

PATTI YAW, INTERVIEWER
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INTERVIEW WITH MARIE RICE
AT KODIAK, ALASKA

PY: When did you first come to Kodiak?

MR: I first came in September 1960 on a belated honeymoon trip with Omar Stratman. We traveled over through the mainland and was at the state fair and saw the huge cabbages and thought that that is the way all gardens grew in Alaska. I learned later that I couldn't do that. He (Omar) flew out to the Aleution chain to look at land for ranching. I met him on Kodiak. They came back to Alaska after getting their teaching degrees to Akutan. First teaching employment.

PY: He was a teacher too?

MR: Yes, he was the head teacher and I was a subordinate teacher, I had the first four grades and he had the upper four. It was so exciting.

PY: How far out on the chain is Akutan?

MR: It's the third island this side of Dutch Harbor. It was a beautiful place, just perfect. We were employed by the state, it was a state operated school. They didn't send new teachers into difficult situations usually, so as I've learned other teaching possibilities that we were in a very sheltered very very ideal situation.

PY: Were they all native children?

MR: Yes, all native. I had come out of the hayfields where I had worked all summer and my hair was bleached almost white and blonde and my skin was tan and blue eyes. Everyone I saw was dark, even my husband, and I'd just sometimes absolutely look at myself in shock when I seen my image in the mirror because I just didn't fit at all. In science class whenever we would have free questions, little Dimitri would hold his hand up and ask "how come you have yellow hair and blue eyes?". Then I would explain. It was pretty remote, we went six weeks without mail. No flights. To get there is was by charters out of Cold Bay on a Goose. There was a mailboat which went up and down the chain at that time. It was the Expansion and it carried mail out the chain and back.

PY: How long would it take mail to get back?

MR: They probably went to Cold Bay and then they were picked up by air, or they could drop the mail off at Dutch Harbor, Unalaska and there were flights there. So probably they picked up mail coming and going from both places. If the weather was bad we didn't get mail.

PY: Were you the only non-natives in this village?

MR: Mostly, there were some part native and one other guy part of the time who was full caucasian. And during the winter, at that time Akutan didn't have any fish processing so in the wintertime, the men would go out to Adak and work on the Deep Sea which was a processing boat out there. Sat through many of the months in the wintertime where it would be my husband and many old men in the village and women and children. We only stayed one year. They really wanted us to stay. The chief William Tcheripanoff was also our janitor which I thought was kind of a conflict in roles, he pleaded for us to come back another year. We were interested into looking into ranching. That was one reason we went out there was to get a feel for what it was like out there. I'm glad we we did that because it was so remote. Marketing problems wer^l such a problem. When we left Akutan, we came to Kodiak and purchases Dave Henley's ranch at Kalsin Bay and went back to summer school. We were hoping to teach on Kodiak but we couldn't both get teaching assignments, so we went to Soldotna that year to teach. In January we were having troubles with the hired man we had hired to look after the ranch, so Omar quit the school and came over here (Kodiak). He was here when the earthquake and tidal wave hit. I was at Soldotna, we didn't have any communication for about ten days. I didn't know whether I had a husband or not. There were six people killed on the ranch on the road going through there. Personal loses were a bunch of Scotch Highland cattle which we shipped in from Colorado. They were mostly down on the tide flats and all the heffers were killed. I think at that time we estimated that it was about a fifteen thousand dollar loss in cattle.

PY: Did you feel any of the earthquake in Soldotna?

MR: Yes, I was in the basement of a motel, I was taking care of a motel for a German couple that had gone on vacation. Business hadn't been very heavy so they thought they could leave it to a school teacher to tend in the evenings. So I would lock it up in the day and in the evening have it open. They told me I could have fifty percent of whatever I took in, well I was busy, busy, busy. They didn't quite think that was fair when they

got back. But, I was doing laundry in the basement, the lights went out and the building started swaying and I got outside and being a log structure the whole building was just giving, swaying with every wave and the big trees were bending in half. Forty foot trees bending in half one way and then the other just like they were rubber. The cars that were in the parking lot in front of the post office, a lot or two away, were bouncing literally off the ground. You could see the ground just like it was water you could see the waves. You could hardly stand up. The snow was real deep I can remember falling down several times in the snow. When school was out I came over to the ranch then and Kodiak had had so much devastation I had only seen pictures and so forth. I remember old Kodiak though it was such a jumble downtown, little winding streets and little bars here and there and everything and I vowed I'd never drive in Kodiak. There were some good things that came out of the terrible chaos that the tidal wave did because Urban Renewal came in then and reconstructed all the downtown area. Laid out nice straight streets and the island had sunk about six feet with the earthquake so much of what was the former downtown area was under water at high tide. So they had to start hauling in fill, most of the downtown city area is on fill they've just raised it up again. To get to the ranch the tidal wave had taken out all of the bridges on all of the streams and of course at high tide the tide (was) over the road at many places so people would travel from Chiniak to town in caravans at low tide. The missile tracking site was open then so there was quite a bit of traffic, alot of the guys went to motorcycles and then they could go to higher trails and get around much of it. We had some real harrowing tales of getting to and from the ranch to town. We didn't do it often. Left for summer school. Came back in late July (Kodiak) and everything was still torn up. For her (her daughter) six week check-up when we came to town we had to ford streams and everything it was such an ordeal. She rode on a road grader and she forded a stream. I remember the road grader driver had black greasy hands and I'm carrying this baby in this bright pink blanket and he says what is he. Then we had to get into a state vehicle and they pulled us with a D-8 cat and pulled us through the stream over to the other side. Then we got in our vehicle and went on to town. When we came home they had laid rail flat cars across the stream without decking on them. They had two rails going this way, maybe they put planks on I'm not sure but it was just these two things you could drive on that were just the width of your tire. But, as you drive you can't really see, my husband is driving and I'm hanging with a flashlight out

the window shining in front of the tire as he crept and I'd say left, right as we drove across the plank. I wonder how we know they were safe. That was my first summer in Alaska, it was neat with the long daylight. Tried my garden to grow those big cabbages and I had just total failure. But, I learned a few tricks. I taught school that fall in Kodiak, he (Omar) didn't take a teaching assignment he stayed at the ranch.

PY: Now did you drive back and forth each day?

MR: No, it was just such an undertaking to get over the road system that I stayed with some members of the church the first while. Housing, people were doubled up all over town. All of the Aleutian homes were part of Alaska housing at that time and so they'd come around and check on how many families were living doubled up and tell you that you couldn't do it, but you had no options. I would go to the ranch weekends, if I could, not every weekend. We got to know the people who traveled the roads because you did it in groups and some of my long lasting friends are ones that I met during that time. After I adopted Craig I didn't want to teach full time so I started the Teensy Bear preschool then. In 1966. The next two years I stayed at the ranch and it wasn't like I was on vacation though. I remember feeding the cattle and everything.

PY: Was the cattle for business or personal use?

MR: Yeh, it was a full beef cattle ranch.

PY: Was it very prosperous?

MR: It had always been a struggle and we finally got up to about eight hundred head of cattle. The building, the slaughter house... we were in on the building of that and used that and I'd work in the slaughter house, I've done everything but kill the animals in there. Some people wouldn't think it was very lady like but we had to do it. I worked out with the men fencing, and working the cattle and branding.

PY: Did you have trouble with the bears?

MR: Yeh alot. Some years were worse than others and ~~(as)~~ the ranch we didn't have telephones then. I don't know maybe we'd just run over to the neighbors, which the ranches are pretty far apart. But they would organize hunts when they knew that there was a bear making kills on one of the ranches. Sometimes they were successful

in getting the bear and sometimes not. Joe Zenter was our neighbor over at Pasagshak. Pasagshak fishing area was his homestead and he had a gun mounted on his plane I think it was an M-16. He would shoot the bear from his plane which was the only way the ranchers were able to survive. Then Field and Stream got a hold of the fact that he was doing that and did a cover on their magazine with this defenseless bear standing with the plane pelting him. The Sierra club and some of those got so upset about what was happening on Kodiak Island to the bear to the point that they had enough pressure to make it removed. Joe Zenter was a very good hunter and every year he got many many bear. Ron Hurst had the ranch in Saltery Cove where the bear came off the refuge and he got many bear, lots of bear. Even your bear protection people here now, when we had a problem with the bear a year ago, they agreed with me that one of the reasons we have such an increase in population is because Joe Zenter and Ron Hurst are no longer here getting the bear. The sentiment has changed so much, Fish and Game would have a protection officer that would help the ranchers in getting the bear. Now the public sentiment is to protect the bear and so the ranching has all gone downhill alot due to that sort of attitude. We had horses and we even had sheep for awhile, we had about two hundred head of sheep.

PY: Going back to the earthquake, how long did it take for them to rebuild the city? Was it a slow process?

MR: Urban Renewal came in and did phases. The downtown area of course where the boats sit had gone right up through town and the stores and things had been demolished. When Urban Renewal comes in they layout an overall plan and they ended up having to redo areas of town that weren't affected by the tidal wave, which took out alot of the older homes, old Kodiak hotel. They remake the whole town. That probably took two years. East Elementary was under construction right after that. It did result in a much nicer town than was here before. It was just zero planning to where streets went or anything before. The streets were so narrow. I remember when I was here the first time in 1960, waiting for Omar to come in from the Aleution chain. There were sailors all over downtown, there were alot of bars and all and Mr. Anderson, I just felt so safe as long as we would only leave the hotel long enough to go eat and then go back and set in the foyer waiting for him (Omar) to get in from the chain. I just supposed thats the way Kodiak was. It wasn't until later that I learned there eas a Navy ship in and that was a Navy base then. The guardhouse was

clear in towards deadmans curve, that's where you went onto base. All the barracks and everything that were there were Fort Greely, I believe.

PY: Did you ever have any personal encounters with a bear?

MR: We got one that had made a kill over by the Pasagshak river, it was about 1975. It was the fifth of July. I remember specifically we had discovered a double kill, a brand new calf and its mother. (They) were both killed between Lake Rose Tead and the fishing area on the river. The bear had not eaten on the animals at all. So we were pretty sure it had happened early in the morning and the bear had not had a chance to feed before and the bear had been frightened away. So we went and sat my ex-husband Omar and I sat in our Toyota Corolla about ten feet from the kill, took a gun and waited for the bear to come. Had rolled the windows down on both sides and made it out into a bed and Omar suggested that, well I think I suggested I take first watch. Believe me I would have watched all night I would never have thought of going to sleep. He (Omar) had laid there to rest and it was about eleven o'clock at night, was getting that dusky look. Frequently a bear will go up a hill, so I kept looking up. There was this real steep bank right across the road in front of us. I kept looking up the bank for the bear to ascend off the hill and then I realized that there was a road there and probably a car had come along the road and frightened the bear. Then it probably had gone the other direction so I looked the other direction and there was this meadow on down in the direction of Lake Rose Tead. There the bear came just plowing the lowlands through brush that was only halfway up it's back, but it must have felt protected in the brush just coming closer and closer and of course we were between it and the kill. So it was coming straight at us. I got Omar up and at the window with the gun and everything and he had a 30-06 pump action and he'd already pumped it and so he was all ready to fire and he waited until the came so close to us. And of course they have poor vision I'm sure it was going on the scent of the kill. It came so close it was ready to turn and go around the car to the kill on the other side. When he pulled the trigger and nothing happened so he did a quick pump of the pump action and the bear then stopped and looked right at us. I about died and he pulled the trigger and this time he did have a bullet in the chamber and it fired. The bear turned just before he fired,

so he was hit from a rear shot and he dropped right on his rearend. Setting up on his front legs just silent. Omar jumped out of the car barefooted with the gun, went out pumped again and pulled the trigger and nothing happened and I looked in the seat of the car was the clip out of the gun and so I grabbed it, here I think you need these and I ran back to the car. The clip had not been fully engaged I guess. (Omar) put that in and pumped the rest of the shells into the bear.... When we skinned the bear out the first shot had gone in about four inches to the right of the spine. I thought probably the way it went down like, that it was a spine hit but it was off to the side and had blown the liver all up. We skinned it out and the ranchers have to turn the hides over to Fish and Game when they get them in protection of their property like that. That's the only bear I had seen.....I had doctored many an animal that had been attacked by bear. My brother was cutting hay, I think, he was on a tractor with a mower and there was a leak in the radiator so every little bit he'd have to go to the creek and get new water for the radiator. On one of his trips he found just the head of a fish was there the rest had been eaten off just between his frequent trips.

PY: So when did you finally move here to Bells Flats when you came back after being in Oklahoma?

MR: When Dale and I were married, before we were married when I was divorced in the fall of '76 I bought the house that was setting behind Mack's Sport Shop. It was setting where the back of Mack's Sport Shop now is. Was Eggmeyers Furniture Store and had it moved out here which was quite an undertaking for a single woman to do..... I was living in there without electricity, without plumbing that whole bit for several months. We didn't have any telephones at the flats then it was pretty roughing it.

I was still half owner in the whole ranch which was a fifty thousand acre cattle ranch.... We homesteaded a hundred and sixty acres out there. We did a five acre homesite which was another way to get land. For a beach site at Kalsin Bay we had to live there for five months to prove up on that. We had done a seventy acre trade and manufacturing lot, a feed lot, down toward Chiniak. It's about a half a mile past the Chiniak post office.... I had then thirty-five acres at Chiniak that I have subdivided.

PY: Now we just went to the museum and seen some of your artifacts today....how were the artifacts found?

MR: That is on our seventy acre trade and manufacturing site I just mentioned. When we were fencing that, my brother Lowell was working for us and that was in about '72.... In digging the post hole he found one of those beautiful big flencing knives.... When KEA put power in out there about three years ago they cut through on my property line and broke open a midden pile and artifacts were spilling out.... I went to Rick and Philomena Knecht, who had been instrumental in putting the heritage conference together and asked them if they would come out and identify what our site was.... Most of your sites are along the ocean and as we stopped completely away from the ocean and started hiking up the hill. They thought we were out of our minds and showed them the site and immediately with their trained eyes there was a stump there that they just picked up ten to fifteen artifacts just off the ground that we hadn't seen. Laid them on the stump and she became immediately excited that they were Ocean Bay artifacts....Ocean Bay sites are hard to find and up until this time all the depth they found in Ocean Bay sites was one to one and a half feet deep. And at that depth you don't get any bone preservation.... They did a test hole and expected to bottom out right away and it went about nine feet deep. It was a mound. They found bone preservation about a meter down finding bone, so they were finding things that had never been found. The carbon dating they got out of it was 7010 years before present with a couple hundred year margin there so. That's 6000 years before present, that's before the pyramids were built in Egypt, there were people on Kodiak. It did generate a great deal of interest in the archeology circles....The artifacts remain ours until we choose to do otherwise with them. There are, I think some of the figures are like, about 3000 artifacts out of the site.

PY: Will they continue to dig? Is there still some artifacts out there?

MR; Oh yes, well that whole area..... is site its hard to say it probably encompasses five acres maybe, around there. And the one lot that I had subdivided and almost sold is where it is located. We've done test holes on the adjoining lots of mine there and they seem to be free of sites.

PY: How did the natives treat you when you were a teacher down on Akutan?

MR: They were really good. Of course I was a shy new teacher and I think we did quite well. One teacher somewhere before had let the teachers come to the school to sew one night a week so I started a sewing night, it was Thursday night I think and they liked to come to the school to sew because we had a generator and the lights were good. In the village their lights were all run by a pelliton wheel. Which is a water generator they had a reservoir up above the village With a large wooden pipe that kept reducing down and so the pressure would get greater. In the winter actually it was pretty good because there was usually alot of water. There lights were only as bright as the force of the water. They usually had smaller light bulbs in their homes because they needed to run their refrigerators. They didn't use refrigerators as refrigerators they called them their freezers but, they were only refrigerators they would turn them all the way cold.... I wasn't sure how much I should intrude into their territory but every Sunday morning the young mothers, and young is like sixteen they would get married and have babies very young, would come to visit me at the school and show off their babies and just like clock work about ten o'clock every Sunday morning here they'd come tripping up the boardwalk with their babies and set and visit. The conversation was pretty much one sided, they'd sit and smile. There was an advisory school board and Anisha was president of the school board and I felt very at home with her right away we would go to their house but we didn't freely go to other houses.

They had starring at Christmas time which is a tradition with the Russian Orthodox Church. It's kind of a combination, I'm learning, of their culture combined with the Russian Orthodox. They visit all the houses in the village every night for several nights and they bring big glass star that must have been four feet across about twenty point star and it had the icons.... They would go into the homes and face it at the holy corner in the house like Catholic homes often have , like right in the corner there'd be a little candle and icons. They would face the candle that would stand on a stand it had a back on it and then they would twirl it and it would twirl around while they sang Russian Orthodox songs. Which was really interesting, musicwise they seem to have more tones than we have in our music..... They would sing in each of the homes and then have refreshments at every home. They invited us to go with them one of those nights and we went to only about five of the homes and then we dropped out. They also have a custom called masking that I thought was part of the Russian Orthodox Church. I'd asked a lot of questions

trying to sort out what was Aleut tradition and what was church and even they didn't know how to separate it out. It's only since what I've learned that some of the things I thought that the masking was part of the church just as the starring had been. The masking follows was after New Years only adults would take part in it. It was a very serious thing, everyone that took part in it would have to be cleansed after it. And they dressed up in big stuffed costumes usually and masks they probably anciently used masks like we saw at the museum. They would go from house to house and they had a record player that they'd plug in and put on music and they would do a funny dance pairing up two of these and it might be two women together or a man and a woman and do this just stomping dance and they'd get real hot because they were so bundled up and then they would have refreshments again at each house. Of course you could tell who they were when they went for refreshments because they'd lift their mask....

PY: Is it a celebration?

MR: I asked the lay priest at the time what it was about and he didn't speak English real well and he couldn't answer my questionsbut since I've asked Father Kreda (and) it is not Russian Orthodox, it goes back to their native culture. Yet they had it intertwined with their religion because when I asked them why they did it to them it was a religious sort of ceremony and they said anyone who took part in it had to go to a stream.... everyone who took part in the masking had to go cleanse themselves and had to go on a moonlit night to this stream and wash themselves at the stream. And if they were cleansed they could see the cross in the water which is bringing christianity into it.

With the tidal wave the grocery store Krafts had been in the area that was so swept out with the tidal wave and with the island sinking with subsequent tides would come through the store and so anything that floated would float away and the Baptist mission was given alot of the groceries. They had to be sanitized, putting all of the containers through a bleach solution and then of course they lost their lables and you never knew what the food was and then out at our beaches we salvaged on the beaches for that whole summer. We had a couple crawler cats, John Deere tractor cats and we salvaged lots and lots of creosote pilings because the canneries washed out and alot of things came across that we would also gather up lots of cans of shortening and coffee and we didn't drink coffee and they did use it at the

mission and they had gotten these other groceries so we would trade them coffee, coffee cans were easy to identify because of the seams around it.... We lost alot in the tidal wave but then by salvaging we salvaged... timbers we could use for fencing or construction and buckets of fuel and things like that would come in on the beach..... Our ranch was thirty miles from town, now its about an hours drive from town but back then it was a whole days undertaking to hit your tides right so we would go in and shop for a large duration. We brought in our groceries from Seattle, we would have case lots brought in and with our own meat and we had our own milk cow we were fairly self-sufficient.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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