

Interview with Mrs. Annie White  
by  
Phil McRee

Kodiak Alaska  
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PM I understand you were born in Karluk and you've obviously moved to Kodiak. Fill me in on when those things happened.

MW "I was born in Karluk in, uh I don't have to put my year do I?"

PM No Ma'm

MW "...and we lived in old Karluk, they called it old Karluk. New Karluk was on the other side where mostly native people lived. In old Karluk there was Swedes, Norwegians and my dad was from Finland. He came there from way back. He was a skiff builder for Alaska Packers there. He came there and he married a lady before he married my mother. Now he's been married twice. He was married twice and with his first wife he had two daughters and one son. So she passed away and he came, my dad, came to Afognak. Fellow by name of John Reft, that's my father, and uh, he came to Afognak and ask my mother if she'd marry him, so she married him and moved to Karluk. So we're offsprings from second marriage and uh, let's see, there was, uh four brothers and three girls in our family and now of course it's now 1943 and I'm the only Reft family left. Praise the Lord for that."

PM Since 1943?

AW "Uh, 1993, Excuse me."

PM So your dad went to Afognak and courted your mom and...

AW "Yeah he did, he married her. Yea, so they moved back to Karluk because my dad's job was in Karluk, he was a boat builder there for Alaska Packers. So meantime, well, he started a second family and we lived in old Karluk until I moved from there after I got married in 1941. Our oldest got burnt. At that time I was going to Russian church and while I was in church he got hold of gasoline and it exploded. He lived for 72 days. That's when we moved to Kodiak. That was in 1941. So we have been in Kodiak ever since."

PM How about your brothers and two sisters?

AW "Yea, one, the youngest sister died. Uh, so she didn't live. My sister Mary lived till about, what was it, three years, well what was it? Time flies. Mary Gallagher was my sister. Till, what was it? Five years ago? Well, can't even remember that."

PM Of your sister that lived and your brothers, did they stay around Karluk or did they move off...

MW "No Gus Reft stayed right in Karluk and he had a house there of course. His son has the house now. He's still living in Karluk. My dad built that house and it was left to Gus Junior."

PM How about your other brothers, did they stay on the island or did they scatter out?

AW "Yea they did. They did scatter out. Let's see, Gus, he was the only one in Karluk and Albert was in Kodiak and during tidal wave he was one of the victims of the uh, tidal wave. He got the uh, him and Tom Gallagher came over from Near Island and of course we had a earth quake and when they got to the dock over here, the

fellow says 'I can't get my motor started' and my brother, of course he was pretty handy, his name was Albert Reft, that's John Reft's father. Anyway he jumped on board a boat and he was working on a motor when, that's when the tide just sucked them right out. You probably heard about the channel going dry. Well, they were one of them got sucked out. We have never discovered a body or anything. So that was the end of him and then my brother Charlie, he was in Anchorage. He moved to Anchorage and was living there. Of course my youngest brother, he passed away with appendicitis. At the time in Karluk we didn't have no airplanes, so no way of getting him out to a doctor."

PM If you got sick you had to wait until a boat came...

AW "Yea, that's right. The only way, when my son got burnt that time in Karluk, Herman Shelley (sp?), (he was a trader going around the island at that time,) well he brought us in. Fortunately he was there at that time, so he brought us in. After that we never went back. We just left our home and everything. I just didn't want to go back."

PM Today is there a medical care facility in Karluk?

AW "I just really don't know what they have there. I have never kept up with it. Thank goodness they now have the airplanes."

PM So your were married when you moved to Kodiak.

AW "Oh yes! We had better be, we had my three sons. Ha ha..."

PM Tell me about the education system in Karluk

AW "Well, we had just elementary school there at that time there in old Karluk. We had to walk clear over to the village and there was a bridge that we had to cross, it was a bridge way down below and it was a swinging bridge you know. It was really a bad bridge. But then, we'd always manage to get across. And the education itself was good. It was by Bureau of Indian Affairs. But golly, they offered quite a bit. They even teached us how to make baskets and ... I couldn't do it now. You have

to practice you know. But then all this handy things a person could use at home. Uh, it wasn't like today, You know, kids looking for things to do. We didn't have to. We had chores to do. We just came home and had chores to do. If we came home and mother was sitting there knitting socks or something, we were there. We would start learning with our mother. Then another thing, whenever the river would freeze and we'd go out skating, Mother would say, 'You can't go out unless you get your bedroom cleaned.' We had chores to do. Then you could go out and play. My job was to put the potatoes on, you know, as soon as I came home from school. But our education was pretty good. Anyway I thought it was."

PM How many students were there all together in the school at the same time?

AW "Well, I couldn't tell you that."

PM Twenty, thirty?

AW "Oh, it would be around that. We were all in one group."

PM So the students would help instruct the kids that were younger?

AW "No, no we had Mr. and Mrs. both in the room. They'd be a married couple teaching. It seemed like we never had any problems. The teachers, they pretty much did it all. She was on the ball."

PM I had the good fortune to grow up in a small community before TV and don't recall being bored.

AW "No I was never bored. Our time it was really occupied. And you know, being a girl, I'd be the one that would get up and build a fire in the morning. We had coal because my dad was working for Alaska Packers and of course they would furnish our coal for us. So therefore, every morning I'd get up and build a fire. The boys never did."

PM What sort of chores did they do?

AW "Well, gee whiz, they'd uh, they would help bring in the coal and we'd have to carry water too. They'd have to carry water in. Winter time they'd have to carry

water in. Summer time we had running water. But later years my dad got the pipes dug down so year round we had running water. But all those things were almost done seasonally. We lived winter time, there was a house between where my dad was working at the spit, we called it the spit, where my dad was working at Alaska Packers, building those skiffs. There was another house in between, it was a red house, we called it the red house. We'd move down there for the winter so it was easier for us to get across to school. And uh, I remember one morning we was going to school and there was great big deep snow and I lost my rubber, you know I had rubbers over my shoes. It was stuck in there and we didn't get it out till spring. Ha ha

PM Was Alaska Packers the only employer in town?

AW "Yes, well there was another company, gee I don't know what that other company was. It was across on the other side of the river. Gosh, Alaska Packers was on the right side and , there was another company that had a site there where they beach seined. And then Tanglefoot, they was people there beach seining there too. They had all their quarters up there and there was another area too, uh Waterfall towards old Karluk way, there was another place there, that's where I used to walk over the mountain to meet husband. Ha ha, over the mountain. Yea , Ha ha ha ha

PM Want to tell us about that?

AW "No no, ha ha. It was really a... Last summer when we went there, it brought back lot of memories. I was reminiscing...

PM I'm curious about the life style. Alaska Packers was there and I take it that he was employed full time year round

AW "Oh yes, he was full time, year round."

PM Were very many full time employees in the community?

AW "No, no"

PM Just a very few?

AW "Well, summer time they were seining, fishing, but winter time they were not employed. My dad see, he worked for the company, so he was employed year round."

PM For most of the people in town, were they actually employed by Salmon Packers in the summer time or did they fish and...

AW "No it was by the company because, winter time they'd buy their groceries on credit. They lived on credit. Then when they went fishing, they'd hold back whatever they owed. You know, from their pay check. And that's how they lived."

PM Today, in society, a lot of folks have problems with their credit ... people grow up and don't know how to manage their credit. When you grew up did people know how to manage their credit?

AW "Well, I don't know how sufficient that was but that was how they lived though because I do know. Do you know how I know? I'll tell you. One morning my sister and I were going to school and an old fellow by name Alexchi was sitting there waiting for seal. They'd seal hunt there from the beach. there, and my sister said, 'I wonder if we should ask him if we could get some candy with his credit.' 'Alexchi, can we buy some candy on your credit?' 'Sure, go and buy some candy.' So we went and bought some candy, we got those candy kisses, ha ha. and we charged to Alexchi. Alex was his name and they called him Alexchi. I'll just never forget that. When we got home we felt sick because we ate this candy, we bought half a pound you know, and we charged it to him and then we got tired of it and we rolled it in a ball and threw it in the water so Mom wouldn't know. But then, somehow she found out and she said, 'Boy, don't you girls ever do that again.'"

PM You mentioned that your job was to get the potatoes on. Did you do any gardening?

AW "Oh yes, my dad made sure we had gardens every summer. We grew all our vegetables, all our vegetables. Carrots, cabbage, rutabagas, turnips, potatoes for winter. We had all that in the cellar for the winter. That was our supply. We had our supply of vegetables for the winter."

PM Did you do any canning?

AW "No, my mother never did, but I did, I could prove it. I have scars. But I start canning after I got married. For some reason i was just one of those things. I was just inclined to handle food. Now another thing, with my family, after I married Al Anderson, well I uh, him and I would sit down towards fall of the year before Alaska Packers would leave. We'd make out an order for groceries for the winter and we'd figure just how many cans of fruit we'll need, vegetables, everything we need in canned goods or oats. We ate quite a bit of oats. For some reason I knew that was healthy for my children. Still, for change, we'd have a little cereal once in a while. And sourdough hot cakes was always there. It seems like we never had any problems. And chickens, we had chickens you know, to get by with, and eggs. So uh, one day I says to my husband, 'By Golly I better start canning salmon.' My mother never did. They'd salt all the fish or smoke'em. That's all they ever did. I canned some salmon & they thought that was just wonderful. But Mom never tried 'cause she saw how I got burned. But I didn't get burnt through uh, canning. It was through cooking a ham and being in a hurry to go on a picnic. That was the problem. That's where I got the burn."

"So when I was growing up, my dad would hire some of those native people to dig a garden and they'd use kelp & they'd plant it in there for fertilizer and then he'd start planting. My mothered be out there though doing the biggest part of planting 'cause he'd be working. But that's how things uh. And my sister and I, we'd have our own little garden. Now we gotta see who's garden is gonna come up

first. By golly, we all was same time, them seeds would start popping up. Boy, we'd be tickled 'cause they were teaching us see. That was all in teaching."

PM Sounds like your diet then was much like today except that it wasn't frozen. What about the native people? Was their diet the same?

AW "No they never had any gardens. Why? I don't know. No, you could go to a village, I bet today even, they don't have any gardens."

PM They somehow maintained pretty good health, I wonder how they did that. How did they supplement their diets with vegetables?

AW "I just don't know what their diets are. I really don't. 'Cause this is how we were raised. My dad knew just what we needed. And potatoes, boy he had to have potatoes every day with our main meal."

PM I understand you are pretty good at Russian cooking. Did you learn from your mother?

AW "Some from my mother, but then I was a food service director for school food service here for twenty one years and where I picked it up was a lot of it from my cook books."

PM So you learned that latter on?

AW "Yea, well the pirok (sp?) and all this other stuff, we did that at home. My pirok is like my mothers. That's salmon pie."

PM Back to Karluk before 41. When summer arrived and the cannery started hiring, where did most of the labor come from? Was it hired locally? or Seattle or where?

AW "Must have been local because I don't recall seeing any Filipinos or anything like that working there. I think it was the locals where I was. I worked for uh, what was the name of that, uh Konigas cannery here. Hap, Haperty, what was the name of that cannery? Anyway I worked there during the summer when I wasn't working up at the school. They canned clams, you know, razor clams from mainland and everything like that. Everything was put up at this one cannery. But

when the tidal wave came of course the cannery went out. Hafferty, I think was the name of that cannery. And uh, old Squeaky Anderson was, no Squeaky Anderson he had a cannery in Carmel and we were there too."

PM Where is Carmel?

AW "Halibut Bay, down past Karluk down at Carmel, they were canning razor clams down there too. We worked there too. My husband was running a boat."

PM Was there any bigotry in the community?

AW "No, ah no, they all got along OK"

PM What about Kodiak? After you got to Kodiak was everything pretty smooth here?

AW "Uh hu, uh hu, well I worked with the public. I had to. I guess I'd done well when I could work with the public. Because when we came to Kodiak, I went and worked at the hospital and I cooked there too."

PM Back to Karluk, did they use fish traps there?

AW "Yea, it was up in Uyak bay somewhere, Zachar Bay was where those fish traps were there. But I can't remember what year they pulled them up. You probably know that."

PM No, I was just aware that during the push for statehood the fish traps were a big issue.

AW "Oh yea, they killed a lot of fish like cod fish and bottom fish and stuff those traps were, they were not good."

PM Was there any friction between the local people and Alaska Packers over that issue?

AW "No, packers used to bring their own crew from California, on the slow boat to China. But they'd come for summer and work there, I remember it, quite a few of them, I guess the main ones would work and the local people would work with them."

PM I get the impression that, historically there was a lot of friction because the Alaskan, the local population...

AW "Now there is, or more so, yes, there is now. But at that time we didn't have that many boats coming up and going fishing where natives are. You know you didn't see hardly any of them. But now, there's so many, so there is quite a bit of friction."

PM I was wondering if the cannery had the capability of not having to buy fish from the fishermen, of getting all their fish from the fish traps.

AW "I wouldn't know that."

PM That wasn't a problem?

AW "Well they canned, see they canned all their salmon in Larson Bay. They had seven canneries, I understand, in the Karluk river before I was born. But that was before my time. I saw some remains, you know, like uh, oh they must a had Chinamen there because they had Chinese uh, bowls and I remember we used to pick up all kind of beads and stuff like that and those Chinese bowls and my dad says, 'This hill side in old Karluk,' he says, 'there's quite a few dead Chinamen up there you know. So I says, 'Well how did they get up there?' He says, 'Well, they used to come up there and some of them would pass away and they'd bury them up there on the hill side.' I says, 'Come up here for what?' and he says, 'Canneries.' He says there was seven canneries up that river there was so much red salmon in that river. That was a good red salmon river."

PM Apparently it has never recovered.

AW "No, no no it's never recovered. Well because now it's so many boats compared to what it was during that time and they were just seining, not purse seining at that time. They was just beach seining. I hadn't realized I could remember that far. Kinda brings me back."

PM What was it like here during the war? Was there much concern that the Japanese might come here after they bombed Dutch Harbor and landed on Kiska and Attu?

AW "Japanese were heading for Kodiak. The fog is the only one that kept them away. Yes, my husband was working for civil service at that time, Al Anderson, anyway he came home and he said, 'You'd better get the boys and get to the trench.' He had a trench built for us. I says, 'What's going on.' He says, 'The Japs are coming, we're supposed to be getting bombed.' And the fog rolled in. It was thick fog and here I am sitting down there with my children and we had sandwiches and thermos bottles and everything like that, you know, until the clear signal came on, and then we could go back home."

PM Do you remember when that happened?

AW "It was in 1942."

PM Was that a one time occurrence?

AW "That was the only time we had to go to a shelter. So uh, it was kind a touchy feeling."

PM I understand you had black outs occasionally?

AW "Oh yea, every night. We had to black out every night. And see, then the town went dry, I mean no liquor to be sold. And we didn't know, we had neighbors down here that must be bootlegging or something. One night there was one of the fellows tried to crawl into our window, the highest window in the kitchen. It was a Mexican and uh, I says to my husband, we're in bed, I says I could hear something. He says he could hear something to. He went out there and here he's trying to crawl in through a window. He says, 'I need a bottle, I wanna buy a bottle' he says and Al says, 'There is no bottle here.' He swung the ladder down, (he had the ladder up there trying to get in through the window.) So any way, he got down and Al came right in you know, and there was a path going down to our neighbors down here and Paul Walcoff, went to work and hit him on the head with his flashlight. Down the guy went. And my husband Al went out there and says,

'Well, the guy is sleeping.' He went down there later and he was gone but he went in through another window down here where it was liquor. So it was dry.

PM Was that associated with the war?

AW "Yea, that was during blackout see. Yea everything was black."

PM Did you have to do the blackouts right up till the end of the war?

AW "Till end of the war, pretty close till the end of the war"

PM In August of 43 the last of the Japanese left Kiska and apparently the authorities were fairly confident that they wouldn't invade Kodiak. But you had to keep up the blackouts?

AW "Well, yes we did, for a while there."

PM Was that due to the proximity of the Navy base here?

AW "Yes, oh golly we had quite a few service men here. Air Force"

(alarm interrupts to signal time to turn over tape)

PM Was the blackout enforced in other communities like Karluk and Larson Bay? Or was it just here in Kodiak.

AW "No no, it was all around the island."

PM Right after the war, when the military sent all the soldiers home, how did that effect the economy here?

AW "I really, I wouldn't know just how badly it effected the town. Because they did have their own store out there to you know. But I imagine it did, some. Because there is quite a few people in town. That's when it starts to build up."

PM I suppose that had a big impact on the canneries too didn't it?

AW "I don't know."

PM I read that there was a real boost to the salmon industry during WWI because the government bought a lot of canned salmon and I wonder if that happened during the second world war.

AW "Oh, I didn't know too much about that."

PM I'm curious about politics and the push for statehood. Do you remember when that was going on?

AW "Well, some were for it and some were not, you know, were against. But I don't know. I think it's for better we are a state."

PM Did you get involved in politics during the push for statehood.

AW "No, thank goodness, I don't get involved in that politics."

PM What were the arguments? Who opposed it?

AW "I don't know if it was Democrats or what."

PM Was there much commercial influence? Did the canneries get involved in that?

AW "Ah..."

PM I understand the canneries were opposed to statehood because it was in their interest to keep the fish traps?

AW "Oh yea, they wanted to keep the fish traps. Sure cause they were catching most of their catch you know. But I don't know how they felt about the statehood. I imagine they would oppose it."

PM Yea, I know that they did oppose statehood but I wonder if they made any effort to change public opinion or sway the vote.

AW "No, I don't know. I really wouldn't know."

PM Then it certainly must not have been anything too visible.

AW "No, no it wasn't because that was in 19..., what year was that?"

PM The statehood actually passed in 59 but there was a referendum in the late 40's.

AW "Yea, see we were here already and I was, well, we were kinda new around here."

PM I understand that you worked for the food service part of the schools here. Do you recall how the Kodiak schools were funded? Was it Bureau of Indian Affairs?

AW "Here? When I came Here? No, it was run by government."

PM The federal government funded it somehow?

AW "Well yea, uh I don't know just how it was funded. but in 1957 was when I went up and started working for the food service. It was all commodity food we was working with. You know, government food that was donated. Not all, but lot of it was, like flour and bulk stuff."

PM Milk?

AW "No, we had to get our own milk."

PM Did that change after statehood came in effect?

AW "Well, this was after it was a state. See, in 1952 I went up there. That was second year when they started having lunch program up there and I was not a supervisor up there then, so I was just one of the employees but the third year I took over being a supervisor. Then I opened up the East Elementary School cafeteria and I opened up the base cafeteria and got those going. Then, there a dorm here. The government was boarding, uh around the island students and they kinda withered out and we took over. The borough took over. Of course I had three meals a day then at this one high school cafeteria. I took over that cafeteria and we were preparing three meals a day, breakfast lunch and supper for these boarding students that were down there, which was quite a thing. And then Mr. Lind, Dr. uh Marsha? he was head of education at Juneau, well he came and, well he was working for the school system here. So I says to him, (him and I started talking about the lunch around the island and I says,) 'See, that sounds good to me.' So we flew around the island and that's how the lunch program around the island is today. Him and I flew around and I says, 'Well, we need freezer, we need convection oven, we need pans to warm up all this', uh, they're like TV dinners you know. And then the milk would be shipped out to the uh, around the island. This is how all this lunch program, it' through Marsha Lind."

PM So you got to set up the lunch program for the whole island?

AW "I set the whole program. First thing, we had to get freezers, pans and oven. That takes care of them. And of course we had to have big freezers where we could store all this stuff to be safe."

PM And those were prepared meals?

AW "Yes, and after first year, we knew what the kids would eat and what they wouldn't so there wasn't any waste. So many things they wouldn't eat. There's no use shipping the supplies that they wouldn't consume. And the milk was shipped out too.

PM You obviously set those up for native villages. Was there much difference between what they would eat in the villages and in Kodiak?

AW "Well, I can't remember just right off hand. Just different things we'd see that wasn't being consumed. Just being thrown away. You don't do that. You just can't push food to them that they wouldn't eat 'cause lotta kids, that would be the only meal they'd have you know. And we tried our best, whatever we could get what they would eat. We'd ship out that. But as far as fruit & stuff went, you know fresh fruit & stuff, we couldn't do that 'cause it was just TV dinner and milk and balanced meal. Type A lunch."

PM Back to Alaska Salmon Packers. Your dad worked for them. Did they have a retirement program?

AW "No. You know my dad passed away while he was working and you know my mother never got a penny. Never. They never even helped her. No retirement what so ever. At that time. You know it was way back."

PM How old was he? Was it work related when he passed away?

AW "No, I think he died of cancer. At that time it was hard to tell. And he wouldn't say anything about what was wrong. I know he couldn't eat. He went to Seward and he kept quiet about the whole thing. But I assume it was cancer."

PM Did they have medical insurance? When he went to Seward, did he have to pay for that on his own?

AW "I'm sure he had to because they didn't have any benefits at all."

PM I'd like to know something about the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the Native Corporations. Was there much controversy surrounding these two issues here in Kodiak?

AW "No I didn't know anything about that."

PM You weren't exposed to that here in Kodiak?

AW "No because I am part of that. I am part Native myself. But I never, I hardly ever go to their meetings. It's terrible, but I should."

PM From my reading, I get the impression that it wasn't a very equitable or just settlement. How do you feel about that?

AW "Well I tell you, the thing, when they did start, I think a lot of money was spent foolishly. Like Koniag, they needed someone to really, you know uh, see into those things. That they not go out and spend a whole lot of money. This is why I don't go to meetings. Because I would speak up on it because so much of it has been spent that could have been eliminated. Like having parties and all this crap. Excuse me."

PM What kind of impact has that had on the native culture? Is it going to survive?

AW "I really couldn't tell you. I really couldn't tell you that. I don't know just how long it'll be going. Because a lot of that funding has been utilized in a way that would have been more careful."

PM Apparently the settlement something over 900 million dollars over a ten year period and then some revenues

AW "Lot of money, lot of money going out. Like I say, this is why I don't go meetings because I could see it in the papers. It comes to me and Elgin, he receives the paper to. Him and I discuss it. Well, If I went up there, I don't want to open up

my mouth. You know, complain. So I just sit back, because it's going to be drained. Eventually it's going to be drained. I belong to Karluk, you know, Larson Bay and Karluk group. But they have nothing. Lost everything they had."

PM How did that happen?

AW "Well, they sold that cannery and no one got anything out of it. They invested in that cannery with the money. Then they never get much out of it. Now it someone else owns it."

PM It didn't make as much profit as they wanted, so they sold it?

AW "No"

PM The prohibition against sale of shares of stock in the Native Corporations was to expire in 91. There is some concern that all the shares will end up belong to some one else. White folks. And eventually the natives would wind up without anything to show.

AW "Afognak is doing pretty good. I don't know just for how long. See this logging and everything. It's pretty well down too. That's another group though. A different organization. We're not in that at all. We're all divided. Instead of being one group, Ouzinkies own their own group and so is Afognak. I don't know why they didn't all get together. But, that's the way it goes."

PM So you think there were some bad decisions made down in Karluk?

AW "Yes, definitely."

PM Who controlled that? Did a local tribal council control it or did they hire some consultant that did a bad job?

AW "I don't know who in the world, I know they tried to hire my nephew you know, he's a lawyer. He took a look at the paperwork. He says, 'No, I don't want it' 'cause it was draining, they were draining the money out. He says it's not going to last long. Sure enough, it didn't. He said, 'I don't want to be in there.' So I don't know."

PM Will someone born in Karluk today have a better life than you've had? More opportunities? Would you want to trade places with them?

AW "Well I personally wouldn't trade my life & all to where I'm at. Because I'm so attached to all my conveniences. It would be very difficult for me to make adjustments again. Because I remember using a gasoline lamp & all this stuff like that you know. Well, we had the time. It was hardly anything going on. Once in a while we'd have village dance. That was exciting. But uh, no, I wouldn't trade."

PM Have you ever met Morris Tollifson from Olga bay?

AW "No:

PM I'm still curious about the impact that the Russians had when they were here and how much of your culture came from the Russians.

AW "I really couldn't tell you."

PM Was there anyone in the community who spoke Russian?

AW "My mother used to speak Russian, and my dad would answer her in English. She was raised in Afognak with uh, my grandmother died when she was young with this flew that they had in 1912 and so she was raised by a family in Afognak Island. And they spoke Russian. When my dad & her got married she'd speak Russian and he'd answer, eh I don't know what their communications were before they really got down, that they could communicate. But that's how she spoke. She spoke Russian."

PM Did you or your brothers or sisters ever pick it up?

AW "Oh yea, we understood what she said, and we'd answer her in English."

PM Is there anyone in the community now that can speak Russian?

AW "I don't know. I don't there was too many what spoke Russian. There was Laktonans that I know, they spoke Russian and uh, there out of there know. It was ah, I got together with a Russian fella at the hospital. I thought, 'Oh I could speak Russian. I went up there. Our lingo was completely different. I was making

signs, all kind of signs. Some words he could understand. Some he couldn't you know. I thought, 'Well gee whiz, I could help the man out.' I told my husband, 'Well I'm going up there.' 'Sure, go.'"

PM Was Russian a second language for your mom, or was it her only language?

AW "I think it was her only language she had. She'd speak English too. She spoke English.

PM Was Russian her family language or did she learn it in church school?

AW "No no. She never went to church school. She learned it right with the family she lived with.."

PM I understand that during the late 1800s some church people got together here in Kodiak and decided to divide Alaska up. The Baptist got to have Kodiak, the Presbyterians got Sitka and other denominations divided Alaska up and sent out their missionaries. I notice that there is still a Baptist church here in Kodiak. Have you noticed much conflict between the Baptist church and the Russian Orthodox, or do they pretty well tolerate each other?

AW "I think they're tolerant. My half brother, that was before my time, he was raised at the mission over at Woody Island. That's where they had the mission first. The Baptist Mission. Of course I didn't know. I was uh, After his mother died he placed over there. He went to school there and lived there. Baptist orphanage there. And they took him out to California with them when they left. The missionaries did. And he had education where he was teaching."

PM What happened to that? When did it wind down?

AW "You mean Woody Island? Oh that's gone. That burnt down I guess. That was, I can't remember what ever happened. I think it burnt down But we do have a camp. I'm a Baptist. We do have a, of course the whole community uses it, it's camp, you know, bible camp over there. And they use it every summer. How long have you been here?"

PM Six months

AW "Oh no wonder you haven't gone."

PM I'm new to these parts

AW "I see. no wonder you don't know. Well then they have a... you should visit the mission some time. Because they have a fella up there that has a group of kids that come up there. Lot of them are problem children. It's quite a home. Of course, for years they were taking orphans. Or problem children. But now it's older children."

PM There are quite a few children at the high school that live there. Apparently they take them in and give some structure. I don't know if its just orphans or problem kids or..

AW "No, they're not orphans, they 're problems kids. It's a job. A job I wouldn't want. I couldn't handle it"

PM I run into quite a few on those kids in class

AW "See, we don't hear nothing about it because everything is, you know, among themselves. Confidential. But we do know there's problem kids there. It's a blessing that there's people that could handle children like that. And then they have a great big building there and they have uh, programs during the day. The kids that are out on the street, they just go up there too. So it's open to all the children at certain times."

PM I guess times were pretty prosperous back when the King crab fishery first opened up. How did that effect you?

AW "Well our money, the money was small. I mean there was lot of King crab but they hardly got any money for it. You know when the King crab first opened up, the Elfin Gem up here, (points to picture on wall) my husband's boat went to work and bought nineteen crab pots and put 'em out. He uh set 'em out, went out

to pick 'em. They weren't there! He didn't put a line long enough, so the current just took the pots & all out! Nineteen pots IOU! Dear."

PM Was that a pretty big investment?

AW "Oh it was at that time. I can't remember just what, I know it was over a thousand dollars. You know I says to Al, "A thousand dollars we don't even have. At that time I was home with the children. You know, always stayed with children. Never went to work, until they grew up. That's a problem today with the children. They haven't got the parents."

PM Yea, that's a problem.

AW "Definitely, yea I know it is. 'cause when they come home they expect something nice in the refrigerator. They expect mom to be there, to greet them & ask them how was the day, you know. Not just tap them on the shoulder and let them go."

PM They can get into too much mischief if someone's not there.

AW "That's right. Oh I never had problem with my children. Never. I have a son that's retiring this year. Elgin Oregon. He's a teacher there. This is his thirtieth year. So he's retiring."

PM Did he ever teach in Alaska?

AW "No, he didn't teach here. I wished he did. Better retirement."

PM I imagine there is a big difference in retirement checks.

AW "Oh definitely, but then they love their horses and his wife has two more years to go and then she is ready to retire. Thirtieth year. So, "

PM How about grand children?

AW "Oh yea, I have grandchildren. There is granddaughter there with uh three little grandchildren and her husband. Forth on the way. And then I have another one in, uh, Washington. She is a nurse. So any way, I have pretty good kids. And lets see, I have four great grandchildren now. Fifth one on the way."

PM Do they come up to see you? Or do you have to go see them?

AW "Well, I have to go see them. They say it's cheaper for me to come down than for a group of them to come up here."

PM Has the relative expense always been about the same? The relative expense of getting to Anchorage and then down to the states. And when did you first leave Kodiak and go to Anchorage?

AW "Oh gee, I was young when I went to anchorage."

PM Did you take the ferry or did you fly?

AW "No we went on the Star. No we went to Seward on the boat named Star. Took us two or three days in '35"

PM Was that commercial transportation or someone's fishing ...

AW "No, no. Yea it was commercial. It was carrying mail & stuff & supplies for Kodiak Island. Slow boat to China. And today we make it in an hour."

PM In talking with people around town, I got the impression that when the King crab fishery was going big and the fishermen had a lot of money, there was Quite a drug problem in town.

AW "Oh I wouldn't know, I didn't know. There was a lot of nice King crab. In fact I worked in the cannery during summer. My husband working down there. I joined him. He says, 'Come on, you don't have to stay home.' OK, I go down there and work with him.

PM OK, that answers the questions I have. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

AW "Ha ha, no I'm tell you too many things now"

PM I'm going to make a transcript of this. Is there anything you would like to take out or erase, we can go back and do it."

AW "No"

PM You haven't told any deep dark secrets or anything have you?

AW "I didn't have any deep dark secrets. I got married young you know, so haven't any secrets."

PM No scandals in town, no juicy gossip?

AW "No, no juicy gossips. Except what I told you, that you laughed about. Oh about Alexchi, and the candy, ha ha."

PM I don't think that's anything that would get you in trouble today

AW "It wouldn't have got me in trouble in them days, except with my mother."

PM And she knew

AW "Oh she knew, she knew."

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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