

**Oral History Project
History 641
April 17, 1993**

**An Interview with John Reft,
Kodiak, Alaska
Conducted April 5 and 7, 1993**

**Submitted By
Marilyn Davidson**

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN REFT

Conducted By: Marilyn Davidson

Marilyn Davidson (M): This is an interview with John Reft. This is April 7, 1993. (...signifies that a thought was dropped, not completed and the sentences finished just as stated.)

We're redoing a part of an interview that we did on April 5th for technical reasons and again (unintelligible) and I'm going to ask John a little bit about his birth place and through his life and I appreciate his being willing to do this for this project.

John Reft (J): My name is John Reft. I was born in Karluk on the west side of Kodiak Island. It's a small village there now, only 1939 lived there until I was about a year and a half old and we moved from Karluk to the Halibut Bay or Carmel. Lived there for several years and moved to Kodiak when I was about six years old and lived with my aunt and uncle to start with until my dad and stepmother moved into a... Then I lived with them and I went to school here in Kodiak. My mother died when I was a year and a half old so I never knew her and my dad remarried after (unintelligible).

I grew up here, living with my Aunt and Uncle Tom and Mary Galligher and when I first came to Kodiak and they owned a restaurant business here called the Polar Bear Cafe and they had three other children and I just lived with them for several years till my folks got here and moved in.

M: What was Kodiak like at that point, John?

J: Kodiak was just a small, it was like little hick western town. It was a... a lot of the buildings were square and the main street was all mud and board walk. There wasn't any pavement material of any kind and periodically my uncle's cattle would run right down through main street and kick up all kind of dust in the summer and in a... splatter mud when it rained. It was a real, real mud hole, actually.

M: Were there different shops or was there just... Kraft's was here, right.

J: Yeh, Kraft's and Son was here then and Donald Lee and Atchison were two stores downtown. Then there was other shops, yah know, not a lot of em, but... & there was a Post Office with, I guess about a hundred for five hundred post office boxes in it. When you went in there you had to take a deep breath and kinda turn sideways so you didn't bump somebody else that they were tryin to go in there at the same time. It was just little, tiny little room with a door on it.

M: Did the mail come in regularly?

J: Yes, what I recall it came in pretty regularly. I don't know how.

M: Um-hmm

J: In the beginning all they had was service by mail boat around the island and I guess military flights or something must have come in and later on (unintelligible) the airlines. The mail came pretty much on time, I guess in those days.

M: Your uncle had cattle at that point?

J: Yeh.

M: Did you ride horses?

J: Yeh, after the war was over. See Kodiak was filled with military, a lot of soldiers like. I think they said at one time there was like 50,000 over all, ya know, the whole island, scattered here and there. That's my understanding. It might have even been 60. But they were out in all these bunkers that they built at different points. Ya know, Spruce Cape and Long Island and all around Kodiak area and look out stations over the water for submarines and different things. And I guess military personnel, they'd trade in & out again on military watch during the war. They built a lot of buildings and stuff while they were here, but then when they left, I think the buildings were all tore apart and sold to...they tore em down. They bid on the buildings and then they went out and tore em down, took nails out of them and used that lumber, which was really good grade lumber

M: Uh-huh.

J: to build homes with, ya know, for their own personal home building, here in Kodiak.

M: Were there buildings here in Kodiak that had to do with the military or just on the base.

J: No, these were out on the base, out there and then over on Long Island and different areas (unintelligible) Bell's Flats. You can see the structures out there along that Anton Bay Hiway,

but it was all military. It wasn't really a very big town. It was pretty small.

M: One of the things they we talked about the other evening, I'd like to mention again was when the Aleutian homes were built, and I know that since we own one of them, a lot of the lumber in there, my husband tells me, is really high grade lumber. Maybe some of it was from, maybe some of that was from some of these military homes. Do you think?

J: No, ah, those buildings, when they came in, they came in, like from pre-fab style, ready to put up! They just laid their foundation and stuff and then they were all pre-cut and they put them up together and like put em like maybe three to five buildings in a day sometimes. But they were (M: And your dad, and your dad bought one?) basically, they were basically built military housing. We had the Navy and then the Marine Corp out there after the soldiers had left and that was basically what the base was made of, military wise, sailors and marines. But when they started building it they... My dad started off as a laborer and uh, there was a big town construction. Yah know, the biggest that had ever come around and he was a shipwright and a carpenter in his younger days so when he went to work right there for em and whenever he started out as a laborer and then a week later he ended up as a foreman of the whole Aleutian home project because the guy that was the foreman didn't know enough and every time he'd get up again he'd run down to where my dad was on the

project and find out what to do next. Then the bosses at the project found out what was going on so they just removed the guy and then put my dad in as the foreman of the whole project and he was...It was good money, big construction back in those days.

M: Three to five thousand houses a day, that didn't take very long did it?

J: Oh, it took quite awhile, ya know, but they had to layer all... and then lay sewers and all this stuff. But once they got it to the point where they were ready, ya know, then they could put, ya know, quite a few homes in one day.

M: And that clearing of that land is a big disappointment for you, wasn't it?

J: Yeh, because what used to be our rabbit hunting spot there in the... when we were kids, we'd take our twenty-twos to school with us and put them in a locker where our books were. Then after school was out we'd just run down, grab our twenty-two and just slip right on up there to what's Aleutian homes now and rabbit hunt cause it was all swampy area with marshes, low profile trees.

M: So you had ammunition and everything at school with you?

J: Oh yeh. There was no problem. Nobody ever said anything to ya about it because, ya know, we were all very capable and with handling... We all did... we just... Probably when we're old enough with your dad, four or five years old.

M: You would have been, like, in Junior High at that point?

J: No, I was in grade school then. I didn't, in Junior High I just moved to Tacoma that year. This is prior to that. I remember there was this good friend of mine, Stan Florsheim and we grew up and graduated and we were in the boy scouts and explorers and sea scouts together and graduated from high school and later on he got killed here on the island down at Karluk Bay (unintelligible). He was my good buddy and my good rabbit hunting partner (unintelligible). I don't ever recall anybody ever saying anything about outlawing taking the twenty-twos to school because we always just took em and put em in our locker and picked em up after school and just go hunt. And then we'd go home with em and next morning we'd take em and put em in again with our books and, ya know, it was a pretty good deal for us as kids.

M: You must have had rabbit for supper a lot of times?

J: Oh yeh, we, basically, what we'd do is hunt em and give em away, 'cause there was lot of old timers around that couldn't hunt 'em. You'd get more than what was needed for ourselves and we'd just hunt and share it with people. That's basically what they did in the old days anyway. Anything they had was fishin' salmon in the summer. The rest of the winter was taking care of the family by hunting and, ah, bring things together to pass the winter away. Ice skating (unintelligible). There was a lot of

visiting. I recall. My parents all visited every night or had card games at this or that house and they kinda rotate around and then, that was their social (unintelligible).

M: Skating really went on quite a bit of the winter, didn't it?

J: Yeh, because the winters were longer, colder and they would start off a lot earlier, like in October, ya know. The lakes would start to freeze and as soon as they got a thick enough (unintelligible) of ice on them well, we'd go out and test it and then (unintelligible) go around and we'd start ice skating all year round. We even had Sunday afternoons, after church, families would get together out here in the big lake and have hockey games. Ya know, father and son and make that teams. Then they'd rotate them, see who would be the winner. Hockey contests.

M: Let's go ahead and talk about other sports in your youth. That area over there by the college.

J: Yeh, there's, where Mission Lake is now, where we used to skate, by the track (Unintelligible) there is now (Unintelligible) playground used to be Clark's Lake and we used to skate and swim in Clark's Lake and then we could skate from there down to a little channel there going down to the east of Mission (Unintelligible) smaller lake, Danger Lake, then you could go down stream and pass over what's Rezanof now and there was a little water fall jump and we skated and jumped right down

into, onto Potato Patch Lake. So, you could just skip right on down through all those little (Unintelligible) and channels with ice skates on.

M: Skating...

J: Then, if you wanted to, why you could skate down Mission Road there and end up skating on Mission Lake further down, ya know, see a new group of people, and whatever else was going on there. It was pretty exciting. We had tobogganing and skiing down the sides of hills. Toboggans were made out of these pieces of tin that they used on the house, roof. We'd just take the tin and bend the front end of it and tie a rope to it and get ready to get on it, a big bunch, and really go down the hills. It was lucky nobody was ever killed because they were sharp. Anything ever happened they'd have cut your arm or leg off. We were fortunate enough that nothing ever... nobody ever had any real incidents except maybe a sprained leg or something like that.

Then in the summertime, when the lakes thawed out, we swam in them and even trout fished. I know one of my favorite spots was Mission Lake cause they had the (Unintelligible) brook trout. We'd follow the brook trout from Mission Lake right on up this little creek or stream and, which is right below Benny Benson's now and we would cross over that Spruce Cape Road back in the old days. It's covered up now but... It was a little pond that ended right below Benny Benson College and it's as far up as the

trout could go and it wasn't very big. I mean it was just a little pond and it was just full of trout. And it was like up in the wilderness. You had to have a lot of courage to get up in there because it was a lot of trees and all you ever thought of was a bear behind every tree would get you or something.

M: Did you see lots of bears?

J: No, I don't recall. We used to see 'em over in Monashka, 'cause that was the other side of the world. We'd hike over the hill to Monashka. If we ever saw a bear, boy we'd run like son of a gun, back to town. Course we were pretty young. We used to venture around quite a bit (Unintelligible)

M: You know, your talking about going, like, over there. There weren't roads over there?

J: No, it was nothing. You just had to pick kind of a small animal trail or something and find your way over there and find the beach and find your way back.

M: What roads were there here?

J: There wasn't any roads here except the one between the base and town and there was the road going out to Mill Bay... They called it Mill Bay Road and then to Abercrombie, Fort Aber... And that was it. Mission Road and Mill Bay was all there ever was.

M: Was there a fort at Abercrombie?

J: Yeh, they had the gun turrets. They had the large guns there during the war and you could see the trench out there where

they were installed and everything & with the big holes on that big turret out there. But they were huge guns out there. Any ships or submarines or anything that they ever spotted or anything during the war.

M: This swimming in the lakes, John. Were summers as cool as they are now? Winters were colder were summers as cool or were summers warmer, or...

J: No, I think the summers were warm even if the winters were real cold. It seems like I recall more seventy degrees, you know eighty degrees even and one time I even remember it was, like 90.

M: Really?

J: Yah, only I was thinking back, yah know, but, now it seems like winters are milder and summers aren't as hot, but... You know, we get probably an average temperature here in the summer of like sixty-five or seventy. That's pretty warm. Course we get some warmer days. Seems like they were much hotter back in the old days. The climate has changed quite a bit.

M: Rain about the same?

J: Nah, I don't ever remember it raining as much as it does now. Cause it's warmed up quite a bit from what it used to be. Oh...

M: Another thing that we talked about was indoor sports, that weren't indoors.

J: Yeh! Well, we had a hundred kids in the high school down here & they'd combined Junior high and high school and everything. I mean we was totalling a hundred kids. I remember in 1955 Joe Floyd came to Kodiak as our coach and uh, we didn't have a gym and all we had was a couple of wooden backboards up out on the gravel, an area that was set aside and we called that the basket ball court. We went through all our plays and practices out in the gravel and then when it snowed in the winter well, time, we just went through the plays in the snow in the same place. Then, when we'd get games, so that the court... Navy kids had a high school out on the base, Base High they called... They had a beautiful gym. Course all your service men stopped in. All... they had a beautiful gym out there and when we played the base high we got to go out an' play on their gym. It was tremendous experience for us.

M: Did you... So you... Anytime you played, you had to travel to play, right?

J: Yah.

M: Either to the base or... and nobody came here?

J: No, not in those days. It was all local teams. You know, like a city league and then in the city league you played the Base high and Kodiak high and that was combined with Marines and Navy and town teams all together with the high schools. So that was your competition and your practice, ya know. Then you'd

go from here up to Anchorage or some part 'a the mainland to compete and to play them. And then you played more teams.

M: Uh-huh.

J: It wasn't until later on, several years later three or four after Joe got here, that what's the junior high now is the high school.

M: Oh really.

J: Yeh. And as the school grew, then they build the new High School where the auditorium is now and then this other one became the junior high. But I was here, well I lived here all my life and then, I think it was six weeks or two months after Joe Floyd came then my family moved to Tacoma, Washington and I was a Freshman, ya know and I had made the varsity. Man I was just top of the world, I thought. Here we were moving to Tacoma and I went from a hundred kids in the school to 800 kids in the school and it was quite an experience. Then I went from Tacoma, next two years, to Seattle and I went to Franklin High School and there was 2400 kids (Unintelligible).

M: (Laughing)

J: We turned out for a basketball team down there it was like three hundred guys turned out for the team. It was just unreal. But it was a good experience and then in '59 when I come up here in the summer to fish salmon, here in Kodiak, and go back down in the Fall. But, em, I remember Joe Floyd and Bill Unger got together with my dad and they asked them if it would be

possible if I would stay here in Kodiak with somebody so I could play basketball for Kodiak High. They approached me with that deal when I came through here in the Fall on my way back to Seattle and I thought, "Well, Joe said you get to travel all over the state, you'd have the time of your life. Boy yer gonna be sorry, you'll have to stay here and play ball for me." So they kinda talked me into it & I stayed and I really had a good time. I enjoyed it.

M: That was your Senior year?

J: Yeah, in 59.

M: Um-hmm.

J: And um, we traveled up on the mainland, around, Homer, Seward, Palmer, different places (Unintelligible). We had good competition, good games and we really enjoyed it. It was kinda the beginning of Kodiak's traveling, pretty much (Unintelligible) started while I was in Seattle, 58, 57. When I came in 59 that's what they were doing. It was really a good experience. (Unintelligible) jumped on an airplane (Unintelligible). You just get on em. Go and play and compete.

M: And then you went ahead and played basketball?

J: Yeh, after, after I graduated from High School I stuck around. Well, I got in the National Guard and went to Ford Ord in California and then came back in... then in 62 I went to (Unintelligible) Jackson College there in Sitka in Southeastern and turned out for basketball there and got on the starting five

and there was a boy named Tommy Sugak here who was going to school with me here in high school, played ball with me, he ended up in (Unintelligible) Jackson too. He and I were the two guards and (Unintelligible) just like we were with Joe Floyd.

M: Now, isn't he the guy who's the principal at Old Harbor?

J: At Old Harbor, um-hmm. So, we had a lot of fun. It was a good experience. We just played ball. When I made the mistake, I got a little disturbed with him down there because everybody was in one dormitory and the only thing separated the boys from the girls was a lounge in the middle and so I told him about it. I was going to leave college. I was coming home for Christmas. I came to Kodiak and I remember I was playing in a ball game up here and Joe was there that night. I was there that night and I went up and somebody bumped me while I was in the air and landed wrong and just tore my knee up bad and (Unintelligible) knee cap and everything. I was in a cast for six weeks. They were calling me to come back to college down there and I couldn't go. I couldn't even walk really. Then I figured my college was ended because I couldn't even play ball. I was angry because I couldn't play ball and somebody talked me into going crabbing so I went out with them and a few days later I just took a saw and cut the cast off my leg and started crab fishing and that ended my college career and I was going to be a coach here at Kodiak High.

M: Kinda put you into commercial fishing gang?

J: Yeh, ever since then well, you know I commercial fish year round. Then later on when I met Sharon in Anchorage (Unintelligible) we were engaged for a year that was 1979.

M: 60...

J: Yeh, 69. Yeh, 1969. 'Scuse me. We stayed engaged for a year and, cause I was never going to get married, til I met her. Stayed engaged for a year and then we got married in the Fall of 70 right after salmon season.

M: Um-hmm.

J: We've been here ever since. We've been married twenty-three years here pretty soon.

M: U-hmm.

J: It's been good. I was afraid to get married all my life seeing all these in-laws and problems everybody ever had and hell, I got the greatest in-laws you could ever want.

M: Yah.

J: You just...The opposite of, the opposite of what I expected it would be.

M: & far away ta-boot.

J: Yeh. Sure. Cause my in-laws live in Texas. We spend all our spare time and vacations down there with her folks. They're really nice and a lot of fun, so I've been pretty lucky in that sense.

M: Now did you, you started with this crabbing and you were crewing for somebody else at that point, is that right?

J: Yeh, for years I just salmoned as a crew member. And then crabbed in the winter time. I remember (Loud something smashing, crashing and followed closely by baby fussing noises drowned out a portion here).

M: When I was a crew member it was on salmon and crab both (now happy baby noises are interfering with the audibility). Later on, well, I'd run the boat through the skiff (fussing baby noises) I'd go home for the holidays. I kinda got experience and then (shushing baby noises) later on, got my own boat. (Fussing baby noises) It wasn't hard to get into that category once I figured that commercial fishing was what I wanted to do and to... when I got married I figured, well Sharon didn't want me going into the Bering Sea or someplace like that. She didn't figure that was a very good home life for anybody, to be away so many months out of the year so I (fussy baby noises getting louder) (more sh-sh-shushing)... (Chuckles from J from whatever he just said) (Crying baby noises)

M: Back to the boats.

J: Well, back with the experience of running boats for skippers as a crew member off and on then in 1968 I or 65 the guy I skiffed with talked me into to-a taking out his boat so he could stay in Longview, Washington. So, I took the Homer out and in those days it was a pretty good boat and I was just a young

thing. Everybody couldn't believe the young kid was running a boat that size. It was mostly boat owners or skippers were all pretty well up in age and here I was with some of my younger buddies that I went to school with and it was kind of rare thing. We had a lot of fun, caught fish and then 68, yeh, from running my own crab boat in 65 I moved into a salmon boat (baby noises picking up tempo again) running his boat & purseiner, converted from a Bristol Bay gill netter into a Kodiak Purseiner and (Unintelligible) power skiff and deck (Unintelligible) over, maps, (Unintelligible) power blocks (Unintelligible) and all this stuff (Unintelligible) It turned out to be a pretty good dream. (Unintelligible) Made a lot of money so I guess (tape ended).

*****Parts of tape are unintelligible--picked up where understandable*****

M: When did you have Miss Heather Built?

J: 19 (Unintelligible)

M: How did you end up in Mississippi to build this boat?

J: Well, I tried to get one down in Seattle (Unintelligible)

M: OK, so we had a three year wait...and ... Seattle...

J: Yeh, I told the guy, I says, "No way" I said, "I gotta invest this money within this tax write off time." So I flew down to Pascagula, Mississippi and looked at this builder's boats

that he was putting out. I picked up my father-in law in Dallas at the airport and Sharon and Heather got off and we flew on. We got to Pascagula and...to the boat yard there and went through his shop...went through his shop and I said, "No way, I don't want none of these boats." I said, "Come on Pop, he doesn't have anything I want here."

The builder says, "What? You flew all the way from Alaska and in ten minutes you're going to turn around and fly?" And I said, "Why should I stay here, I don't know anybody." And, I said, "You don't have what I want." He said, "Well, what do you want?" And I said, "Well, it would be too hard to explain and..." and I told him I had to build a fast boat, yah know, and something different that would compete. I said, "Well, I'll see ya later." So, off I went, got on the plane, flew to...back to Dallas. Then he called me at Sharon's folks and he called me here and he kept hounding me for months until finally I told him, ya know...what I wanted. I said, "If you really want to know, I said, you better fly up to Kodiak if you want to build." I says, "You come in here and we'll show you around and we'll put a boat together and I'll show you what I want." I said, "You get the mold built." And I said, "I'll let you know if it's right or wrong." He says, "OK".

So, he and his wife came up in the spring, we toured through Kodiak here with them for about a week and put all these ideas & stuff together. You figure he added together enough to go down

there and built this mold, fiberglass mold. He sent me a picture of it and I told him, "That's it." And I said, "Build it." I said, "That's what I want, that's exactly what I was talking about."

So, I think it cost me hundred... It was around \$200,000. Back then it was...Everyone said I was crazy, yah know. But now the boats gave gone from there up to five and seven hundred thousand. But, at least I built the fastest thing that they had ever saw, started it out anyway. (Chuckles from Marilyn.) It's been exciting.

M: Let's go back and... There were a couple of other things that we wanted to talk about too. One of them was this mail boat incident that you were involved in.

J: It was, I think it was 1942. It was during the war. The only way you got around on the island back then was, they had a mail boat that toured the island and to each village, made stops and went completely around the island each month. So, you pick you up on a...his trip...and he'd bring ya in and he'd drop you back off so you could do your shopping or whatever. Anyway, we came in just before Christmas and I was with my stepmother and her sister was with us. Kathy. But, I remember, I was three years old and I'll never forget that incident, to this day. We were in Whale Pass. And there was a boy that I went to school with, graduated with, that lives here...his folks, Danny Valley and his mother and my mother, we had state rooms in the bow

section of the mail boat. I remember Danny and I, we had this... it was top

M: Um-Hmm.

J: you know, that you push down and they'd spin and you'd let em. So, we'd push on that thing, ya know and we'd see who could make theirs go the longest. Then all of a sudden it was like, Boom, come out of the world just come to an end. Just exploded, ya know. This is what I'm remembering as a three year old and next thing I know, they're pulling people out of the boat and into the life skiff and they couldn't get my mo...stepmother through. They had a skylight, ya know, it was a dome light, skylight and they couldn't get her through there where they had gotten everybody else out 'cause the boat was cut right in half by a Navy destroyer in Whale Pass and they couldn't get her out the first try and they said, "Well, we gotta leave her, we can't get her out, ya know, she's pregnant."

Man, I'm screaming at 'em and finally they looked at me an' boy, they said, "OK we'll give her one more try and if we can't... if we have to tear her arms off, we can't get her...she's just going to have to go with the boat."

So they went back and they yanked and everything as hard as they could and somehow they popped her through that skylight and into the skiff. And then I'm going up the rail of the boat because it was going under and I was on the bow, hanging on and they got my...got their hands on me just before the boat went

under and pulled me off of the anchor. But the... it was during the war when that happened. My understanding is that the guy that was at the helm warned the captain that we were...that they were on a collision course with the boat. He wanted to alter his course and the captain said, you don't change course during war time is when Kaboom, cut us right in half. And then they ended up turning around after it was over to pick us up out of the life skiff and brought us to the village and stuff.

M: What was the name of that boat?

J: I don't know the name of that.

M: But, the boat that you were on?

J: I was on the Phyllis S. All those years the Phyllis S stayed right in Whale Pass until the tidal wave and then it floated from there to Ouzinkie Narrows and, oh, years... several years ago it just floated off on a big tide and disappeared somewhere, I don't know where. There was a... there was a lady named Mary P (Unintelligible) and her daughter, their stateroom was behind the engine on the boat and that's where...cut in half. Those two...they never saw those two...they were killed instantly (Unintelligible). But everybody else, they were able to get off somehow. It was amazing, but I, I never did understand what happened, ya know? Apparently nothin' was done to them so they got away with it, I guess. I guess they had some kind of (Unintelligible) during the war time that whatever he said, he was able to get through it, the captain of the destroyer.

M: Interesting. What about the Tsunami? John, where were you during that?

J: Oh, I was crab fishing down in the south end, Alitak, around there and I had just come in. I flew in and the boat I was crabbing on, they took...the skipper had gone to Seattle for three weeks and crabbing was almost over when he came back and I was running the boat with one crew member while he was gone. He says, "Well, it's all over with" He says, "John, you just hop on a plane and fly home." He says, "We'll bring the boat and gear in, just take the rest, you did enough for me. He says, "We'll bring the boat in ourself. No, no, you go ahead". So, finally he talked me into it and I flew in three days later and that's when the earthquake hit and the tidal wave right behind it. They were out...or I was in town and the skipper and the other crew member were coming from Alitak and they were up to Ugat (spelling?) Island and they got the warning of the tidal wave and they ducked in behind Uyat (spelling) Island and I guess the wave broke right around them and they were able to get in through town on that evening, ya know, pretty late. But they survived that.

But, that day my dad and my uncle Tom Gallagher and Uncle Charlie Reft were over... were apparently over here on Near Island and they were jacking up this house and it was like a...refuge or something for the animals and they'd tilt it over on one end so they'd blocked it up and straightened it out and while they were under there doing that the tidal 'er the earth-

quake hit. And they ran out from under it, ya know, and it crumbled down and after the quake hit so bad that it took the five horse outboard that was in their skiff or small outboard, anyway. And they were right over her in this lagoon here on Near Island. It shook the island and the skiff and stuff so bad it popped that outboard right off the skiff and knocked it about twenty feet down the beach. Just popped it right off.

And then the tide started coming in and then when the tide went out they noticed it. They grabbed it and threw it into the skiff and when the tide come back in again, why they jumped in the skiff and started rowing toward the, oh, it was the D & A dock then and the oil float down there and my cousin, (Unintelligible) Gallagher and I were waiting there and we thought they were running in the outboard and here they were just guiding it, they didn't even need the oars and they were just flying right toward us with that tremendous tides just running in and out. I guess even the channel dried up. But, ah, we tried to get up to my dad to go up with us, but he said no he was going to stay with my Uncle Charlie because he was on his own boat the Mermaid. He didn't want to leave it so we ran up together to get my aunt at the Polar Bear, at the restaurant.

M: Um-ha.

J: ...My dad was doing fine on the boat with Uncle Charlie and then Foggy Cape started to go under, tied to the dock. So he jumped off the Mermaid and started that up and cut it loose and

then he went over and he cut the (Unintelligible) loose. He had that...he towed that behind him and then he's jogging up and down the channel, ya know, in this Foggy Cape towing the Silver Cape (Not sure if that's the name), my uncle right along side of him. They were doing fine. Then the owner of the Foggy Cape just started...the D & A dock went under, he came running down with five or six other guys and hollered for him to come in and pick him up so my dad swung in and they all jumped onboard and they called him (Unintelligible) Larsen (Unintelligible) Afognak, John Larsen. He took over his boat then and he just started heading out the channel and he cut the Silver K loose and my dad had the tow rope on it. He started running out the channel, he was trying to get Fred or Teddy Panamaroff from Ouzinkie, who was worried about his family. He was trying to get his family, he was trying to get them around to Ouzinkie on the outside. So they got out in Spruce Cape there and they got through the first two waves and then the last they heard them on the air was, well, "Here comes the third one. It's a big one, don't look like we'll make it through this one." That was the last they ever heard of them.

M: (A commiserating) Ummmm.

J: My dad drowned right in here, right around Spruce Cape on the Foggy Cape...No, the Spruce Cape not the Foggy Cape. The name of the boat was the Spruce Cape and it drowned...er, it went

down out here on Spruce Cape on the tidal wave. Foggy Cape was Leonard Halverson's, who was a sister ship to it.

M: Hmm.

J: So, that's the last we ever... saw of 'im.

M: Um-hmm.

J: And I think they found just John Larsen, the guy with (Unintelligible) boat. They found him out there by the Loran Station, way up there in the cliff, in the trees...

M: Oh my gosh!

J: Just washed him way up there.

M: Um!

J: But he was the only one that was ever found out of the six or seven guys on it. But the whole town... I mean, I was down town when the wave hit and um... I remember, I was just crossing the street in the main town there and then they had some pavement down there and all of a sudden, just hit so hard... ya know, and it got so violent and... the streets were just rolling... ya know... you couldn't even stand up. Finally, I just got down on my hands and knees and... felt like the world was coming to an end 'er some-um. You'd look up and, ya know, the telephone poles, they were just s-w-a-y-i-n-g, ya know, just tremendous. The ground was just rolling and the buildings were just, ya know... It felt like everything was just going to open up and just swallow ya' right up. It seemed like it went on for

a tremendous long time. I couldn't believe it. And then, when it was over, the thing I remember was women coming out of Kraft's supermarket with bags, when it hit, they didn't know what was going on and their eyes got SO BIG. That was the scariest part of the whole thing for me, was to see the expression on people's face.

M: Um.

J: They didn't know what was happening, like they had bags of groceries and they just started shaking and then pretty soon it got rolling and earth... they just screamed and threw their groceries and their eyes, like they were just H U G E , ya know and fear... ya know. There was a tremendous amount of fear... But that's the thing I really remember about that, was the people's expression during that quake. So, anyway after that was over we went over to the restaurant and checked on my aunt and stuff and then we ran down to the dock, ya know and things. My Uncle Tom Gallagher, he was a volunteer fire department, he ran to get a fire truck and police were getting things going to warn people about the waves &... It was pretty chaotic.

M: Oh yeah!

J: A... It wasn't, like a big wave would come in 'cause the islands broke the waves up out here. It was the surge, ya know, from the tides and you would come in... creeping up on the fire trucks and people to get out of town and get up to high lands and everybody was going up Pillar Mountain. So, we ran

home and my aunt wanted to get her parrot and her poodles and this and that and jumped in the car. So, we went on up there and then the loud speaker came on up there, "All Nation Guards people report to the Armory with gear and everything within fifteen minutes." Man we tore out of there without regard... whoever had a car, ya just jumped on, came down, grabbed our clothes... Man, we were dressing, 'cause when they said fifteen minutes, you were there, standing in rank in fifteen minutes, ready to go, so... We all went in, lined up, got orders about everything... We were on duty for three week. We lived in the armory 'night and day, ate and everything. We never went out. And then we lived up there for three weeks, patrolled through the town, and, ya know, stoppin' all the looting and all that stuff that was going on.

M: Um-hmm.

J: Between us and the Marines...

M: Uh-huh.

J: Then after the tidal wave was over then I took leave and went to Orange, California, where my sister was living

M: Um-hmm.

J: Told her everything that happened, ya know, what I knew about it... and Dad disappeared. So that was, that was one bad day.

M: (A very sympathetic) Yah!

J: People can't imagine how violent this earth shook. I mean, it was like it was all going to open up and just swallow

you in, you know, like it was just going ta... It was like I guess the end of the world, it could be. I don't know how else to explain it.

M: Um-hm.

J: It... It's tremendous. Bad experience.

M: Do you feel like, if anything like that ever happened again, your house is pretty close to the water here, would you be safe?

J: Yah, it survived it.

M: It was here then?

J: Um-hmm.

M: Yah?

J: The other, the house that I lived in when I was a kid right down below here disappeared during the tidal wave. But this one here survived it.

M: Was this where you lived then?

J: No, we bought this here in '73.

M: Um-hm.

J: I worked for the state then, for three years and then just before Heather was born we bought this house. We got married in seventy... moved here in '73.

M: Um-hmm.

J: But, it survived it then, unless there was tremendous, huge tidal wave, it would probably survive it again.

M: Well, certainly nothing has come close to that.

J: Nah, but there was a lot of 'em washed out.

M: Uh-huh.

J: Course the whole town was washed out, down there where the town is... and rebuilt, boat harbor. A lot of changes were made (Unintelligible) a lot of theft(?). There was a lot of land in this area sunk and the other end of the island raised up.

M: Hmmmm.

J: It just kinda tilted, the island itself.

M: Interesting. I think the other thing that we wanted to talk about a little bit was the Mission and

J: Yah.

M: and what that was like. You're a board member at the Mission, the Kodiak Baptist Mission

J: Yah I

M: aren't you?

J: been on the Board for quite a few years out there. Course, I like the Mission and even when the program has changed now (Unintelligible) troubled kids.

M: Um-hmm,

J: When I was twelve years old my dad and stepmother split up so I went into the Mission for about a year and four months, something like that and um, I thought it was really a good training program for the kids. Course I was an orphan then, most of them that were in there lost their parents or something. But

there were cases, ya know, where the parents would divorce and the kids had to go into the program. It was a good learning program for me.

M: Uh-huh.

J: It was a family life. In each cottage you had a house parent. You learnt chores, ya' know, to set tables, take out... cook, and making your beds & all things... all this stuff.

M: Um-huh.

J: And you had other things that you did outside of that to get an allowance, like three dollar a month! I mean (laughing from Marilyn) you had like, chickens, any... you had like, oh I don't know, it was about five hundred chickens out there and em, that would furnish the fresh eggs for the three cottages and then on Sundays... Every Saturday you'd go up and butcher several chickens for

M: Um-hmm.

J: each cottage and there was three cottages. But between chickens... and I had pigs and they had cattle. And then they had gardens and would grow gardens down there in the flat down there and we'd have to take care of it and weed it and different things. We always did something, we earned, oh, about ten (Unintelligible) stock (Unintelligible). It was, to me it was a good working program. Plus you had a family life. You know, it was good.

M: How many... Do you have any idea how many of the other kids were in there at that point? How many were being served?

J: In the Mission?

M: Uh-huh.

J: Well, we were... each cottage had between 13 to 16 (he could be saying 60). I was in Doane Cottage and I think we were the smallest and I think we had 13. I think McWhinnie had 14 or 15 and Ayer had 16 (or 60--surely he is saying 16!)

M: Those were full houses!

J: Oh yeh, they were tremendous (Unintelligible).

M: I mean, isn't... I think the limit now is six per house,

J: Yah

M: right?

J: Yah, but it's a different program than it was. There you didn't have trouble with kids, ya know.

M: Uh-hmm.

J: Ya know, just exploding...

M: Uh-hmm.

J: It was a family type situation,

M: Um-hmm.

J: ya know, you'd live together, you'd work and everything. They had a truck, I remember then, in the old days. They had a big truck and they'd built that big plywood house on

the back of it and everybody'd load up in that thing, just jam in there and they had seats on the sides, ya know, wood seats

M: Um-hmm.

J: just pile in there and we'd all go to school in that & one of the boys would drive, one of the older boys.

M: Um-hmm. And after school we caught that thing where you had to run all the way from down town pretty near out there to the Mission if you missed the ride. Then, much much later they got a bus.

M: Um-hmm

J: (Unintelligible) Oh, we had fun. We used to have a lot of things, (Unintelligible) church, all our programs. We had certain nights we were there, youth fellowship,

M: Um-hmm.

J: like we'd have a dinner on a Wednesday night. We'd cook it up there and Miss Marlin (?) was the director then and then after that we'd have games or dances or something, ya know

M: Uh-huh.

J: We always were busy and everything that we did was centered around that Baptist Church.

M: Uh-huh.

J: All the hay rides, sled rides and ice skating parties and you know, it was fun. They kept us going all the time.

M: Yah, the church was pretty new at that point wasn't it?
I mean the building down there?

J: Yah. Yah. Yah, it was pretty, pretty new then.

M: Uh-huh. And have you always been, then, associated
with the Baptist Church since then?

J: Well, originally I was Russian Orthodox,
(Unintelligible). But, I can remember when we moved to Kodiak I
(Unintelligible) We always went to Russian Church. This one
time I remember, my Aunt Ann White now, she was Ann Anderson
then, uh, they had a Christmas... No, they invited me to go to
church one time with them. I thought, well I'll try it. I went
to Sunday School and then to church service and I came back well,
told my dad, I sure like that church. Boy, they speak English
there and I could understand everything the priest said.
(Laughing from Marilyn and chuckles from John).

Then in the Russian Orthodox they just speak in Russian back
in those days. Kids didn't understand any of it.

M: Um-huh.

J: But, when I went to the Baptist Church, why I
understood everything they said and I asked if I could go back.
Sure, you can go back there if you like.

M: Um-hm.

J: So, I think I was nine years old then.

M: Um-hmm.

J: So, after that, well, I just kept going there (followed by chuckles). Nobody ever said anything in town. Russian priests & stuff.

M: Uh-huh.

J: As particular as they are about drifting away from the church, they never said nothing. (Unintelligible) I (Unintelligible) probably thirteen years old

M: Uh-huh.

J: but, I, I always go to the Mission, always been connected with 'em through the church and I guess, I'm probably the only one that's ever come out of the Mission that's continued to go to church and been on the Board of Directors out there from anybody that's ever been in the Mission.

M: Um-hmm.

J: But I'm in contact with 'em all the time, too.

M: Yeah.

J: So

M: And you do the same kind of thing for Camp Woody, don't you, John?

J: Yeah, more or less. (Both laughing) Yeah, I'm on the Board for Camp Woody. That's a pretty good program, ya know I like it. They gotta lot of good things, people from different churches involved in there now. The old days it was just a meeting down at the Baptist Church. We did everything ourselves,

maintained everything. It was kinda' like our own camp (Unintelligible) all the other churches. There are a lot of nice people on that Board (Unintelligible) really great people.

M: Um-hmm.

J: So it's kind of a fund thing to go over there. Bill Guy, he's Catholic and he's the President.

M: Uh-huh.

J: He's the greatest President of Camp Woody I ever saw (Unintelligible) really like him. There's nothing he won't do and he's so energetic and involved.

M: Um-hmm.

J: It's a good group to work with I think. I try to help out mostly with the boat.

M: Uh-huh.

J: Try to haul (Unintelligible) in the summertime

M: Uh-huh.

J: but now it's spring time and we gotta start thinking of maintenance and getting ready for the new camp director, before they get here.

M: Uh-huh.

M: There's always something to do.

J: There's always lots to do. Between that and our church, there's always something... that and the parsonage.
(Laughing from Marilyn)

M: OK

J: But, em (Unintelligible)

M: I think that pretty well wraps it up unless there's anything else that you think of that you think you ought to add.

J: Ah, not really, I guess. Just tremendous amount of changes on this island. It's grown so much. (Laughing) from what it used to be and how nice it used to be, with all the fisheries disappearing.

M: Um-hmm.

J: The population and all the laws and regulations. It used to really be nice but now it's a lot of pressure. You know... Just trying to stay in the commercial fisheries is a tremendous (More like the rest of the world, isn't it?) Yeh, it is. The fun part is... the exciting part of being a commercial fisherman is gone now. The pressure is so great and competition, it's gotten to be a... before you used to go out on a season and everybody'd be friendly, ya know, you'd go fish and we'd work together. Now it's a dog eat dog show and if you don't watch it somebody's going to cut your throat. You know,

M: Um-hmm.

J: it's just no fun anymore. Not like is used... strained, changed.

M: Um-hmm.

J: Now, I just can't believe it. But it used to really be exciting.

M: I'm sure there are still moments of excitement in it John (laughing).

J: Yeah, periodically, but not like it used to be. It used to be exciting all the time.

M: Um-hmm.

J: You was... enjoyable. Now it's, it's not periodi... You know, there are periods when it's fun, you get some of the guys that know each other together and (Unintelligible) you take turns fishing (Unintelligible). But that doesn't happen often.

M: Um-hmm.

J: It seems like everybody is so competitive and so greedy. It's taken all the fun and stuff right out of it.

M: Too many new comers.

J: Yeah. It's the name of the game, I guess.

M: Um-hmm.

J: Nowadays where ever you go whatever you do, you just live with memories now. And you tell these kids, when we started fishing... when I was a kid, it was all by hand, you didn't have all this power and electronics and hydraulics.

M: Um-hmm.

J: They said, "Well, how'd you do it?" I said, "Well, by hand."

M: Um-hmm.

J: "You mean you pulled the net by hand?" "Yeah, pulled it up and let it go out." I said, "We used the oars through

(Unintelligible). We didn't have jet power skiffs or hundred and fifty horsepower outboards. Had a pair of oars, you sat back there and you rowed. (Marilyn laughing) "Nah, you're kiddin'." "I'm serious." "Wa, Well, how'd you get the net in?" I said, "You pulled it in by hand."

M: Um-hmm.

J: "Just got back here and pulled it by hand and stacked it up." "Well, how'd you brail?" I told them, "Well you took this small brailer and you just stuck it out into the fish and you pulled it back in by hand." They said, "Well, how could you do that, we can't hardly even lift it up with hydraulic?" "Well, that was the way of life", I says "It's all we knew back then, it's all by hand." These kids look at you now like yer, ya know, pulling there leg or your crazy. They can't imagine. Pursein is tremendous, heavy, hard work. You had a purseine instead of a sidewash. You know you had rings, so you did all that by hand. You had a turntable on the back of the boat. You had to turn that and pull the net in and stack it by hand. We didn't have power blocks, winches and all that stuff.

M: Um-hmm.

J: They just can't imagine what a guy went through when fishing first started in the early days.

M: Um-hmmm.

J: Now you got all this fancy equipment and everything and these kids, you know, you get them out in that boat and they make

a few sets and they act like they're gonna die. (Marilyn laughing) Hey, man this is easy. You should have been here in the old days, then you would have died, really. (Both laughing)

J: They can't imagine when you try to explain to them, you know. But it's been a good life. I've enjoyed it. A lot of rewards in it. First you get frustration when your seasons are

M: Um-huh.

J: not good and competition's stiff. But, overall it's been a good life. I never went to the Bering Sea or anything like that, but we just wanted to have a small boat and small business and have a good family life.

M: Yeah.

J: That's why I got a small boat and never really went that big. And I'm not sorry for it. I know one thing, looking at the fisheries now (Unintelligible). What I got was what I'll end up with when I get out of it.

M: Um-hmm.

J: The thing I enjoy now, after salmon is hunting charters. I (Unintelligible) take charters out for hire.

M: Um-hmm.

J: I been doing it since 197...5 or 76,

M: Um-hmm.

J: before any charter boats ever came in here.

M: Um-hmm

J: I do it because I enjoyed it

M: Um-hmm).

J: Then we got guys coming in with these fancy charter boats and (Unintelligible) Coast Guard and wanted all these rigs so they could tie it up for themselves. I been in here too long so I went to Anchorage and passed the Coast Guard test and got a license (Unintelligible)

M: Um-hmm).

J: Now I'm trying to look into someum' I might get in with another guy or two and build a floating lodge and maybe see how that would work. Still stay in the charter business

M: Um-hmm.

J: because, the way fishing looks now, you gotta find someum' else

M: Yeah.

J: and that's where the money seems to be at in Alaska. It's in that charter business. I've been doing it a long time and and enjoying it

M: Um-hmm.

J: (Unintelligible). If I slid out of commercial fishing that's probably what I'll slid into is charter business. Like to be out on the water, ocean, ya know.

M: Um-hmm.

J: Now I (Unintelligible) I have fun, get Kim (Marilyn laughing) and some of them guys out there. That's what a hunts like. If you can get along (Marilyn laughing harder) with people and get them to where the game is

M: Em-hmm.

J: you can have a great time and enjoy it. Ya know it's not really work. But, if we can't put up with people or don't even know how to get along with em, you better not get into it because

M: Um-hmm

J: you won't last (?). I look forward to different seasons, ya know

M: Yeah.

J: commercial fishing, commercial crab, one week of that (laughing by Marilyn) the rest of it'd be charters

M: Uh-huh

J: Ya know

M: Uh-huh.

J: (Unintelligible) to the winter.

M: Um-hmm.

J: If a guy goes into this commercial charter business well, he could do it almost all winter

M: Um-hmm.

J: and fall.

M: Sounds like a good idea, hope it goes well for you
John. Thank you John. Thank you.

J: Thank you.

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