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INTERVIEW WITH MARCILEE JONES  
IN KODIAK, ALASKA  
ORAL HISTORY

ED: Why don't you start Marcy, by telling me how you first came to Alaska; how, why, when, etc.

MJ: OK. Harold and I were married in Los Angeles. I was 18 years old. We were married the day after I turned 18. Harold and his brother had just gotten out of the service. This was in 1946. They were reading some articles in the Los Angeles Times about Alaska and the opportunities of Alaska. So, when we first got married I was working at Smith-Beater Co. and Harold was working at Good Year Tire. Both mundane jobs. Especially since he had been in the Merchant Marine and all over the world. He didn't think his job was very exciting and so he and his brother decided to come to Alaska. By the time we sort of got to it I found out I was pregnant and I decided that was the end of that because people in AK only live in igloos and burn coal oil lamps and there's no such thing as hospitals. But there were quite a few young people at East Los Angeles Church of Christ that had come up to Juneau to help establish the church there. These were all friends of Harold's and his brother's. Some of them wrote letters back and said there was a modern hospital, people lived in modern houses, and everything was just fine. I thought, "No, I couldn't go," but his brother and sister-in-law went up and wrote back saying everything was fine. Well, my mother was dead set against it and I always obeyed my mother. I decided we were not going. One day my mother almost forbade me to go and I was married and 18 so I decided we were going. We were married in Sept. of 1946 and our first baby was born in Juneau. Three of the kids were born there.

We had bought our boat on the G.I. Bill and we thought we could buy both a house and a boat. So, we only used half to buy a business, business fools that we were. When it came time to buy a house we couldn't use the G.I. Bill and all there was to buy in Juneau was mansions and shacks. I couldn't afford a mansion and I didn't want a shack. So, we went down to Everett and bought a house there. And our life was from Everett to Pelican twice a year. I would completely move out of the house and get on the boat

and put the kids in school in Pelican until school was out and then in October, November take them out and go down to Everett and put them in. There weren't any fishing seasons then. You could fish as long as the weather would let you fish. We fished only salmon. We did live in a tent at first and finally built a house in Pelican. It was like a Tom Sawyer's paradise.

ED: Help me with my geography. Whereabouts is Pelican?

MJ: Pelican is just right out of Juneau on Chichagof Island. Chris (my son) always wished his kids could have a childhood like he did. Which I thought was pretty nice. Then the kids got into the upper grades and Anita (my daughter) had to take her first year of high school by correspondence course. That was very difficult. We started flying down for the kids to go to school in Everett and Harold would stay to fish until October, November. He would come down to work in the shipyards in the winter.

ED: Were there alot of families doing that, moving around?

MJ: Yes, there were. It really was a very fun-type life. Whenever we would travel it would be during the day. It was a very small boat with the family aboard. We would stop in different coves at night. We would try to stop at a different place we had never been before. Later on we always had our cat and dog and one trip we had two squirrels. Other times we had a fur seal and a sea otter.

We had alot of storms. I had been frightened within an inch of my life a few times. But, Harold was always telling us, "Don't worry, it's always going to be better, everything's going to be fine," which always helped. If he had shown one little bit of fear that would have been the end of it. And I didn't dare show any fear because of the kids. We did alot of singing. One of our favorite songs was "The Old Rugged Cross". We sang alot of church songs and hymns. Usually we sang all the way through a storm.

In Pelican I worked several different jobs. I would work in the office at the Pelican's Cold Storage. One year I worked at the meat department cutting up meat. To get to the office I started taking the skiff because you couldn't get to and from our house except when the tide was out. We could walk across the tide flats.

ED: How large a community was Pelican?

MJ: Approximately 100 people during the winter. About 300 during the summer. It was a "booming" community. It was strictly a fishing village. A lot of boats would deliver there, but wouldn't actually stay there. Pelican had a cannery and a cold storage. There was a Filipino community. You could smell their good food cooking! And I had a little garden the size of this table. We had plenty of stray pets; sparrows and a Great Horned Owl, and an otter, and the fur seal.

ED: When you moved to AK for the first time was that a culture shock for you?

MJ: Well, somewhat because of course I was still very young. But, we had instant friends and that helped because they were already there and we helped establish the church there in Juneau. I was used to a lot of warmth because I was from Southern California and here it was raining all the time.

ED: You said Harold was fishing salmon at that time?

MJ: Yes. We bought our boat in Juneau. He had never fished before, but he was in the Merchant Marine so he knew about boats. Sunday afternoons we walked up and down the docks and we found a boat and bought it.

ED: Did you go fishing with him at that time?

MJ: Yes, I did. First he went out halibut fishing and he took a fella with him that had done halibut fishing. Then I went out with Harold knowing absolutely nothing about boats and water. I was too stupid to know when to be afraid. I went right out there in the storms and didn't know beans about anything. I learned. I never was seasick. Then we had that accident and I wouldn't go near the water for a year.

ED: Would you mind recounting that story for me again?

MJ: Harold had taken the boat to Auke Bay. Of course, in those days there were no radios and I didn't know he was coming or anything and he and a

friend, Dick, hitchhiked up to Juneau. At that time you couldn't go from Auke Bay to Juneau without going around Douglas Island. We decided to go on a picnic after church with the baby and a few friends. It was beautiful weather and we told everybody we would only be gone a little while and we'd be back to church that night, which was our full intention. We didn't have any instruments to help guide us, a compass maybe and there weren't such things as weather forecasts. About halfway around the trip the weather started getting rough and it got worse and worse. I put the baby up in her bunk that Harold had built in the pilot house. Now the pilot house was only 6X6. I went below to the bunks down the ladder. I got in the bunk. Harold and our friends were in the pilot house with the baby. The next thing I heard was Harold yelling down to me and I woke up. He yelled, "Get up! We've been hit! The boat is sinking!" So I got up and climbed up the ladder and went straight to the baby's bunk and she wasn't there. So I asked, "Where's Punky?" Harold said, "Don't worry about the baby. Get into the skiff!" Well, he might as well have asked me to fly to the moon because I wasn't going to leave without my baby. I was also pregnant with our second child and it was pretty late in the pregnancy. I think it was Dick who told me the baby was already on the other boat and to get into the skiff. Harold had put her on the other boat as the two boats slapped together, but I didn't know this at the time. When I got into the other skiff I just stood there. I couldn't figure out what was going on. Dick finally pushed me down. He and I went hand over hand from one side of the boat to the other side and as we were going our hands were getting wet from the the stern going down. Then we got to the other side and Dick told Harold, "Harold, you had better jump. She's going down and we've got to get away from here." Harold was up on the bow and I could see he had a line in his hand. I found out later he was trying to throw a line to the other boat. I looked at the other boat and it was headed toward Juneau away from us. They had decided there were no survivors and they were going on to town without us. Harold jumped in the skiff and the oars had floated away so they were paddling away from the boat as it was going down. I looked over my shoulder and I remember thinking, "Well, it's just like in the movies," because just as I watched, all the lights were on in the boat and the bow shot way up in the air and as it slowly sank I could see the lights way, way underneath the water. It's funny what goes through your mind. They didn't know how far off shore we were so they kept paddling with their hands and Harold said he didn't want me to get in the water because it was cold and he didn't want me to lose the baby.

We found out later that Mary Daroff saw us get into the skiff as they were pulling away in the other boat and told the captian she saw us. She finally persuaded the captain to turn around by crying and screaming and kicking and I don't know what all. They did turn around and come back to get us. Harold said they had tried to throw us a great big hauser and he had yelled to them to throw us something smaller because if that line had hit us it would have sunk us. As soon as we got on board the skiff we were in disappeared. It went under. They took me down below for coffee and to see the baby. I remember saying, "I will never, as long as I live, go aboard a boat again."

ED: And did you?

MJ: Oh yeah. But, I didn't for a long time.

I wanted to go South to go see my parents. I hadn't seen them for a long time. This was after the second and the third baby had been born and we were living in a little house at the time. Harold said we didn't have the money for the steamship so the only way we could go home was if he took us in the boat to Seattle and then down. So, that's the time I got back on the boat. After that we started making trips back and forth. We lived that life until 1967. Than Harold bought a bigger boat and came up to Kodiak for the shrimp. We actually moved up here permanently into Kodiak in 1970. Harold had been fishing out of Kodiak for some time with our two sons, Chris and Tony. And I thought, "Why am I living in Everett all by myself?" So, without telling anybody I hopped on the plane and came to Kodiak while Harold was out fishing. I was standing on the dock when Harold came in. And the funny thing was it was our 25th wedding anniversary and Harold said to Chris before they got in, "I wouldn't be surprised to see your mother standing on the dock when we get there." So, neither one acted surprised to see me. He couldn't leave the boat on our anniversary so I sat on the edge of the dock watching Harold mend net.

We were able to live in a trailer in Jackson's Trailer Court for the winter. A friend let us stay in their trailer. Then I was offered a job as bookkeeper at the Daily Mirror by Wayne Catulla.<sup>SP?</sup> He asked me how long I was going to be here. I told him, "Well, you know fishing. I could be here two weeks or two years or twenty-five years!" So, he told me to take my coat off and get to work right then and I did. Now we were officially

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settled. The longer we were in Kodiak the better we liked it.

ED: During the time when you were going out on the boat with Harold were there many women doing that kind of a thing?

MJ: Down at Pelican there were a lot of families doing that. In fact, there were a lot of people who made swings for the children up on the booms of the larger boats. Maybe it wasn't real common, but a lot of families did. It was a family fishing. Every summer I went out with Harold shrimping. It was really nice because during our trips from Southeast Alaska he could take a nap and I could run the course. Eventually we got a fathometer and he would tell me how far to stay off the shore. He would tell me at what time to change the course.

ED: Did you ever have any hair-raising experiences while Harold was sleeping and you were in charge?

MJ: Yeah, I did. And I would scream for him to get up there. I also don't believe in reading in the pilot house. If you are in charge of that boat you are watching at all times. It is interesting because sometimes some of the crew members would resent it. I had been on a boat a lot longer than they had, but because they were the crew, macho men, they figured I didn't know beans about anything. One time I remember I was in the pilot house just standing there and there was a guy on watch. Something had gone wrong, he got too close to something and he didn't know what to do. So, I reached over and turned off the "pilot" so he could take over by hand. Well, he blew apart! Harold came up and I told him what I had done and he said, "That's exactly right, that's exactly what should have been done." So I felt better.

Sometimes when we were out on the boat I would cook. Occasionally I would find a crew member who would resent that because he was the cook and he wanted to cook. After awhile I would go on the boat, but would not raise a hand to do anything. I was there to sit and read books and enjoy conversation and singing with Harold.

ED: Did that last very long?

MJ: Until the shrimping quit. That was approximately 1981. I never went crabbing or anything like that.

ED: So, is that when you started staying home?

MJ: Yes.

ED: So Marcy, what is your current position here at home?

MJ: If you want to sound real fancy I guess I'm Harold's administrative asisstant, HA, HA. I do all the books and have it on computer. I have a helper now because working for two boats (the Marcy J. and the Anita J.) got to be too much. I was working 8, 10, and 12 hours a day until I got help. Now I don't work more than 4 hours a day. That might be 7 days a week, but never more than 4 hours. I do all the bills and take care of all the calls when Harold is gone fishing or down in the shipyards which may be up to 5 or 6 months at a time. If there's a call where someone needs to talk personally to Harold I send him a message or have them call him. Sometimes stockbrokers don't want to talk to me. They want to talk to Mr. Harold Jones. I don't mind, but Harold always says, "You take care of it." One time a guy almost got rude and said he wanted to talk to Harold. I told him he could talk to Harold all he wanted to, but I made out the checks, so he had better talk to me! And so he did. He calmed right down. He was real nice after that!

ED: You came up here in 1947. So, you were here when AK became a state?

MJ: Actually, we were on the boat between Everett and Pelican.

ED: Do you remember hearing things about it?

MJ: Yes, at that time we had a radio and we heard the events over the radio.

ED: Did you notice any changes in AK after it had become a state?

MJ: The first thing I noticed was that more people started to come into AK. People used to fly up and come in by steamship. The Alaska steamship

was no longer in business. You see, a lot of young men used to come up on Alaska steamship by steerage so they didn't have to pay as much money. And we came up by AK steamship. What I noticed was the greatest influx of people was when the ferry started and I can't remember when that was.

It seemed like that opened a lot of access for a reasonable price. In some ways that's good and some ways it isn't.

ED: What ways would you consider that to be good?

MJ: I think it's wonderful for tourists and for people who want their families up here. Also, for people living here who want to go out on trips. The bad part I think, it seems that it has opened up access to the drug problem. Maybe it's just coincidental. It just seems like it opened AK up to a lot of transient people who didn't want to stay and make AK their home.

I'd like to finish by saying that wherever Harold is that's my home. Harold first bought his boat, it was only a 38 footer, and I was pregnant at only 18. Several friends would say to me, "Don't let Harold get that boat, talk him out of it." I thought to myself, "I probably could. I could turn on the tears and tell him I didn't want him to." But, then I thought to myself, "He is going to be the bulk of the breadwinner and I want him to be happy in his work." I never wanted him to feel he could have done something if I hadn't stopped him. I didn't want that responsibility. It is my philosophy that he is the head of this home and the main breadwinner and it is my duty and privilege to help him in any way I can. And that's always been my philosophy and I have always done so. I believe I am married to a truly happy man.

We have been married 45 years and I have contributed part of our marriage success to some promises. We promised "never to let the sun go down on our wrath," and "never leave each other's presence angry at each other." We have always lived by that and it works. We also believe in prayer. Before we do anything and while Harold or my sons are out at sea I pray for them diligently. I do believe God listens to our prayers because "a righteous man availeth much." I believe I have received a lot from God, not necessarily materially, but in many other ways.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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