

11/26/91
Pamela J. Hummell
Alaska History Oral Interview

Interview with Toni Munsey

Born: Kodiak, AK; August 14, 1954
Parents: Park Munsey & Pat Munsey

TM: Dad came to Kodiak in 1941 in the Army for 2 years. He got out of the Army went to Anchorage and started to raise dogs (Sled dogs). He also worked in the gold? coal mines up there (Palmer area). He got hurt in a mine and went to a hospital in Anchorage where my mom was working, she and her sister were nurses there.

PJH: What did he do in the army?

TM: He was a rifle man.

PJH: Did he have anything to do with the invasion of Kiska and Attu?

TM: No. He never saw anything happen here. He fell in love with Kodiak he knew he had to come back here to live. I remember him talking about it as a kid saying that he knew instantly that this was where he wanted to be.

PJH: Did he ever tell you any stories about it:

TM: Not the military part. He talked a lot about being in Palmer with the dogs and racing dogs. And how dangerous it was work in the coal mines. You're going to have to figure out whether that's coal mines or gold mines.

PJH: When did he get the bear camp (Munsey's Bear Camp)?

TM: He got the bear camp in 1952. He also worked at the Kitoi Bay, Fish and Game was starting a hatchery. In fact that's where I was just about born there, they had to fly in real quick and I was born in town (Kodiak). Then we moved out to camp. It was pretty rugged. When we moved out there it was an old house that nobody had really taken care of over the years. No running water, no toilet. I remember going out, at night you didn't you had a bucket, but I remember going out, walking way away from the house to go the the bathroom. Slowly Dad got a little bit better at what he did and he got a pilots license and we bought a plane and then we were big time. We could fly back and forth to town.

PJH: Did your mother teach you?

TM: My mom taught us. We had one room that was just for school. At one time I think she was teaching four grades at once, you know she was good. Dad would fly in (to Kodiak) like once every couple of weeks and pick up the mail and stuff. I don't know it was a fun way to grow up. It was different. We didn't know we were different. We'd come to town and we didn't have a car and I can remember Dad walking with us and there were five of us and we'd all walk right behind him, I know people thought we were odd.

PJH: Who owned Munsey's Bear Camp before your dad?

TM: Bill Poland owned it before Dad. There was a gold mine was right up the bay (UYAK) from us about a quarter of a mile. The care takers used to live there (at the camp) it was also where they made all the alcohol.

PJH: A still?

TM: A still. As a kid I remember Dad used to pay us a penny for every piece of glass we found on the beach because we had a float plane and the glass would puncture the floats. When they cleared out of that place they threw every bottle on the beach I mean we're talking hundred and hundreds of bottles.

PJH: You must have thought you were filthy rich.

TM: Well, we'd make pretty good money my brothers (Mike and Bobby) used to break them up cause it was a penny for every piece. The beaches were covered. The walls in the house, they'd take five gallon cans and flatten them and they'd put newspaper on top and that was their insulation. The newspapers from that time were just amazing. There was alot of people in that day. The ships that came in and out of there where 2 or 3 hundred feet long. They'd bring the ore out... They didn't process gold there they had the rock there it would be brought out. I think one of their last trips they hit a rock right outside of Amook island which is in Uyak Bay and the boat is still down there ... It's too deep to dive on.

PJH: And it's still got the gold ore on it?

TM: Well, they say it doesn't I think if it did they would have dove by now. It was coming in. Everything is still there (at the gold mine) they blew up some of this

stuff when they left because they didn't want anyone else to using it. All the tunnels are there.

PJH: It was a hard rock mine?

TM: Yes, they had trains running through there.

PJH: Do you know about when all this was?

TM: The house was built in 1912. So I would say in the 1912 area. There's a grave yard there where the bootleggers, ...a nice fenced in beautiful graveyard for his wife. He died and so she buried him there. I think she's buried in Larsen Bay. Dad always wanted to be out doors he was from New Hampshire and always spent alot of time outside....

PJH: What did your mom think of that?

TM: She was from West Virginia but she was in Anchorage anyways so she obviously... You know they (Pat and her sister) were kind of tough ladies for that time because they came up together to Alaska, didn't know anybody just decided, I think they did have a far off uncle or something that they knew his name.

PJH: What was your Mom's maiden name?

TM: Atkins.

PJH: He (Park) was a bear guide. Right?

TM: Yah. He also was a pilot he flew for different airlines at different times whenever the business was slow at that time Kodiak Western and he also had a charter business....and then he finally went to the main land he started branching out a little bit and went across the straits (Shelikof) to Peshchurov Lake. That was about 1960 to 1965 and the whole family used to fly over there and set up house for a month and we'd all fly back. You're out in the middle of nowhere I mean gee it was horrible over there.

PJH: Did you ever have any experiences with bears coming up to the cabin?

TM: I can remember a couple times but this is pretty recent in the last 15 years or so. I was cooking over there. We were sleeping and we had a light on outside. The bear came between our tent and a tree you could see every hair on the bear from the light just leaning up

against the thing. They always were in the camp. They didn't want to hurt us. They just wanted the meat. We hunted for caribou and bear and moose over there. They took our meat all the time we just kind of put up with it. My dad wrecked (the plane) a couple of times over there just about died one time. It's real tough country over there. Landed upside down one time out on the tundra with a couple of hunters. They walked out. I remember one time being in the plane, it was just a single engine plane and we were coming up ^Karluk flats going to the mainland and we ran out of gas in one tank of the plane. You had to switch over (tanks) on the floor. Something was wrong with the knob and it wouldn't switch, the engine just quit. Dad and I are looking at each other...and he just keeps messing with it and switches over and he starts it up and it starts... I hate to fly I grew up flying around here and its a lot safer than it used to be I remember flying through snow storms that we had no business being in.

PJH: Where were you during the tidal wave.

TM: I was in town. My family was out (at camp). My sister (Patty) and I were boarding out because we had started going to school 1/2 year in town. I remember things started falling off the wall and I remember Patty and I starting to laugh, we didn't know any better then we realized latter that we were scared... There were people running around everywhere and going nuts but they weren't scared they were just kind of frantic they didn't know what was happening. It was hard because our family wasn't there ...there was no radio communication. The rest of our family was at camp and theirs was a real strange one too. When the tidal wave hit there (Amook) it didn't hit like Kodiak. It hit in a big tide...all the water went out of the bay you could walk to the island there was no water.

PJH: You could walk to Amook Island?

TM: No, but the bay was basically dry and then it came in but not as a wave it came in as a swirling, you couldn't have stood up in it and it just kept coming and kept coming it came into the house it came into the shed they started heading for higher ground because they knew at that point it was going to be trouble.

PJH: Where was the place you were staying at when the tidal wave hit.

TM: It was an aleutian home. The people we were staying

with ran a cannery down on Tagura Road. We went down there because he had to check out his cannery and everything was demolished. None of the boats were up because the tidal wave hadn't hit yet. People didn't know, they were wandering around and sirens were going off and it got dark and I remember going up Pillar mountain where low cost housing is now. That's where our car was in the line that line went all the way to the tip of Pillar mountain you could see headlights behind us for miles and miles. People were getting kind of of frantic then.... I don't remember alot afterwards....but still if we have a tremor I feel my legs go weak.

PJH: What school did you go to the elementary?

TM: I was ten. Mrs Beckford was my teacher. I guess people whose homes were messed up went to the school. People as always around here really pull together Solly's was open within about a week and they had a little frame building that said Solly's on the side....At that time that (bottom of Tagura Road) was where Kodiak Western and all the airplanes were. Right down where the Moonies would be around in there maybe where the transient float is. They had to get all those guys out of there real fast they didn't lose any (planes) I don't think.

PJH: Did you go to high school in Kodiak?

TM: Yes, where the junior high is now. The year I graduated is the year they opened the big new school. When I was a kid we never had swimming or anything because they didn't have a pool.

PJH: Who was the principal?

TM: Mr. Craig and Betty Springhill was principal at my elementary school. My elementary school was right down town. It (Kodiak) was so little then everything was right down town. One that really sticks out in my head is Ardingers because they always had the neatest display and it was right down town ... it always had musical instruments in the window because thats what they did then they did musical instruments I used to play the clarinet. That's where you got your clarinet they didn't sell furniture they just sold musical stuff. Christmas time, the holidays, they always had the best display in their window... They've just have always had that knack...

PJH: Why don't you tell me some more stories about the camp?

TM: This one I don't remember myself but I do remember it happening in my family it was a real big part it was very important. This man who we called Wild Bill Nekeferoff. He lived at Peshchurov Lake he felt that the land that my dad guided on was his. He was a native man from Egegik. He had a home down the lake, it was a hole in the side of the hill, really, and a roof on it. This man lived like an animal but he was amazing he did everything like an animal. You could see him coming down the beach and he'd go on the beach then he'd go up in the woods then he'd come down and go on the beach and that's how a lot of animals will walk... you could tell it was Bill for fifty miles away if you saw him because that's how he walked. I remember his stories from a child because everybody was afraid of him. He had killed people and that was known. The stories got really out of hand, that he took people out trapping, the people never came back. One point plane had flown over his place and seen people skinned, people hanging in a tree. He had skinned these people supposedly. Wild Bill was nobody to mess with. I was scared of him. I remember one time my sister and I, Jerry, were at Peshchurov and he came. My Dad wasn't there he was out hunting. He (Bill) had a hearing aid on I remember he wanted Dad to fly him to someplace to get his hearing aid fixed. We were like, Oh My God, this man is going to kill us, he's going to skin us and hang us in a tree. Dad is going to find us like that.

PJH: How old were you guys?

TM: We weren't very old eleven, twelve little kids. Dad came back when he was there and Dad was known far and wide for having a temper and he was furious at Bill for being there. He said, "Bill, I don't want you around here. I told you before don't come here." And Bill saying. "I was just introducing myself to your children everything's fine, it's fine." Bill always had a look in his eye like he was really crazy he just didn't look normal. They went out side, my Mom was also in camp, Bill had a rifle - my Dad was in front of him (Bill) picked up the rifle and aimed it at my Dad's back. Well, my Mother and Tom Curley, who's another guy who used to be here years ago was there, my Mother hit him (Bill) with a pan some kind that she picked up off the ground. Knocked Bill out, us kids are so scared we can't move we don't know what's going to happen. Dad and Mom kept him there, called the state troopers, they flew out and took him away. Even when we got home to Amook the worst thing you could say to any of us was "I think Wild Bill's coming. Doesn't that hand look like Wild Bill". We spent half our childhood in fear of this man. He supposedly went down in a boat called the

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Cape Uyak about ten years ago and everyone thought great fine he's gone. Then the guy shows up again he had killed a minister in Egegik.

PJH: You don't happen to remember if your family did anything in 1959 when Alaska became a state?

TM: No. I wouldn't be suprised if my Dad did because he was very much into Alaskan politics. I remember when Jay Hammond got elected the second time I thought my dad was going to come unglued. As much as he liked him (Hammond) he was real bad for the guiding business. He (Park) would call him on the phone. At that time we had ACS you had to call through like a marine operator. There was a lady there named Marge Graham. Her and her husband Bill Graham (he was a pilot). In fact she was there during the earthquake and really kept everybody calm out there saying Kodiak was still here she kept it going the whole time. She was in Kodiak in that green building where the satilite dish is (the RCA site next to the KIB offices). You could call the governors office and my Dad an Bill Pernell called him on a regular basis and I know they dreaded hearing from these guys (Park and Bill) because they were very down to earth and they didn't care what anybody thought of what they said. They just had a problem and they didn't mind voicing it. I know that when Bill called they'd just go "Oh, God it'ss that crazy guy from the bush. I think they listened a little bit more to what people wanted out in the bush because alot of Alaska was then out in the bush. I noticed this summer when i went down there (Munsey Bear Camp) the radio is quiet all the time. When I grew up the radio never stopped. That was your link to everything you would here some wife call her husband to tell him it was time to come home to dinner. Everything was on the radio you knew everybodies business you grew up knowing voices and not knowing faces. I would stand in line at the airlines to come home and I'd hear a voice behind me and I could tell you who it was in a second. I'd never seen them but I'd heard them my whole life.

PJH: So you graduated from Kodiak High School?

TM: 1972. Then went to Fairbanks (UAF) or I worked here for a year for Fish and Game, I worked in Karluk.

PJH: Doing what?

TM: We did stream surveys. I did that and then I went to Kitoi Bay where I worked in the hatchery. That's where my Mom and Dad worked together when they first came up here.

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My Dad did something at the hatchery I'm not really sure what, my Mom cooked. I met Val at Karluk. I was the only woman for a couple hundred miles. We went to Fairbanks and went to college he finished up college and I just took classes and had Monica (oldest daughter) and then came back home and spent two years at camp taking care of the camp for my Dad. Then moved into town. Now we go out there in the summer time. We don't go out there anymore to live but we might like to someday.

PJH: You were one of the first people to build out here (Russian Ck subdivision, Women's Bay) after the second land sale. What year was that?

TM: 1980 or 81 I think.... It was '80 because we built in '81.

PJH: Let's hear a little about the Flats?

TM: I remember the Flats way before that....I remember my Mom saying I don't care what you do just don't go out to the Flats.

PJH: And why did you come out to the Flats?

TM: Because it was fun. There was a lot of really (Hippies) fun people. I remember where the park is now there was a little white quonset hut at that time there was a man named Speedo Bob lived there..... Nobody lived between here and back up where Rose lives. About two or three quonset huts back in there where Tom Padiloki (lived). It was wild times.

PJH: What about Speedo Bob? Did you have any run-ins with him?

TM: All I remember about him was seeing him. I don't think I've ever spoken to him. I remember he had a lot of dogs, a lot of dogs 10 or 15 dogs. I remember when he got shot, the rumors were just flying. I don't know if they ever found who shot him. I could be wrong about him being down this way. Maybe he was up farther because there was somebody that lived up where Bridget and Mike (Milligan) live now. There was a home up there and there was a few scattered around and then on the other side (of the river) Nixons pretty much had that whole ranch area down in there, what is now Brechens pit and around in there and there's still a ranch down in there...

PJH: Tell us about the hippies?

TM: It was a wild place out here.... You didn't just come out here and go to a party you better know somebody. There was a lot of things going on out here that you didn't want the wrong people out here. You didn't want any people from the narcotics bureau out here. No Cops! You didn't want somebody that could cause some trouble those were liberal times but they weren't that liberal. I'm sure there were busts out here over the years. As you know this place has changed a lot. I see it in the last ten years. Ten years ago we thought nothing of livestock walking through our yards.

*** GARY, PLEASE DON'T LET THIS LITTLE EPISODE BE PUBLISHED FOR AT LEAST 30 YEARS. ***

PJH: Me! Livestock, Cow Divits! in my lawn. (Sucked me into that one Toni) And what did we do to cows that walked across our lawns when the boys were out fishing and hunting?

TM: We took care of them. We should have took care of a few more if we were smart we would have. But probably our best cow story is...It was early in the morning and I think we (Toni and Sidney Johnson) were still in our night gowns...It was a Sunday because we were thanking God later because there was no traffic. We had been so sick of our lawns getting destroyed by cows. It was getting bad to the point when Cowboy (Jim Cobis) would leave for work he would call back and say OK they're coming around the bend. Everybody had this little network worked out. Alright, here they (cows) come watch out for your kids or what everAny way we (Sid and Toni) look out there (Toni's lawn) and there they are so I call you (Pam) and say "Pam, do something about this cow".

PJH: You did not. You said "Pam, there's a cow in my yard SHOOT it!".

TM: So, I look out there and see Pam, I think you were in your robe weren't you, with a gun in her hand a very large gun and I hear this shot and I thinking that she's shot over this animals head. We're out on the front porch watching this cow sway from one side to the other ... pretty soon about the third or fourth sway it fell over. We were so shocked. We thought it was sick. That's how much we did not believe that Pam had actually killed the cow we thought it had died because it was sick. We put two and two together and realized that Pam Hummell had killed the cow. We (Pam, Toni, and Sid) spent the next couple hours going nuts trying to figure out what to do with this cow. Then we got a couple freinds, men who

still to this day remain nameless, I think, Pam and Sid were out there trying to cut it's throat, I'm not doing well with this at all, the kids were running around screaming and yelling that we're all going to go to jail. I think one of the funniest scenes is all those guys dressed in orange rain coats trying to butcher this cow, and every time a car would drive by they'd just start walking around the lawn like somebody is not going to notice this. We waited til night and you and I got the cow (carcass) into the back of that god awful truck of yours. What was that thing?

PJH: It was an old Chevy and it was loud remember.

TM: Barely ran.

PJH: The clutch didn't work.

TM: No. We got it into the bed of the truck and we went out to cliff side and found a spot and dumped it. It was dark and spooky. We got some meat off of it. We didn't probably get as much as we should have if we weren't so scared that we were going to go to jail. I still have a spot on that lawn where that cow died that's green. We waited years before we told anybody didn't we?... After that I thought we should have shot a few more. Like off my front porch when they'd be back there nobody would ever know. But we had to pick out here in the front where everybody could see us.

PJH: Anything you can remember about working a Kitoi Bay or Karluk?

TM: Well not really Katoei Bay; Karluk. We had a lot of run-ins with bears I'd grown up around bears and my Dad always saying most people brought it on themselves anything that would happen to you if you just left them alone they'd leave you alone, which wasn't always the case. This is a cabin that sits right on the side of the river ... and the weir is right there, a weir is a wooden structure that fish pass through and you count them so you get an idea how many fish have gone into the lake. That was our job to count them (salmon). We had a couple bears that we had named they were very very friendly in fact we probably weren't real smart because a bear is not a pet under any circumstances feeding them is not cute and we used to give them bacon an stuff. They got a little too friendly a couple times and they would come up to the window and just lick all over the window ... this cabin is not very big. At all times we had a 2x6 that went on a slant ... up to the door and it was a big wooden door

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whenever we were in the cabin we always had it up. We (Dana Reid) had a mother and two cubs get up on the porch looking for food ... They'd lean up against the door and lean up against the door and they'd get tired of that and go to the window and lick it. You spent alot of your time looking behind your back. Dana and I one time got chased that's all I remember about it, I totally blanked it out of my head. I just remember it was getting dark and Dana and I were going out in the skiff to do some surveys. He was in front of me and he turned around to say something to me and a bear came from the river up over the bank onto the trail that we were on. At that point she was about a 100 yards away....well she kept running down the trail and Dana was going Toni you've got to run she's coming. I' not going to run but I've been told all my life don't run which is pretty stupid at that point she's coming I should be running but I'm not I'm scared to death and I turn and I look at her and I she's coming and I just walk like she's can't touch me ...I don't know what I'm doing like I've lost my mind so I just walk like I'm pretending she's not there and she stops , she stops a ways down the trail and she just kind of looks at us for awhile, Dana filled me in on that I still don't remember to this day from when he told me to start running to the time we got to the boat it's just a total blank. We'd see 10 and 15 bear in a day but we were conscienses about making alot of noise. That helped. The place was infested with bears especially anything to do with fishing. We had to put up with a lot of tourists ... that didn't beleive in treating animals with much respect. We always had to stop tourists from taking long poles, used to get fish to move out of the way, it was not uncommon to have to get it away from some tourist they would get on the end of the weir and try to poke at a bear that was feeding at the other end of the weir. The whole time I was there nobody got hurt. I don't see why not some of them asked for it. We were probably as good as we could have been considering we were very young. and the only thing really stupid was that we'd feed them.

PJH: How old were you?

TM: 19 or 20. I was probably the first female hired by Fish and Game to work out in the weir camps. They never would hire a woman because they just didn't want women in there because it was all men and they didn't want to have a problem as they used to put it. They knew my family so they gave it a try and it worked out really well, I think. They realized that men and women can live together in a camp without having sex, it is possible. Especially the guys I worked with. Now you count by computer. It's

different people don't sit there with clickers and count actual fish going through anymore.

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