

**CLARENCE SELIG JR.**

**ON**

**KODIAK, THEN AND NOW**

**BY**

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**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

***JV : Tell us a little bit about your family and then your growing up years in Kodiak.***

**CS :** Well, I was born June 26, 1937, ah just on your way to Ouzinkie, a little island called Nelson's Island , my step-grandfather Doc Pryor had the island at that time and my grand mother Caroline Kerry Alf Pryor was there when I was born. He moved back to Kodiak, about 1940 oh just before the war in 1941. Ah, my father Clarence Sr. was from Gloucester, Massachussets and my mother Pauline was born and raised in Afognak, an Alaskan native. Both of them are deceased. My father died in 1979 and my mother just passed away here last April, ah right now I've got four sisters and three brothers. I had a , out of family of four and four, there are three brothers living and four sisters. Well as far as living in Kodiak, I remember old Kodiak, I remember growing up just quietly.

My real grandfather William Selig and my grandmother Caroline arrived in Kodiak in 1922. Ah, the family made their way from Gloucester, Massachussets to Prince Rupert by train and they stayed there for a short time and my grand father came around by sailing ship and when they met up at Prince Rupert, they stayed up in Kethchikan and stayed in Kethchikan for a short time and then they bought a boat Cedric, little a one banger that's what they call it, and then they made their way to Kodiak and my dad got to Kodiak in 1922.

My grandfather went back to the sea probably about 1936 before I was born and he eventually went on to get his masters mariners certification... but going back to my father , he was the one who told me all about old Kodiak ,he was here when they brought the first deer you know. The deer in Kodiak island are not native to Kodiak island. They were transplanted , these Sitka black tail deer, they were brought

to Kodiak just like the elks. The Roosevelt elk that we have in Afognak aren't native to Kodiak. They were brought here and planted there. My mother told me stories when she was a little girl in Afognak that the elk was so tame that it would come down to her and be right down in the village but eventually they got wild for reasons I do not know.

**JV : Do you know how big or how tall they were ( elks ) ?**

**CS :** The Roosevelt elk in Afognak were really big. They can be as heavy as 500 pounds, maybe. and there's quite a herd there now. But going back to my family and what I remember of Kodiak, I went to kindergarten here ah, went through the grade school system , I went to the Junior High and graduated in 1957. I remember the old school house, the old bell up there before the tidal wave. I remember this stream down there, down on Brooklyn Avenue where salmon used to come up from the ocean, and go up to what is now the Aleutian homes, that is the old spawn area, marshland ,lots of rabbits. I remember especially in my kindergarten years it was so peaceful out there and quiet. I say this because the Kodiak I grew up in isn't even here anymore. It's just completely gone. After the tidal wave, Kodiak has changed so much really you know. I can remember sitting on the beach set up by Kraft's warehouse and skipping rocks on the water and listening to the airplanes taking off the old Naval Air Station which was an old base out there. I remember as a kid here in Kodiak watching the troops army soldiers, they send about 20,000 troops in Kodiak in World War II , I remember when they were marching out troops out of Fort Abercrombie, Pigmark Point.

**JV : Are you sure they were Army troops ?**

**CS :** Oh ! yes. There was a big build up of Army troops in Kodiak during the war.

There was troops over Woody Island. There was troops over Long Island, Chiniak, ah Cliff Point. There was troops up at Pillar Mountain, at Fort Abercrombie they call it. There were troops at Pigmark Point or Millers Point area. And I remember a time as a kid that ah, the President Franklin Roosevelt, FDR , made a trip to Kodiak. I can still remember everybody lining up the street down at Brooklyn Avenue and he drove by waving at everybody, that was a highlight in my life watching the President drive by our yard. He flew to Kodiak then. He came by in our house in his car and seeing him really was one of the highlights in my life and in my career.

I guess what i'm trying to say is that everything is different now from before.

**JV : Do you know why your grandfather and grandmother left Massachussets ?**

**CS :** My grandfather William Selig was born in NewBerry Port in Massachussets and my grandmother was born in Massachussets too and moved to Kodiak in 1922. My grandfather was a fisherman and he fished the banks of Glouster there, a key cod area and Martha's vineyard and he said that there was speculation that they are going to put a , the vineyard fish company, a freezer plant and employment in Kodiak but that did not materialize but that is the reason why they got to Kodiak and left Massachussets.

**JV : Is your father responsible for transplanting the first deer in Kodiak ?**

**CS :** No, no. He wasn't responsible. He took part or he was here when they brought the first deer in Kodiak and he tells me how it was that ah, it's amazing how they've grown in their numbers since that time. I don't have the exact date that they were put here in Kodiak. I think it was in the early 30's when they put the deer in

Kodiak and I remember my father telling me about that.

Going back to my father, he came to Kodiak in 1922 like I said, He was 18 years old and ah, I remember in his journals that he left for us kids about a hundred and five pages ah it was in July that the family were coming from Marmot, Marmot Strait sailing to Kodiak now, my dad wrote how beautiful, the hills were so green, he said he could see the houses along the shore there down by Standard Oil , he said that they were just all distant the houses were painted in white and the grasses were so green. He just had a feeling that he found his home. He said to me one time that he didn't think he had to go any further, this Kodiak is going to be my home and he called it the Emerald Island. So he sailed all over the island, probably just when he got here. He never really left the island. All the years my dad was in Kodiak, he never went back to the lower forty eight. He made one trip to, that's interesting to Ketchikan to see his mom. He went to Anchorage a couple of times but never made a trip down to the states once again.

**JV : *But going back to the war, in your recollection of the war, how old were you then ?***

**CS :** Well I was born in 1937 and we moved back to town in early '41 when the war started ah I remember the troop build up. I remember the people ah having to go through the black out. We used to, when firings would go off and we have to pack a few things and we'd go up there towards what is now called the Aleutian homes probably now called Thorsheim Avenue. We grew up there and since I was so small Clarence Sr. would put me in his shoulders and pack me out there and we stayed there for three or four hours till the signal is clear we could go back home. You know.

**JV : *What was the reason for the black out ?***

**CS :** Well we thought or we believed that the Japanese is going to bomb the island here and they made several attempts to get here and bomb Kodiak.

**JV :** *Did you really believed or feel that they ( the Japanese ) are going to bomb Kodiak or did you hear of any real attempts from the sky to bomb the island ?*

**CS :** Well you have to understand that the navy station out here was kind of like a rallying point or build up point for all the airplanes and ammunitions that was going down towards the Aleutian chains. So they have a pretty good data or common sense out there . They were aware of what was happening.They even heard planes flying one time above Kodiak.

**JV :** *How about you, did you hear planes flying ?*

**CS :** I never heard the planes though but I heard the sirens go off and we have to shut all the lights off, have to go around with blackout headlights with just little slits showing you know and the guards would come around and tell you, knock on your door and say you have to turn your lights off, cover all your windows because they were really worried the Japanese is going to bomb Kodiak. They really felt that you know.

**JV :** *How often do you change houses or do you still live in the same place ? Or you only leave it when the sirens go off or when told to do so ?*

**CS :** Well we would evacuate the house and we'd take food and whatever we need and we'd go up there in the bushes. We just stayed up there till all things are clear then we go back home. But even if we go back home at night we have to keep all the windows closed, no lights could shine out or nothing. Even the cars headlights had to be really dim.

**JV : Did you ever feel miserable then as a child ?**

**CS :** Oh ! no. I was too young probably to know what was really happening. I remember one time we even have a bomb shelter we need that was built. I dont know what good it would have done if we were hit by bombs.

But I guess what I'm trying to say is that there was a real threat by the Japanese to bomb Kodiak. And I remember a lot of war efforts, planes that were sent down to the Aleutian chain had to pass through Kodiak and I could still remember as I look up in the sky and see formations of P-38 coming in, lining at the base, you know, B456 at times come real low right above Kodiak against Pillar mountain and go down, land in the base then maybe about two or three hours after they got refuel you hear them take off again maybe circle Kodiak once or twice and head on out sometimes they head up towards Anchorage and most of the times they head out towards Old Harbor thru the pass heading down the chain area.

**JV : Have you seen a Japanese in Kodiak when you were young ?**

**CS :** No, no. They never got to Kodiak. They never did. It was just a threat.

**JV : What happened to the Naval Base after the war ?**

**CS :** After the war, the Navy Station till 1972 became a Coast Guard base but in between that was the Korean war too you know so it was important that the Navy or Military have a presence in Alaska you know like Fort Richardson, Fort Wainwright, Elmendorff air base. Well Kodiak naval station is important too. Well after they close up the base they reopened later on and became the Coast Guard Base now.

Right after the war in 1945, there was really no scaling down too much of the naval station, they just kept right on going, right on going and so we've always have a

military presence in Kodiak probably since about in the late 1930's.

***JV : Do you think the military presence in Kodiak is beneficial to the Island ?***

**CS :** Oh! yes, definitely. Because it puts credence to the community and believe it or not a lot of retired families in Kodiak are ex militaries. They come up here. They do their tour, they extend their tour extension and then they retire in Kodiak. The military presence is important in Kodiak and for one thing it provides an income and more than that it provides a sense of security and its presence here ( CG ) is high profile, it's a nessecity in a way of search and rescue for the fishing fleet. Kodiak is probably the second biggest port in the United States. As far as surveillance and domestic needs. The Coast Guard is very vital to Kodiak and also to Alaska.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

For an index of other recordings in this collection see the index:

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