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History of Alaska  
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INTERVIEW WITH HAZEL JONES

On first meeting Hazel Jones I could see that she was a congenial and good-natured person who liked to share her love of Alaska with others. As I entered her beautiful home which overlooked the town of Kodiak I noticed an incredible amount of Alaskan artwork. I was overwhelmed with the collection of Alaskan treasures which decorated her inviting and cozy home. It was also noticeable the pride that Hazel Jones felt about living in Alaska and being present during some of the most memorable parts of Alaska history.

The following is an interview taken on November 9, 1991 with Hazel Jones:

SB: When did you arrive in Kodiak?

HJ: June 1941

SB: Who did you arrive with?

HJ: My mother and dad, two older sisters, one older brother, and my youngest brother who was three at the time. We arrived on the "Denali" which was an Alaskan steamship. Planes weren't flying in Alaska too much except for military use. We came over from Ketchikan. We had lived there for two years.

SB: Were you surprised to be moving to Kodiak at the time or was it an expected move?

HJ: My dad Alfred Owen owned a shingle mill and we lived on Lake Washington in Kenndale right at the end of the depression in 1939, and there wasn't alot of work before that. When the depression hit, he owned a lumber yard with his dad in Seattle. They built houses and carried loans on the houses. When the depression hit the people were not able to pay off the loans so that hit hard. He graduated from the University of Washington and moved around a great deal trying to find work. It was really tough times. We lived in Kenndale for two years. He decided to tear the mill down and take it to Alaska. With the forest service's permission he was able to build it in Mud Bay (in Ketchikan). He also took with him some banny roosters and went across on the barge. He came north and we stayed with his dad and mother. We came up on an old freighter called the "Tongass" which can now

be seen in Sausalito, California. It was quite a time coming up north. Mom, Didi, Fred, and I came up after the mill and house were built. My sister was in kindergarten at the time and I was only four. It didn't turn out to be a good venture because nobody wanted to buy shingles. So then my dad procured a job in Kodiak, but transportation wasn't provided to Kodiak so he went to work in the cannery downtown with my mom. My brother Bud, who was thirteen at the time, took care of us. They got enough money together to afford tickets so we could come over on the "Denali." At that time they were building the base up here. They realized that there was a good possibility of a war pending. They were furiously building out here and Norm Sutliff was one of the first carpenters out here. My dad went to work for the employment office, and there was a mass of people. I can remember when we pulled in on the boat my brother said his first recollection was of me bawling because I thought we were going back to the big city. We had been living in the boondocks for two years, and even at six years old Kodiak wasn't my idea of a place where I wanted to get off. So my mom took us to the Island Fountain, which would have been right straight down Center Street where Subway is. We went in and got a big ice cream cone. We had no place to go even though we were supposed to have a house when we arrived here. There were thousands of people. There were 15,000 civilians, and something like 35,000 military. They built the entire base in three years. The road had been built by the time we got here. My dad took a job as Chief Clerk out on the base. The man that he was working for said he knew of a house on Tagura that we could stay in, as the lady who owned it was out fishing. She had a set net site in Ouzinkie. We moved into this little house and I recall alot of little mice running around. Evidently she must have been a lady that provided some services because in the middle of the night men came knocking at her window. Mom used to give us red pepper for the mice, but then we would all end up sneezing.

SB: Did your father actually help build part of the roads?

HJ: No, he was involved in the building of the base. Then we found a house right behind what was the firehouse at the time. It was only one bedroom, but we had a place for a little while and it had running water and lights. It was pretty hard to get a toehold anywhere. Later on they found another house, called the "pinkhouse." It was supposed to be a haunted house, it had been built during the Russian days. There was a livingroom, bedroom, and kitchen, and a shed where there was a still. So we stayed there. There were alot of air raids, and boats were running in and out of the channel. They had to dredge out the channel. They had it all mined out there for

submarines. They had a net with all these mines and they had mine sweepers out there. Every Sunday in the town square where the Cherrier and King and the Kodiak Hotel were located they used to demonstrate how to put out firebombs, --- and when they would have the air raids, because sometimes the Japanese were only sixty miles away at a time, they said it was the fog that protected us.

SB: Did you have alot of blackouts?

HJ: We had them all the time. You had to have the windows blocked. The women had to get their shopping done early in the morning before the military came to town because there were so many people that you couldn't even cross the street. Even though we had all those people they only had one sheriff and a volunteer fire department. They never had any really serious problems, and the military always had the MP's. They'd come down with these billy clubs and throw these kids into the drunk tank and haul them back to the base.

SB: There was a time that I had read about when they evacuated alot of the women and children, did this affect Kodiak?

HJ: Yes, mom wouldn't go, she said this is my home I don't have any other home to go to. That is how we happened to get our house. They evacuated all the women to Seattle. The airstrip was the first one built we didn't really have good air coverage. We had alot of ground forces.

SB: Did a lot of people you know leave?

HJ: We didn't really get to know them, we just knew that they weren't here. I remember we would have been a part of those going but my mother refused to leave.

SB: Did you ever have any actual incident with the Japanese?

HJ: They never got this far, they made a number of attempts. It was an eminent thing at all times. They knew this area like the back of their hands. When you consider that they were up as far as Dutch Harbor at the time. I remember when that incident happened and my dad was talking about it. Alot of the native people were in prison camps. They didn't want any of that information to get out to the lower 48, they were afraid that people would panic knowing that the Japanese were that close. In fact the men, (the soldiers) thought they were going to Africa. They didn't even have the clothes to come up here and half of them died of exposure. It was a Russian priest that was the spy in Unalaska. Ms. Chavnikoff was from Atka originally and she was one of the lay readers

and helped cleaned the church and look after everything. The priest would never let them go into the back room. He had a wicker basket on a table back there and that's where he kept a radio. He was able to get off the island but evidently he was raised in Japan and he gave the signal when to attack.

SB: I imagine Kodiak has changed a great deal in the past year. Did you leave Kodiak at some point and then return?

HJ: My dad did many things, when we moved into the "pinkhouse" there was a lady next door who knew Bob Chamberlain who came up in 1898 with the Gold Rush to Nome. He told one story after another about the Gold Rush. Old Bob used to tell us these stories before we went to bed at night. Bob told my dad about Marmot Island and about the red and silver foxes he had taken out and left on the island. He talked my dad into going out there with him. We were going out there for three months. I was in the second grade at the time, and my brother was in high school, so he stayed behind. It was in October and we took all our supplies with us. There was this little 32' boat we were taking. As we were going out the channel they had to open it up because it was all mined, evidently they can open it up. The guy (Bob) said, "If I go out Ouzinkie Narrows past Three Sisters I think I can avoid most of the mines because we have a flat bottom boat, so we should clear them." Then away we went. They had no outboards at that time so you had to row. We arrived on the island, and there was a small three bedroom house there. We spent the winter out there. Bob Vonscheele was supposed to pick us up in three months. He hit a rock and his boat sunk, but he survived. Later on he got another boat but it was cut in half by what I thought was a Coast Guard Cutter but it might have been the Navy, it went right through it. It happened in the Whale Pass area. Maybe the sun was shining wrong and they didn't see him. A woman and a child lost their lives because that part of the boat sunk, but Bob survived. We didn't have any radio or communication. We did have a short wave radio and listened to Tokyo Rose every night so that we knew what was going on with the war. Five months later my brother was able to get the Coast Guard to come out and get us. We finally made it back okay, and went into Danger Bay. Then we went up to Fairbanks. My dad got a job with the Wartime Commission. They were just building bases up there. We only stayed for one year, then we went back to Kodiak. We were in Kodiak when the actual war ended.

SB: Was there a big celebration when the war ended, when did you hear that the war had ended?

HJ: I was in school. I was in the fourth grade.

SB: Did you continue to live here?

HJ: We lived here until 1948. My dad had gotten into the fisheries and fished off and on. My dad got us a little house up on the hill. It was still a problem to find accommodations in Kodiak. We still fish the gill net sites today in Uganik Bay. We are probably the oldest residents out there. That's my recollection of the war years.

SB: After the war ended how long did the military stay?

HJ: They were here for quite some time. I'm not sure when Fort Greeley moved out.

SB: Were you here during the Tsunami also?

HJ: We were in Anchorage.

SB: What was that like?

HJ: It wasn't any fun. My son James was only six months old. We were having dinner. It started to shake, we always had alot of earthquakes, but it didn't stop.

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(Back to the war years .....)

HJ: My dad walked over one day and introduced himself to Norm Sutliff, and asked him if he would like to start a carpenter shop with him. Norm said that it sounded like a fine idea and that was the beginning of Owen/Sutliff's, which is now the Sutliff's of today. That's how Sutliff's had come about; because they had finished the base and Norm thought that starting the business was a fine idea. Meanwhile, my dad sold his part of the business to Norm and we got started into the fisheries. As a matter of a fact, the new Fisheries Center is named after my dad. He was in the legislature for fourteen years and represented Kodiak and the chain for many years. In fact, the reason that the State Fish and Game exists today is because my dad introduced the legislation to put it through. He did many things, as a matter of fact, someone that knew him quite well recently said to me that my dad did many things that people will never know about that benefited the state.

SB: Do you plan to stay in Kodiak?

HJ: Well, our roots are pretty deep. We just got through driving around Oregon and we made the big circle to

Portland and then back to Pilot Rock. It was lovely farmland and lots of cattle and I thought.... I'm glad I live where I live.

SB: I guess the last question I have is: What are the biggest changes that you have seen in Kodiak throughout the years?

HJ: I think the most significant change is that nothing really changed until the tidal wave. We were gone for fifteen years and when we came back nothing was even painted differently.

SB: How long has the movie theatre been here for?

HJ: Well, everything was replaced except for the museum by Urban renewal. At the time of the tidal wave the whole island had sunk by six feet or so. So they leveled all the hills in town. From 1948 to 1957 nothing had changed that I could see. The waterfront had all been taken out during the tidal wave. One of the kids had set the Russian Church on fire, they had a gold bible in the Russian church and it was the only thing that survived. It burned in about 1944 and didn't get rebuilt until 1947 but it did survive the tidal wave.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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