

MR. LARRY C. O'HARA
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
OFFICER'S WIFE'S CLUB
SANTA-TO-THE-VILLAGES

BY PETER K. AMSTUTZ
ON APRIL 14, 1993
FOR ALASKA HISTORY CLASS
KODIAK COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY REPORT

PETER: WE'RE HERE TODAY ON THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD SUPPORT CENTER; IT'S WEDNESDAY APRIL 14. I'M GOING TO HAVE AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH MR. LARRY O'HARA AND WE'RE GOING TO TALK A LITTLE ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCES WITH THE U.S. COAST GUARD'S OFFICER'S WIVES' CLUB SANTA CLAUS-TO-THE-VILLAGES PROGRAM. I GUESS WE'LL START OUT WITH HOW YOU CAME TO LIVE IN KODIAK, LARRY?

LARRY: WELL, I CAME UP HERE ORIGINALLY AS ASSIGNED BY THE FD&CC (FACILITIES DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION CENTER) PEOPLE OUT OF SEATTLE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, THE DAYCARE CENTER AND A LOT OF OTHER WORK THAT WAS GOING ON AND HAS CONTINUED OVER THE YEARS. I CAME FROM SEATTLE, HAD BEEN THERE FOR TEN YEARS. PRIOR TO THAT I WAS OVER IN ELLENSBERG, WASHINGTON AND MIGRATED THERE FROM NORTH DAKOTA, WHICH WAS MY HOME STATE. THAT'S WHERE WE FIRST STARTED THE SANTA CLAUSING IN 1958 AT THE REQUEST OF A FRIEND OF MINE, A GUY BY THE NAME OF CLYDE BULOCK, SO I DID IT OFF AND ON, AND DIDN'T DO IT REAL, REAL STEADY - (THE SANTA CLAUSING) - BUT I GOT UP HERE AND THE OLD EXCHANGE BUILDING 26 - THEY WERE LOOKING FOR A GUY WITH A BIG BELLY, I GUESS MORE THAN ANYTHING, SO I WAS JUST MORE THAN GLAD TO DO IT WITH A BORROWED SUIT AND I GUESS THAT WAS THE START OF IT ALL AND THEN I WAS INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN MANY OTHER ACTIVITIES WITH THE SANTA CLAUS ON THE BASE, HERE, AND WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY. THAT

PARTICULAR YEAR, WHICH WAS 1984, I WAS INVITED TO GO TO THE VILLAGES AND I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO GO TO AKHIOK AND OLD HARBOR. I WAS JUST SO THRILLED; IT IS REALLY SUCH A GREAT PROGRAM AND JANE CLARK IS TO BE THANKED FOR THAT BECAUSE JANE IS THE ONE, - SHE AND CAPTAIN CLARK (COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE SUPPORT CENTER WHEN HE WAS UP HERE) - THEY ORIGINATED THIS AND I DON'T REMEMBER THE YEAR, BUT SOME ODD YEARS AGO, AND IT'S CONTINUED BY THE OFFICER'S WIVES' CLUB AND IS ADMINISTERED BY THEM BUT EVERYBODY PARTICIPATES; THERE'S NO GENDER AND IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO YOUR HUSBAND OR WIFE IS-EVERYBODY PARTICIPATES IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY, AS WELL AS THE WIVES OF THE GUYS HERE ON BASE. I HAVE BEEN SO FORTUNATE, I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GO TO ALL THE VILLAGES-AKHIOK AND OLD HARBOR, INCLUDING THE DANGER BAY AREA. THAT WAS QUITE AN EXPERIENCE IN ITSELF. WHEN WE FIRST WENT THERE THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT, I GUESS, THEY JUST SAID TO COME AND TO HAVE SANTA CLAUS COME AND WHEN WE TRIED TO LAND THE H-3 (HELICOPTER) THERE WERE BARRELS AND PAPER AND TIN CANS FLYING ALL OVER THE PLACE. WE HAD TO ABORT (THE LANDING) UNTIL THEY GOT THE AREA CLEANED UP SO WE COULD COME IN AND LAND. VERY COLD THAT DAY, I REMEMBER.

PETER: DO YOU KNOW WHAT YEAR THAT WAS, LARRY?

LARRY: THAT WAS ABOUT 1988. YEAH, '88 MAYBE 80..., YEAH '88, I HAVE THE RECORDS AT HOME; I'M SORRY I DON'T HAVE THEM HERE, PETE. WE'VE HAD SOME GREAT EXPERIENCES BY VIDEO TAPING, YOU KNOW, FROM HELICOPTER TO HELICOPTER AND I'VE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY IN THE H-3 AND THE H-65 THE FIRST YEAR WE CAME

UP HERE AND SANTA CLAUS WAS KINDA PRIVILEGED TO RIDE WHERE IT WAS WARM AND QUIET (IN THE H-65) AND EVERYBODY ELSE HAD TO RIDE IN THE H-3 WHERE IT WAS COLD AND NOISY. WE'VE HAD SOME GREAT EXPERIENCES WITH SANTA-TO-THE-VILLAGES. I'VE HAD THE GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE AN INTERVIEW WITH MARRION STIRRUP, AND AGAIN, I WOULD HAVE TO GET THE YEAR FOR YOU, PETE, BUT IT WAS IN THE ALASKA MAGAZINE ON "LASTING IMPRESSIONS", THERE WAS AN ARTICLE IN THERE I FEEL VERY, VERY, VERY FORTUNATE AND I FEEL VERY PRIVILEGED TO BE PART OF THIS AND YOU KNOW SOMETIMES I THINK MAYBE WE'RE GETTING TO BIG FOR OUR BRITCHES, FOR ME ANYWAY. YOU KNOW, THEY HAD, EVEN A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, A SHORT BLURB, TEN SECONDS, MAYBE ON NATIONAL TELEVISION, ON CNN. SUE WORKMAN, LIEUTENANT JUNIOR GRADE SUE WORKMAN, (OUR ENSIGN I BELIEVE AT THE TIME) SUBMITTED THAT AND IT DID GET NATIONAL RECOGNITION.

I ALWAYS CHOSE OLD HARBOR AND AKHIOK, I GUESS, PETE, BECAUSE THERE IS A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF HISTORY IN THESE VILLAGES. LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE, TALKING TO THE PEOPLE, TALKING TO SCHOOL TEACHERS AND IT'S REALLY IRONIC THAT WHEN YOU GO THERE AS SANTA CLAUS YOU KNOW EVERYBODY BUT THEY DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE. SO WHEN YOU COME BACK INTO KODIAK HERE AND YOU SEE SO MANY OF THESE PEOPLE IN THE STREETS AND YOU SAY "HI, HOW ARE YOU DOING TODAY?" AND CALL THEM BY NAME, THEY LOOK AT YOU LIKE, "I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE", BUT THEY DON'T DARE SAY ANYTHING. THEY DARE BUT DON'T WANT TO, I GUESS, MAYBE IT'S AN EMBARRASSMENT.

BUT I HAD A GREAT EXPERIENCE WITH A YOUNG STUDENT AT OLD HARBOR, HER NAME WAS MOLLY MOORE. AND WHEN I FIRST STARTED GOING THERE, MOLLY WAS A SLOW LEARNER, SHE WAS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION I GUESS IS MAYBE THE WORD I SHOULD USE AND WHEN WE FIRST LANDED - THIS WAS BEFORE THE H-65 GOT UP HERE - AND I BELIEVE IT WAS 1985, CHRISTMAS '85; THE HELICOPTER WAS LANDING AND, OF COURSE THE STUDENTS WERE ALL ECSTATIC AND OUTSIDE AND THE SNOW WAS FLYING. IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SUN SHINY DAY BUT A LOT OF SNOW WAS FLYING, SO EVERYBODY WENT INSIDE TO THE SCHOOL, YOU KNOW THEY RAN INSIDE BECAUSE IT WAS COLD AND ALL OF A SUDDEN I NOTICED WHEN THE SNOW HAD SETTLED DOWN A LITTLE BIT THAT ONE SMALL YOUNG PERSON, THIS YOUNG LADY WAS STANDING OFF TO THE SIDE SO I WENT OVER AND I GRABBED HER HAND AND I ASKED HER IF SHE WOULD SHOW ME HOW TO GET INTO THE GYM, WHICH SHE DID, AND I LEARNED A LOT ABOUT MOLLY ON THE WAY IN. AND SO WE WALKED IN, PROBABLY A COUPLE HUNDRED FEET, OR SO, AND OVER THE YEARS I HAVE DEVELOPED A GREAT FEELING FOR MOLLY BECAUSE SHE WAITED FOR ME AFTER EVERYONE WAS GONE AND SHE SHOWED ME HOW TO GET BACK OUTSIDE AGAIN AND THEN A COUPLE OF YEARS LATER, I REMEMBER VERY, VERY EXPLICITLY, SHE GOT A LITTLE STUFFED POODLE, WHITE POODLE, AND I ASKED HER WHAT SHE WAS GOING TO NAME THE POODLE AND SHE SAID "I DON'T KNOW SANTA I'D LIKE YOU TO NAME IT FOR ME" SO, I COULDN'T THINK OF A NAME AND I USED TO HAVE A LITTLE POODLE, MY WIFE AND I. WE CALLED IT "TAFFY", SO I SAID "WELL, HOW ABOUT IF WE CALL IT "TAFFY"?" AND I THOUGHT "I'LL BE ABLE TO REMEMBER THAT NAME". SO, OF COURSE, IN MARCH OR APRIL WE GET LETTERS

FROM THE STUDENTS AND SANTA DOES. IT SAID "I'M DOING FINE"
AND I THANK YOU FOR ALL MY TOYS AND TAFFY'S DOING WELL; SO
THE NEXT YEAR, OF COURSE WE ASKED MOLLY HOW SHE WAS DOING.
"VERY WELL". AND OF COURSE SHE WAS VERY, VERY EXCITED WHEN
I REMEMBERED HER NAME BECAUSE SHE SAID "HE REMEMBERED MY
NAME! "HE REMEMBERED MY NAME!"

PETER: SOMETHING SPECIAL

LARRY: VERY SPECIAL AND IN MY HEART SHE'LL ALWAYS HAVE THAT PLACE
IN MY HEART. I ASKED HER "WELL HOW'S TAFFY DOING?" AND SHE
WAS JUST SHOCKED THAT SANTA CLAUS COULD KNOW ALL THIS
STUFF, AND THEY ALWAYS ASK A LOT OF QUESTIONS LIKE "HOW
COME YOU DIDN'T BRING THE REINDEER?" WELL, THE REINDEER ARE
RESTING FOR CHRISTMAS EVE "OR" YOU DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH SNOW
AND WE DIDN'T WANT THEM TO BE REALLY TIRED OUT FOR
CHRISTMAS EVE. SO YOU HAVE TO COME UP WITH A LOT OF EXCUSES
AS TO WHY YOU DON'T HAVE REINDEER. YOU KNOW YOU HAVE THIS
HELICOPTER AND, THEN SO, MOLLY MOVED FROM THERE AND I'VE
LOST TRACK OF MOLLY IN THE LAST FEW YEARS BUT ALWAYS TO BE
REMEMBERED AS A GOOD MEMORY AND SHE HAD GROWN UP TO BE A
PROPER YOUNG LADY AND HER MOTHER AT LEAST TAUGHT SCHOOL IN
OLD HARBOR. SO, YES SANTA-TO-THE-VILLAGES IS, WHEN WE TALK
ABOUT HISTORY IN ALASKA, I THINK IT'S PART OF THE HISTORY
OF ALASKA NOT ONLY BECAUSE I AM A PART OF THAT PROGRAM, AND
HAVE BEEN PART OF IT AND HOPE TO CONTINUE TO BE PART OF IT
AS LONG AS I AM ABLE TO AND LIVE HERE IN KODIAK BUT THE
GREAT THINGS THAT COME FROM IT, THE RAPPORT WHEN WE LOOK AT
THE HISTORY, YOU KNOW WHEN WE TALK ABOUT THE DISTURBANCES

THAT HAPPENED BETWEEN THE NATIVES ETC. AND THE RUSSIANS AND ALL THIS BEFORE IN THE BEGINNING OF TIME OF OUR ISLAND I THINK YOU KNOW THE CURRENT DAY HISTORY IS THE RAPPORT WE HAVE WITH THE VILLAGE PEOPLE AND KNOWING THEM, THEM KNOWING US HERE AS COAST GUARD AND I THINK WE'RE FORTUNATE AND BLESSED TO HAVE THIS PROGRAM AND TO BE ABLE TO CONTINUE WITH IT. WE NEED TO KEEP SUPPORTING IT IN THE STRONGEST WAY THAT WE POSSIBLY CAN.

PETER: OUR SUPPORT THAT YOU MENTIONED, THE TOWN PRETTY MUCH HELPS YOU SUPPORT IT AS FAR AS GIFTS...

LARRY: YES, A LOT OF THE GIFTS ARE DONATED. APPLES AND ORANGES ARE DONATED, YOU KNOW BY NAFA (NON-APPROPRIATED FUNDS ACCOUNTS) OR BY WASHINGTON APPLE GROWERS. MONEY WISE - THERE IS A LOT OF MONEY THAT IS CONTRIBUTED BY ORGANIZATIONS, I'M SURE THE C.P.O.A. (CHIEF PETTY OFFICER'S ASSOCIATION); I KNOW THE ROTARY DONATES MONEY TO THE SANTA TO THE VILLAGES PROGRAM THE BOROUGH, WE WENT PREPARED TO LOBBY FOR NOT CUTTING LAST YEAR'S BUDGET AND WHEN WE GOT THERE THEY HAD REAJUSTED THEIR BUDGET, AND WE HAD THE FULL AMOUNT, I BELIEVE IT WAS \$1,500 THAT THE BOROUGH DONATES. BUT IT IS A VERY LARGE COMMITMENT IN DOLLARS; YOU WOULD HAVE TO CHECK WITH THE WIVE'S CLUB BUT, IF I'M THINKING IN GOOD TERMS, I BELIEVE THAT IT'S A LIKE FOUR TO FIVE THOUSAND DOLLAR A YEAR PROGRAM. THE MONEY THAT IS NEEDED PLUS ALL THE DONATIONS - AND ALL THE TOYS THAT WE GET ARE VERY, VERY GOOD TOYS THEY ARE NOT CHEEP TOYS - MOTORIZED CARS AND SQUEAKING DOLLS, AND ROCKING DOLLS AND DOLLS THAT WET AND...

PETER: AND DOLLS THAT CRY

LARRY: YES, THESE ARE "GRADE A". THAT'S WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT, I THINK TO, TO... WHEN I SPEAK OF SANTA TO THE VILLAGES, PETE, I THINK OF IT IN A SELFISH WAY, BECAUSE I THINK OF THE GREAT JOY IT BRINGS THOSE CHILDREN. YOU KNOW THE HAPPINESS THAT YOU CAN BRING TO THEM, IT'S JUST, YOU CAN'T EVEN PUT WORDS TO IT BECAUSE IT IS SOMETIMES, I BELIEVE, ONE OF THE NICEST GIFTS THEY GET AND THEY DON'T SEE SANTA CLAUS LIKE WE DO DOWNTOWN HERE IN KODIAK AND FOR SURE NOT AS YOU SEE IN ANCHORAGE OR SEATTLE. YOU KNOW YOU GO DOWNTOWN EVERYDAY OF THE WEEK YOU SEE 15 OR 20 OR 50 SANTA CLAUS'S SO THAT'S GOT TO BE CONFUSING AND I'M VERY DISCREET WITH MY SANTA CLAUS SUIT ON. I DON'T GO DOWNTOWN WITH IT ON UNLESS I'M GOING SOMEWHERE AND I'M VERY, VERY DISCREET BECAUSE I DON'T WANT ANYONE TO SEE SANTA CLAUS DOING SOMETHING THAT SANTA CLAUS SHOULDN'T BE DOING OR OUT OF CHARACTER. I WOULDN'T EVEN THINK OF HAVING ALCOHOL ON MY BREATH WHEN I'M SANTA CLAUS. I JUST REALLY, REALLY WATCH ALL THE THINGS I DO. BACK TO THE GIFTS, THE GIFTS ARE ORDERED THROUGH EITHER THE EXCHANGE OR SOMETIMES THROUGH WODLINGER'S, WODLINGERS AND THE MERCHANTS DOWNTOWN HAVE ALL BEEN VERY, VERY GENEROUS. THEY CAN'T GIVE US THAT MUCH BUT THEY CAN GIVE US A PRICE BREAK ON SOME OF THE STUFF AND THEY'VE DONE THAT. THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PEOPLE IN DOWNTOWN NEEDS TO CONTINUE. AS WE GO THROUGH OUR BUDGET CUTS AND ALL THIS KIND OF STUFF THAT WE ARE NOW FACING WITH THE DEFICIT, THAT'S HURTING US LOCALLY TOO. I THINK IT'S

MORE MEANINGFUL THAT WE AS INDIVIDUALS TRY TO HELP THE PROGRAM AS MUCH AS WE CAN. AS YOU CAN TELL, I'M A GREAT SUPPORTER OF IT.

PETER: SOUNDS GREAT

LARRY: I LIKE THE IDEA OF THE MILITARY/CIVILIAN INTERFACE THAT WE HAVE HERE BETWEEN THE SUPPORT CENTER AND THE AIR STATION. WE'VE GOT A GOOD RAPPORT AND THE INTERFACE THAT WE HAVE IS- IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT COLOR, CREED, RELIGION - ABOUT THE ONLY THING YOU HAVE TO DO IS BE ABLE TO HAVE A BIG, OL' BELLY ON YA OR BE ABLE TO TAPE ONE ON, SOMEHOW. BUT THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE - CAPT. GRAVINO WENT OUT, CAPT. CUMMINGS, A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, YOU KNOW, OF THE SUPPORT CENTER HERE PUT THE SANTA CLAUS SUIT ON. SO, THERE'S A LOT OF PEOPLE INVOLVED. YOU KNOW, IT'S WITH SANTA-TO-THE-VILLAGES, BUT IT RUBS OFF AND IT STAYS WITHIN THE BASE; YOU KNOW WE'RE AT THE EXCHANGE AND WE GO TO PEOPLE'S HOMES. I GO TO PEOPLE'S HOMES ON CHRISTMAS EVE - I HAVE THEM GIVE ME GIFTS THAT DAY AND I PUT THEM IN A PAPER SACK WITH THEIR NAME ON IT; IT'S UNBELIEVABLE WHEN SOME YOUNG PERSON ANSWERS THE DOOR - I REMEMBER ED RANDOLPH'S SON WHEN HE WAS LIKE ...WELL, IN 1987, I BELIEVE IT WAS - THAT I RANG THE DOORBELL AND THIS YOUNG MAN, PROBABLY FOUR OR FIVE YEARS OLD, CAME TO THE DOOR AND HE SAID "THERE REALLY IS A SANTA CLAUS!" "THERE REALLY IS A SANTA CLAUS!" AND HE WAS ECSTATIC DRESSED IN HIS TUXEDO, AND, REALLY THAT CHILD WAS A BELIEVER FROM THEN ON, I'M SURE, AND MAYBE STILL IS.

PETER: GEE, LARRY, AREN'T YOU? (CHUCKLE)

LARRY: (CHUCKLE) I'M A BELIEVER! I'M A BELIEVER.

PETER: YEAH, I SOMEWHAT BELIEVE IT, TOO.

LARRY: YOU CAN MAKE EIGHT, NINE, TEN AND MAYBE, EVEN SOME ELEVEN YEAR OLDS, YOU CAN STILL MAKE THEM BELIEVE. WHAT I DO IS FIND OUT MOSTLY GOOD THINGS ABOUT THE PERSON IF I GO TO THE HOME - GOOD THINGS THAT THEY'RE DOING EITHER IN SCHOOL OR AT HOME OR IF THEY'VE BEEN HELPING SOMEBODY ELSE, LIKE SHOVELING THEIR SIDEWALK. AND THEN I FIND OUT SOMETHING THEY HAVEN'T BEEN DOING VERY WELL - JUST SOMETHING THAT BUGS THE PARENTS, PROBABLY - DON'T BRUSH THEIR TEETH, DON'T PICK UP THEIR ROOM, DON'T LIKE THEIR SPINACH OR SOMETHING AND I'LL MENTION THAT TO THEM WHEN I'M SITTING WITH THEM. I TAKE THE TIME WITH EACH STUDENT AND I REFUSE TO BE RUSHED. I DON'T CARE IF WE GET BACK AT MIDNIGHT OR TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING, BUT I WILL SPEND TIME WITH EACH INDIVIDUAL. I JUST WILL NOT BE RUSHED, BECAUSE THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY AND I WANT THEM TO BE ABLE TO SAY IT. SO, I REALLY ENJOYED WHEN I COULD MAKE THIS ONE ELEVEN YEAR OLD BOY, MAYBE HE WAS TEN AND-A-HALF, I GUESS, FROM CALIFORNIA, AND HE WAS CONCERNED - HE AND HIS FAMILY WERE UP HERE VISITING AND THE LITTLE GIRL (HIS SISTER), WAS CONCERNED, VERY CONCERNED, THAT SHE HAD SEEN SANTA CLAUS DOWN IN SAN DIEGO BUT SHE FORGOT TO TELL HIM WHERE SHE WAS GONNA BE, AND, SHE THOUGHT WELL, HE WASN'T GOING TO BE ABLE TO FIND HER. SO I SAID "WELL, NO I SAW YOU IN SAN DIEGO (AND I DON'T REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE MALL) - HER MOTHER HAD TOLD ME ALL THIS STUFF - AND THIS YOUNG MAN OVER THERE WAS

WATCHING ME OUT OF THE CORNER OF HIS EYE, AND I SAID "I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU LIKE HANK AARON REAL WELL AND THAT YOU HAVE HIS BATTING AVERAGE DOWN PRETTY GOOD." WHEN I LEFT THERE, HE WAS A BELIEVER.

PETER: HE WANTED TO KNOW...

LARRY: HOW DOES THIS SANTA CLAUS KNOW ALL THIS STUFF. I'M HERE FROM SAN DIEGO AND HE KNOWS ALL. HE'S REALLY WATCHING ME, HERE.

PETER: GOOD. AND YOU MAKE SUCH A NICE ONE, TOO. I CAN REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME BRINGING THE KIDS FOR SANTA CLAUS BREAKFAST OVER THERE FOR PANCAKES AT THE ANCHOR WITH YOU AND YOUR WIFE FREIDA AS MR. AND MRS. CLAUS. YOU REALLY DO PUT SO MUCH INTO IT. YOU ARE BELIEVABLE.

LARRY: IT'S GREAT THAT MY WIFE FREIDA..

PETER: YOU CAN GET ME TO BELIEVE A LITTLE BIT.

LARRY: UNTIL PRESENTS DON'T COME.

PETER: I GET PRESENTS.

LARRY: GET A NEW JEEP, HUH? YEAH, MY WIFE, FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS, NOW - SHE MAKES MY OUTFITS FOR ME, OTHER THAN THE BEARD AND THE HAIR. YOU HAVE TO PURCHASE THOSE - BUT SHE MAKES MY SUITS FOR ME AND SHE MADE HER OWN DRESS (MRS. CLAUS SUIT) AND WHEN SHE CAN'T GO, SHE LETS OTHER PEOPLE BORROW THAT SO IT CONTINUES. THEY DON'T KNOW WHO'S UNDER THAT SUIT, YOU KNOW, AND UNDER THE BEARD ESPECIALLY. BUT , I BELIEVE IT WAS IN 1989, THAT WE WENT TO OLD HARBOR AND AKHIOK AND LOU MAGYAR WAS FLYING THIS SMALL PLANE AND FREIDA AND JUDY CORNWELL, AND I DON'T REMEMBER WHO ELSE IT

WAS RIGHT NOW, BUT WE GOT BACK ABOUT 75 FT. OFF THE WATER AND THEY GOT STUCK OUT THERE FOR THREE DAYS AND THEY HAD THE TIME OF THEIR LIVES. THE PEOPLE OF OLD HARBOR - THE MOTEL WAS NEW, THE RESTAURANT WAS BRAND NEW - SO THEY GOT TO MAKE THEIR OWN BED WITH BRAND NEW LINEN AND BRAND NEW BEDS AND THEY HAD A SPANISH COOK IN THE MEXICAN RESTAURANT AND IT WAS GREAT FOOD AND THEY GOT TO TOUR THE SCHOOL, TO VISIT THE CLASSROOMS AND TO PLAY BINGO WITH THE NATIVES. THEY HAD THE TIME OF THEIR LIVES, NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN.

PETER: I'M SURPRISED, YOU KNOW, I NEVER THINK OF THE VILLAGES AS HAVING A MOTEL. I THINK OF IT AS A FEW FAMILIES HERE AND THERE, A SCHOOL, A CHURCH AND WHAT, THE PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICER THEY HAVE OUT THERE, AND WHEN YOU MENTIONED MOTEL...

LARRY: YEAH, I DIDN'T KNOWN IT WAS THERE, EITHER. BUT, IN OLD HARBOR THEY HAVE A MOTEL AND, LIKE LARSEN BAY AND SOME OF THESE PLACES, THEY HAVE A LODGE BUT THAT'S OPEN SEATING IF YOU WANT TO SAY IT, A BUNCH OF BUNK BEDS IN THE PLACE, BUT I'VE NEVER BEEN IN THIS MOTEL IN OLD HARBOR MYSELF, BUT FROM EVERYTHING I'VE HEARD IT'S A NICE PLACE AND IT'S A GREAT PLACE TO EAT. I PLAN TO FLY OUT AND HAVE LUNCH SOME DAY AND COME BACK AGAIN.

PETER: MAYBE YOU COULD RIDE THE FERRY OVER OR FLY OVER AND RIDE THE FERRY BACK. YOU KNOW, IT'S ONE OF THOSE MANY THINGS YOU WANT TO DO SOMETIME BUT YOU HAVEN'T DONE. I UNDERSTOOD THAT YOU RODE OUT WITH THE HELICOPTER AND THE SUPPORT GROUP SOMETIMES...I MISUNDERSTOOD THAT THEY WOULD FLY IN ON

MARKAIR OR SOMETHING AND SO ACTUALLY SOMEONE HAS DONATED THEIR TIME AND AIRPLANE TO TAKE YOU THERE.

LARRY: WHEN LOU WAS HERE THE FLYING CLUB DONATED THE AIRTIME, EVEN THE FUEL AND EVERYTHING AND THE PILOT. THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS, NOW, MARKAIR EXPRESS AND PENN AIR HAVE FLOWN THE HELPERS, OTHER THAN CIVILIAN. HEADQUARTERS HAS KIND OF PUT A CLAMP TO US A LITTLE MORE WITH CIVILIANS RIDING IN THE HELICOPTERS - WE HAVE TO GET A WAIVER FOR CIVILIANS EVEN THOUGH, IF YOU WORK HERE ON THE BASE, YOU STILL HAVE TO HAVE A WAIVER FROM HEADQUARTERS. BUT, WE'RE STILL ABLE TO RIDE THE HELICOPTER - SANTA'S ABLE TO RIDE THE HELICOPTER, BUT THE HELPERS ARE NOW RIDING IN STYLE, ALSO. YOU KNOW, WITH THE COMMERCIAL AIR. BUT, WE HOPE THIS YEAR TO TALK TO THE FLYING CLUB AND HOPE THE WILL START FLYING THE PEOPLE AND BECOME ACTIVE AGAIN.

PETER: OH, VILLAGES, YOU MENTIONED AKHIOK, OLD HARBOR, LARSEN BAY...

LARRY: LARSEN BAY...

PETER: ...GO TO KARLUK?

LARRY: KARLUK, OUZINKIE, DANGER BAY, PORT LYONS

PETER: TALKING KIDS WISE, ARE WE TALKING HUNDREDS?

LARRY: TOTALLY OVER 500 CHILDREN. THE COMBINED SCHOOLS, YEAH, OVER 500 AND YOU KNOW, I USED TO TRY TO REMEMBER SOME SPECIFIC THING ABOUT EACH ONE OF THE SMALL SCHOOLS BUT I HAD TO GIVE THAT UP BECAUSE IT WAS TOO MUCH MEMORY FOR ME IN SUCH A SHORT TIME. WHAT I DO REQUEST FROM THE COORDINATOR OF THE OFFICER'S WIVES' CLUB IS THE NAMES OF

THE STUDENTS PRIOR TO THE DAY BEFORE WE GO OUT AND THE REASON FOR THAT IS PRONUNCIATION. IT'S REALLY HARD TO PRONOUNCE SOME OF THESE CHILDREN'S NAMES - LAST NAMES, ESPECIALLY. THE FIRST FEW YEARS THAT YOU DO IT - AFTER A WHILE YOU GET USED TO PRONOUNCING THEIR NAMES BECAUSE THE FAMILIES LIVE THERE SO IT'S JUST REPETITION - BUT WITH THE PEOPLE CHANGING AS MUCH AS THEY DO , SOMETIMES YOU'LL FIND THIS STUDENT IN LARSEN BAY THIS YEAR AND MAYBE IN KARLUK NEXT YEAR. SO THOSE ARE THE THINGS I TRY TO REMEMBER A LITTLE BIT AND ESPECIALLY ABOUT EVERYONE FROM THE NEWBORN THROUGH THE GREAT-GRANDMOTHER ARE WELCOME TO COME UP AND SIT ON SANTA'S LAP. ONLY THE STUDENTS ARE GIVEN PRESENTS (OR THE CHILDREN, I SHOULD SAY). I SHOULDN'T SAY STUDENTS - CHILDREN UP THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL (THROUGH SENIOR HIGH). THEY WILL COME SIT ON YOUR LAP, SOMETIMES THEY ARE A LITTLE EMBARRASSED, BUT YOU TRY TO MAKE THEM AS RELAXED AS YOU CAN. THEN THERE ARE SOME VERY SAD TIMES, YOU KNOW, WHEN THERE HAS BEEN SORROW - BOAT ACCIDENTS AND DROWNINGS IN THE FISHING INDUSTRY. SO YOU EXPRESS YOUR CONDOLENCES WHEN YOU FIRST GET THERE AND THEN YOU GET ON WITH THE PROGRAM WITH SANTA BECAUSE YOU CAN'T DWELL ON THAT OR THINGS ARE JUST TOO SAD ALL THE WAY THROUGH. THE FIRST THING YOU DO WHEN YOU GET IN THERE, OR THE FIRST THING I DO (AND THIS IS ALSO HOW I COACH OTHERS THAT DO GO), IS YOU GET OFF THAT HELICOPTER AND YOU SHAKE AS MANY HANDS AND GIVE AS MANY HUGS AND HOLD AS MANY BABIES - IT'S LIKE THE POLITICAL WORLD - ONLY YOU'RE NOT RUNNING FOR ANYTHING. YOU'RE THERE

BECAUSE IT'S SUCH A GREAT TIME. YOU CARRY CHILDREN, YOU MAKE SURE THAT YOU DON'T SLIP OR SOMETHING; BUT THEY'RE JUST VERY KIND TO US, YOU KNOW, THE VILLAGERS ARE VERY GOOD TO US, AS WELL. YOU TAKE THESE PEOPLE AND YOU TALK TO THEM - THIS IS THEIR TURF - YOU TALK TO THEM IN THEIR VILLAGE AND ASK HOW ARE THINGS GOING. AND, I'M VERY SINCERE WHEN I ASK THIS. I DON'T THINK THEY REALLY RECOGNIZE THAT BUT WHEN YOU START TALKING AS SANTA CLAUS AND YOU USE HUMOR WITH THEM, BY GOLLY IT'S AMAZING. PRETTY SOON THEY'LL COME AROUND.

PETER: THEY'LL OPEN UP.

LARRY: AND THE GOOD THINGS THEY SAY ABOUT THE PROGRAM I HAVE NEVER, SINCE 1984 - SO THIS WILL BE THE NINTH YEAR - SINCE 1984, I HAVE NEVER HEARD ONE BAD COMMENT ABOUT SANTA TO THE VILLAGES. NOW, MAYBE I'M GUARDED FROM THAT, I DON'T KNOW, BUT...

PETER: WHO CAN COMPLAIN ABOUT SANTA CLAUS

LARRY: THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT.

PETER: ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU'RE NOT THERE TO DO THEM A FAVOR, YOU KNOW, HERE I AM TO DO YOU A FAVOR.

LARRY: WE JUST GO TO GIVE, WE EXPECT NOTHING; WE COME BACK WITH, GOOD GOSH, WE COME BACK WITH STRAWBERRY CAKE, AND COOKIES (CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES), POPCORN, CHRISTMAS CARDS YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE AND CANDIES ... AND AFTER THE FACT... I GOT ONE CARD AT HOME THAT'S ABOUT 18 INCHES WIDE AND ABOUT 2½ FEET TALL AND IT'S SIGNED BY NUMEROUS PEOPLE IN OLD HARBOR. I'LL KEEP THAT - THAT'LL BE PART OF MY ALASKA ROOM

WHEN I RETIRE (IN MY KODIAK ROOM). BUT AFTER THE FACT, AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, SANTA CLAUS CONTINUES TO GET MAIL IN FEBRUARY, MARCH AND APRIL. I'VE NEVER GOT ANY LATER THAN APRIL - BUT CARDS FROM THE SCHOOL AGAIN SAYING "THANK YOU AND WE ARE AWAITING YOUR RETURN NEXT YEAR" - LOOKING FORWARD TO AND THAT SORT OF THING. SO THEY'RE EXCITED ABOUT IT TOO, YOU KNOW; THEY'RE EXCITED AND PLEASED.

PETER: THE BIG HIGHLIGHT OF THE YEAR I IMAGINE FOR THE VILLAGE, HUH?

LARRY: I'M TOLD THAT BY THE TEACHER'S OVER AND OVER AGAIN AND BECAUSE WITH THE CUTS WE WERE FACING EVEN LAST YEAR WE NOTICED IT A LITTLE THAT WE WERE TALKING ABOUT CUTTING BACK A LITTLE AND THE EXPRESSIONS COMING FROM THE TEACHER'S AND THE PEOPLE WE TALKED TO IN THE VILLAGES IS THAT'S THE HIGH LIGHT OF THE YEAR - THIS IS SOMETHING THEY LOOK FORWARD TO ALL YEAR LONG. IT'S SOMETHING THAT JUST CAN'T STOP, IT JUST CAN'T STOP.

PETER: IT NEEDS A BOOST.

LARRY: IT NEEDS A BOOST - THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT, PETE, IT DOES.

PETER: FULL-TIME STAFF? THE OFFICER'S WIVES, OF COURSE, IS APPARENT.

LARRY: NO FULL TIME STAFF. THEY'RE ALL VOLUNTARY; THEY'LL HAVE ONE CHAIRMAN OR MAYBE A CO-CHAIRMAN. (PERSON). THE MOST I'VE SEEN ARE TWO PEOPLE. THEY'RE THE PEOPLE WHO COORDINATE THIS ON A YEAR ROUND BASIS.

PETER: WELL, I MIS-EXPRESSED MYSELF WHEN I SAID FULL TIME STAFF - WHAT I MEANT WAS IT GOES FROM DECEMBER TO DECEMBER.

LARRY: IT GOES FROM DECEMBER TO DECEMBER.

PETER: YOU START ORGANIZING FOR NEXT YEAR TODAY.

LARRY: DEFINITELY, YEAH, RIGHT NOW THEY'RE WORKING ON CONTRIBUTIONS, THEY'RE WORKING ON GETTING THE TOYS - YOU GOT TO START ORDERING THE TOYS; IN THE SUMMER IS WHEN YOU START THINKING ABOUT ALL THESE THINGS, PROBABLY THE FIRST PART OF AUGUST IS WHEN YOU START ORDERING THE TOYS AND THEN BAGGING ALL THE STUFF UP AS YOU'VE SEEN WHEN WE PUT THEM ON THE HELICOPTER - EIGHT, TEN BAGS, FOR SOME OF THE BIGGER VILLAGES. SO THERE'S...

PETER: AND HOURS OF PAPER FOLDING AND SCOTCH TAPING.

LARRY: OH, MY, ... THEY HAVE WHAT THEY CALL WRAPPING PARTIES IN ONE OF THE VACANT HOUSES. OVER THE YEARS, THAT'S WHAT IT'S BEEN - ONE THAT'S IN TURN AROUND - THE TOYS ARE SPREAD OUT IN DIFFERENT ROOMS, ACCORDING TO AGE GROUPS, AND THE COORDINATOR(S) AND THEIR HELPERS - THE (ELVES - THEY TAKE THESE TOYS AND PUT THEM IN DIFFERENT ROOMS IN THAT HOUSE AND AGAIN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN AND MEN AND SAILORS AND ARMY PEOPLE AND ONE TIME THERE WAS A MARINE HERE, WE HAD A MARINE HELP). SO, THERE'S JUST EVERYBODY THAT HELPS WRAPPING. AND THIS TAKES MORE THAN ONE DAY - IT'S SOME DAYS; I DON'T REMEMBER, IT CHANGES FROM YEAR TO YEAR BECAUSE DEPENDING ON HOW MANY PEOPLE YOU HAVE, BUT IT'S NUMEROUS HOURS JUST TO DO THE WRAPPING. AND, THE COORDINATOR OVER THE YEARS, YOU KNOW, JUDY CORNWELL, SHE DID IT FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS. TERESA HANSON DID IT AND I'M FORGETTING SOME OF THESE PEOPLE AND I APOLOGIZE. THEY

ALL DO SUCH A GOOD JOB. I MEAN, THE WIFE'S CLUB HANDLES IT EXCELLENTLY. IT'S A LOT OF WORK.

PETER: I'M SURE IT IS.

LARRY: A LOT OF WORK.

PETER: SO HOW DOES SANTA CLAUS HOLD UP AFTER ALL THAT?

LARRY: SANTA CLAUS IS VERY, VERY TRIED. BUT USUALLY SANTA CLAUS STARTS IN THE LATTER DAYS OF NOVEMBER, I THINK NOV. 26 IS THE EARLIEST I'VE ACTUALLY STARTED SANTA CLAUSING - NOT TO THE VILLAGES. I START SANTA CLAUSING AT THE EXCHANGE; HERE ON THE BASE IT STARTS...

PETER: WITH THE BELL RINGING CEREMONY...

LARRY: YES, AND THE TREE LIGHTING AND THAT SORT, SO WE GET STARTED PRETTY EARLY. THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF DECEMBER ARE ALWAYS SET ASIDE FOR SANTA-TO-THE-VILLAGES. THAT'S A PRIORITY ONE, NO MATTER WHAT ELSE COMES UP. YOU BETTER BE DARN SICK EVEN BEFORE YOU START MAKING EXCUSES THAT YOU DON'T WANT TO GO. EVERYBODY WANTS TO GO BUT, SURPRISINGLY, SOME YEARS WE HAD A HARD TIME GETTING SANTA CLAUSES. PETE READY? (TO BE SANTA CLAUS) ONCE THEY DID IT, THEN YOU COULDN'T STOP THEM, BUT THEN OF COURSE, UNTIL THEY ROTATE OUT OF HERE AND THEN THEY GO SOMEPLACE ELSE AND THEN WE'LL DO IT... I KNOW I'LL CONTINUE WITH IT AS LONG AS I'M ALIVE.

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