it, and then, with the alcoholic problem in Alaska, I think a lot of it got drunk up, I think. Drunk up- went down the bottle. It really changed a lot of people's lives because it went from a sleepy village environment to a big, big business, political thing.

And then, our island becoming a borough also changed it, too. All of a sudden we just don't have Kodiak City Government, we have a Borough, with new laws and new ideas. And just kind of, no longer are you just kind of a little unique town, but part of a

bigger system, and having to obey laws and regulations of other systems.

KW: When you talked about the urbanization of Kodiak, was this something that was mandated by law, or was this something that just progressed through a variety of reasons?

RW: I think it urbanized because, from a variety of reasons. Because of World War II, the, the Navy base was there already, so there was already a lot of, what do you call it, outside people, influences here. But then, uh, I think people got interested in coming to Alaska. Some of it of sheer adventure, and some because of the teaching jobs. I think a lot of them on Kodiak- you'd either have fishermen or teachers or, ... that pay good money here. And ANSCA kind of took away the.... People were able to have like fish sites and things wherever they wanted to. And I think that kind of has taken away where Natives have their Native Land Claim, because there people had to.... I'm not sure what all, what happened with that because I was little, but I believe that they had to pay for the land, or rent their land or settler areas or whatever. So the Urbanization came because people, Kodiak, was no longer just a sleepy little fishing village. It had a big business community.

KR: Were the canneries already operating here before the earthquake, and on such a large scale as they are now?

RW: There seems to always have been a cannery row. It may not have been as quite as large scale as later, not quite as many canneries as there are today. But at that time Kodiak was the king crab capital of the world. And that was a booming

business; that brought in a lot of money and dollars. And the more dollars there are, the more big boats people wanted to build, and make. And you know, the canneries have always been there, maybe not as quite as huge as some of them are.

KR: What about the transients?

RW: I think the ferry system probably affected the transients more than anything, plus having flights more than once a day or twice a week, or whatever, in and out of Kodiak. More access ah, to the island. I believe the ferry probably did clear, the *Tustamena*, really affected their having transients because college kids would come up to go work in the canneries every year because they could make good money, you know. A thousand dollars a month from working in the cannery. That was good pay in those days.

KR: Did you work at all when you were living in Kodiak?

RW: Actually, yes, after graduating from high school I got a steady job. I worked under a work program. I think it was for a work-study program with the National Bank of Alaska as a bookkeeper trainee, and stayed with them off and on for ten years, bookkeeping, tellering, and whatever else. I don't know.

I really enjoyed it and got to know a large part of Kodiak's population through that, the business impression of people. And I like to see things balance out, so that was a fun thing to do.

KR: When did you go to college?

RW: I actually went to Kodiak Community College one semester, and took western civ and something else, and I really didn't care for it, so I just dropped out. Then I went to, uh, I wanted to travel because

I'd never been off an island, never. Well, I had been on the mainland a couple of times, but not, uh, really enough to make a big difference. So, I was affiliated with the colleges affiliated with my church- I decided to look into those because I knew they would be smaller, and I wouldn't be so intimidated by a smaller college. So I applied to Warner Pacific College in Portland, Oregon, and was accepted. And I went there one semester in '73, in '75, and then I moved back home and went to work at the bank at inbetween times. My dad was aging and I was concerned about his health and everything, so I finally had my brother move back to Kodiak. And after settling my dad with him, I went back to college in 1977 to Anderson College, which is in Indiana. So I went from the west coast to the east. And while I was there my dad passed away, and so I came back and went back to work at the bank again, till I got fed up with it, and their system. And I quit, and I was unemployed for a while. I was doing bookkeeping for individual companies on a personal basis for them. And I got hired at Kana, and got a job working in the payroll department there in 1980, I think, or '81. And after working payroll, they opened a new dental clinic, so I transferred down there, helped establish a new dental clinic by being the person that got to order all the supplies and everything. And, uh, go to Anchorage and work with the girl that worked over in office supplies there, since they had to order through the government there. It was an interesting experience, and I really appreciated the experience. In fact, that's where I met our now borough mayor, Jerome Selby.

KR: When did you meet your husband?

RW: Oh, that was when I went to college- for the fourth time? -third time? -fourth time, yeah. And this time I decided I really wanted, to teach, because I just didn't see any business world going anywhere with me, so I went back to college.

And this time I went to Texas, to a small Bible college there. And I met my husband there in 1983 and I spent three years there in college, finishing up. And I went to summer school, too, to get my degree, and we met there. In '83 we were both interested in a club there, we were both in a missions club there, and I think in another. We had mutual friends, too. So, we met there. Then we got married in 1985 and moved back to Alaska, up to Fairbanks. And things didn't work out completely there for what he was working on, and so we went to, spent the year, well, not, less than a year with his brother in Michigan, Flint Michigan. I taught in the inner city schools there, as a substitute every day of the week. And then my friend wrote and said there was an opening at the Kodiak Christian School here, so I applied, and since the Alaska Natives wanted Native people teaching in the school systems, I was able to get some financial aid to come up here to be interviewed, and also for my family to move here. And so, we moved lock, stock, and barrel back up to Alaska in 1986 and have been here ever since. And I've been, this is my tenth year teaching at Kodiak Christian School and my husband's ninth year with Union Tire and Brake, and now he's breaking with them to, going to the school district, working with them.

KR: Can you tell us a little about the story of Kodiak Christian School?

RW: I first knew about Kodiak Christian School mainly because of

some of the people I knew who were teaching here, through friends. And then one year I helped them, the year that I was between the bank and Kana. I helped them with their yearbook because I was doing bookkeeping for one of the parents there, not modeling, but, something, - carpentry, carpentry company he had, and so his wife was in charge of the printing of the yearbook. So I helped her there. And you'll find my name in the yearbook. I believe that was in 1970, or, '80, uh 1979, I think. And I've known, I knew all the people who established this school, prior to that because I'd been in the community long enough, and in a small community you meet everybody. And I've known them, that most of them were associated with, were affiliated with the Bible Chapel - I knew them through that. And that was my first time in contact with the school. I also knew, that's how I also met Mike Ross there, who now works at Saint Hermon's Seminary. He was teaching at the school at that time, I think. It was fifth and sixth grades, or something like that.

KR: So, when you first came to work at Kodiak Christian School, where was it located? That was 1985?

RW: 1986.

KR: 1986.

RW: 1986. It was at the Kodiak Community Church and it has been here past years since. It also had been housed at the New Assembly of God Church, over on East Rezanov. There for a couple of years because of the population in the school expanding, and they had the fourth through sixth, or fourth through eighth grade over there for a while, a few years. And it just fluctuates depending on the population of the school. The population of the school fluctuates

depending on the, of course, the transient society here. It comes and goes with the people. In fact, in my, the graduation class of the eighth grade this year there were three students I had that were my second graders, and the class at that time had fourteen students in it. Three of them are left of that class, graduating. The rest have gone on their way, somewhere.

KR: Well, this is a really interesting story. Why don't you tell us a little bit about your brothers and sisters- where they've gone, or if they're still here.

RW: Ok, originally I said there were fourteen Brandals, and four of them are now deceased. My favorite brother,.... There are nine girls and nine boys with the Brandal-Lee combination together. My oldest brother, Nels, was my favorite brother, and he drowned when I was still, I was working at the bank here. In 1975, I believe, he went down in a boat, a boat that was called the *Saint Mark*, and none of the bodies was ever recovered, and it was just kind of sad. But he was my favorite brother because he was just so full of life and he could tell you stories that would intrigue you and, 'cause he'd been everywhere. He'd been in the Air Force before he was a fisherman, and so he knew all kinds of stories and would keep us enthralled with them. And he also, after my mom died in 1962, he kind of helped my dad keep us together as a family. And then, my next brother, Norman, I don't really know. He came to visit my mom periodically. I don't know him too well. Then my brother, Sam, he lives here in Alaska. He lives over in Homer. He comes through and visits me once in a while. He's just full of life. I really enjoy him and his family. Once my family out, after Unga, moved to

Sandpoint, Alaska. I have three sisters and two brothers that live there, actually. Sandpoint is right next to Unga, Alaska. It's just a hop and skip. In fact, I understand from the history that the children from Sandpoint used to go to school in Unga. They'd just boat over and go to school there. It's kind of interesting to me. I never knew that. But, uh, I have another brother, Glen, who lives here at Kodiak, at Port Lyons. And I have a brother, Dan, that lives in Alaska, off the island. And he's the one who comes and visits me more often than anyone else. We're closest in age. And of my sisters, my sister Nellie and I were the closest, but she now has passed on. And she was also my dad's favorite of the elder sisters because she was full of life, and she looked like a big Italian mamamia, really, because she just had that, she was a big Native lady. And, she looked like she was permanently pregnant because she was deformed when she had polio, when she was younger. I had, another sister, Virginia, who lives over in the mainland, and she has, by the way, 13 children, and about a hundred grandchildren I guess by now, and, uh, not really, (chuckle) and then I have a sister I've never met. Her name is Christine, and she lives in Iowa somewhere. She's married to a Methodist preacher. Then I have a sister, Mertle, who kind of keeps everybody together. She's the next after my brother, Dan, and she's kind of like the family historian. She knows everything: all the relatives, all the aunts and uncles. And then my sister, Florence, lives also in, they both live in Sandpoint, by the way. And, she's one of the older sisters, and she's just come to visit me last year with her husband. They've had some interesting lives, too. But they both live in Sandpoint, and they're ex-fishermen, and like that life there, and I don't think either one of them

graduated from high school. Then my sister that's closest in age to me, Alice,... the interesting story about her is that she was adopted out to the teachers at Unga when I was there, when I was younger, and I think I probably grieved over it, and I don't really remember. Her nickname was Lala, and we still call her that. She lives down in the Seattle area. And then, the ones of my immediate family: my sister, Frances, who is a year younger than I lives in San Diego, with her husband and her son, and then, my brother, Bjorne, lives in Sandpoint, and my other sister, Laiv, lives in Sandpoint. By the way, Bjorne and Laiv are, (we call her Leafy) they're both Norwegian names- my father's influence on the family. And she, Leafy, lives there and she has four children, some of them are in college right now. And my mother had us one right after another, so we're like a year apart, and that's it, for the Lee family, anyway. And that's all my family, and brothers and sisters. I have tons of aunts and uncles, and I don't know half of them, because I haven't been back to the village of Sandpoint since 1959.

KR: Is this real common, for the people who are in the villoges to stay generation after generation, or are they also part of the transient populations today?

RW: I think some stay, and some are transient because many people that lived in Sandpoint during my early age have moved down to the Seattle area. They live down there, now. In fact, I have quite a few relatives out there, because that's where everybody went after fishing to go spend their money. You know, you didn't go to Anchorage to buy things, you went to Seattle to do your orders.

And usually they took their boats down that way to go get repairs, down at Tacoma boat yards. So, that's what the traffic to Seattle is, by the ocean. And the big city!

I believe I mentioned that my mom died in 1962, and I was just eleven years old, and my dad raised us, the rest of us, four, five of us. My brother, Dan, was still at home, my sister, Merle, decided to go back to Sandpoint and marry a local fisherman there. And so we, there was five of us at home and my dad raised us with the Norwegian discipline. He had the Lutheran influence background there, so he, uh, was the authoritarian, so we didn't really fear him, but he just had to say one time: he spoke and we listened, we jumped. Not actually jumped, but we obeyed, actually, 'cause he had to have a smooth running household and we all had our specific duties to do, and chores, and he taught all of us how to cook, and, basically how to take care of our household on our own. And his experience from raising children from when he was in Kodiak in the forties, he helped raise John Holland's children, which, by the way, is Holland Ranches, which is where, Saint Marys is right now. And my dad said he could have had the property there for three thousand dollars when he was younger, but he was single and he didn't care to have it then. Eh, you know hind sight's always 50-50, or 20-20, whatever (chuckle). Anyway, the Welfare almost took us away from our dad, but the local people ran interference and said, "Give him a year, see how he does with the kids by himself." And since my dad was at home, anyway, and he was there all the time, basically he was mother and father- he was Mr. Mom, the original!

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For an index of other recordings in this collection see the index:

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