

Arlene Noble Brockman
Alaska History
1995
Oral History Report
Corky McFarland

AB: This is Arlene Brockman and I am here with Corky McFarland. Corky please state your full name and your age and where you were born.

CM: Well, my name is Corky McFarland and I was born in Fort Madisen Iowa back in 1928. I was born in Fort Madisen there in the Midwest I was raised in the Midwest there. I grew up like any other kid during the depression. You didn't have very much and you walked everywhere you went or ran. Nobody had a car. You went to the school closest to ya. And so forth and you didn't go out of town. Anybody that's been out to the next town and back again, they've been pretty well around the world. Then the war broke out in 1941. Then everything changed then. I used to carry papers at that time. Biggest thing I'd seen is it used to be two or three pages like that Kodiak Mirror is now. Then when the war broke out in 1941, December 1941, the paper increase almost by five times that size. And it was about the war stuff most of it.

AB: All stuff about the war?

CM: All about the war and everything overseas. That was news.

AB: Was there a big "hype" about Alaska and the Japanese?

CM: There wasn't anything about Alaska at any time. You didn't hear very much about Alaska in 1941. The biggest thing in 1941 was the over in Burma. Some of the American people went over there. The Russians were flying the Burma. They had the ~~flying taggers~~ ^{Flying Tiger} and some of the people from Fort Madisen Iowa were flying the flying taggers. I can remember when they came back at bay before, in the last of 1941, there was this friend of my brothers and he had on a Russian uniform of the flying taggers and they just thought that he was terrible. Because he was fighting for the Russians. We wasn't fighting an American war at that time. We weren't in the war at that time. He wanted to get in a war so he went with the flying taggers in Burma.

So, after the war I went into the Army for awhile in 1946 and 1947. I was in the Army Ordinance. Then I got out of there and I went into the Navy a year later as part of the weather central. May of 1948 I got married to my wife and I'm still married to her.

I came up here to Kodiak in December of 1948. I got stationed up here in the weather central.

Kodiak, nobody knew where Kodiak was and they thought it was all snow and ice. They knew we was going to die up here cause it was so cold. Anyway, we came up here with the weather central and we started to do weather "obs". up here. The weather is so much different that you almost have to learn it almost all over again. The clouds up here are like your low clouds and mid clouds. Your High clouds are about like your low clouds and mid clouds down state-side. They are not as high up here because we're farther north and it is a lot colder up here. So they stay down lower. The biggest thing in weather was that it was new in those days. And you don't have weather stations reporting what the weather is. You have ships out in the sea in which there weren't as many as there are now. They reported in to you and you didn't know whether they were right or whether they were wrong. So, if they fit in the map you put them in. If they didn't fit in the map you didn't put them in.

AB: So they would call in to you guys and tell you what the weather was like?

CM: They sent it in on observation Teletype. It was all done in teletypes in those days. So they sent it in there. Some of the "obs." that the pilots made, they came in on the FAA and they were reported to us as they came in.

When we came up here in Kodiak, you had the Navy Station, you had the Army, Fort Greely was there, and you had the Marine Corp. protecting the Military, the Navy, and you had part of the Coast Guard there. Coast Guard came there I think in 1947. They were patrolling all of the Aleutian Chain. They had about 1500 miles that they were Patrolling.

AB: Why were they doing that?

CM: They were doing it during war time and before the war patrolling that to keep the ships out and to see if there were any other ships in activity. They were patrolling the shoreline that belonged to the United States. That its what there main job was. Then later on there jobs were in fisheries. They came up with a 200 mile limit from your shore. Then they had to go out 200 miles out and be sure that the other foreign boats weren't coming in to fish. I think the limit in most places in 3 miles from shore. Three miles from shore would mean that if you had a bay, you'd go out to where...out of the bay and draw a line across where the head of the

bay is. Wakeside, you go 3 miles past that.

I've seen a lot of fishing. They used to just have summer fishing here in Kodiak. They didn't have fishing in the winter time/year round. They just had it in the summer time. They would go out and make pretty good. They had small fish and small boats. The average boat was about a 25 footer. A big boat was a 27 and a 30 footer. That was back in 1949 and 1950. people would just come up here in the summer. They had the Philipinos working in the canneries just in the summer time and then in the winter time they didn't have any canneries working.

Then around in in mid and late 50's they had the King Crab that came into effect. They didn't start marketing the King Crab until about 1957.

Wakefield was the biggest man I believe at that time in Crab. I'm not a fisherman so I may not be right on that. There is a story that he use to over at port Wakefield over there. He would be about three miles out there because they said they would come and take his ship away from him because he owed them so much money on it when he first started out. But he stayed out there and got the King Crab on there. People started liking King Crab so they started fishing year round then. And when they started fishing year round the canneries built up and brought the people in and they stayed here year round. So then you had fishing year round instead of just in the summer time. The boats went up to 100 feet then.

So you can see the difference in fish. They say that the fish are depleting and we're not having as much as we did in the past. But there wasn't that many people fishing in the past. Nowadays they are talking about fishing for the boat and not for the owner because they have to pay for their boats and some of their boats are millions of dollars. So you're fishing really for the boat and not for yourself.

But, I don't know that much about fishing. I worked at the power plant on base in the Navy there in 1948 then I got out in 1950. I was the count crew supervisor for supply at the Kodiak Naval Station for a year. Then, I went to the power plant in 1951. Which generated steam and electricity. It had all the water and steam and electricity for the base. The Army went out of here in 1952. So, when the Army went out of here in 1952, All of their forts; Fort Ambercombie, and Chiniack and all these places still had their same houses and everything that they had during the war. So, it was like a kid playing around in an empty town. Then the military started selling off all of the houses. Taking all of the houses down. The timber in all of the houses were better that what you could buy in town. The timber that they would put in the house was A-1. They were better than what you could

even buy made here in Kodiak.

AB: Were they the Aleutian homes?

CM: The Aleutian homes were built a brought up here in 1954. They were housing that was brought up here in 1954. They were made for flat land. They weren't made for the hilly land. That is the reason that your big picture windows are facing the hill sometimes instead of the view that you had behind you. That and your base, your Nimetz Park, on base there were built about the same time. A lot of your buildings on your base and your military were taken down and rebuilt in town and so forth. Your church, up there next to the high school use to be Army. They moved the whole Chapel over there across from where the Junior High is now up there on the side street there.

AB: Oh, that church...

CM: Where Main School is...that church was originally brought in from Fort Greely. Fort Greely was near the Army Base there. Fort Greely Alaska...they moved the whole base to Bethel, up North there of Fairbanks. So, when people talk about coming to Fort Greely, they thought they were coming to Kodiak and they found out that they were going to Bethel. Instead of nice warm Kodiak.

Fishing here has been real good. Hasn't been that many people fishing compared to what there is today. You're population for Kodiak was about 1500 to 2000 people down in the town. And when we first moved into town, my wife and I came up in 1949. We moved into a house and the whole house was 30x30 and they had 4 apartments in it. The apartments were 15x15. We thought that was pretty good.

But compared to today's houses it is kind-of tight. People in those days used to laugh about selling refrigerator's to the Eskimo's and even to us. Nowadays everybody's got a deep freeze, ~~little one~~ a refrigerator. We used to have a window box and we used to keep our food for two or three days and that was all the food you'd buy. Today you buy food for 6 months and then you throw out part of it. In the deep freeze.

AB: So you put your food outside?

CM: You had a box that fit in the window. The box was outside and you just opened-up the window to get your milk and butter and stuff out of you box there...they called it a window box. Some people out in the wilderness still got that today.

AB: Saves on electricity...

CM: Ya, saves quite a bit. All the heat in the houses were generally oil heat in those days. You had and oil stove. On the oil stove you did your cooking on, the left side of you stove generally had your fire box you had coils in there that you water ran from the hot water tank through those coils and that is how you got your hot water. So, as you can see you didn't use as much hot water in those days and you do today. With your washer machine and garbage disposals and your dishwashers. So, actually it's pretty simple. Electricity as they say in Kodiak, went from a small one or two engine grip to hydroelectric now.

CM: The pace in Kodiak has been pretty good. Most people on leave in the service up here used to send picture home of the winter time up here. They never sent picture home of the summer time.

AB: How come?

CM: Cause they figured Alaska was all snow and ice and didn't want to show them any different stateside. We went back to the states in 1963. We went out of here in '63 an the earthquake was in 1964 of March and we came back in 1965. So we missed the earthquake up here. But when we was back here our young daughter was in school here..Both of them. We have two daughters one that was born in 1954. But, she was back here in school and the teacher asked her about Kodiak, Alaska. When she started telling her how we go swimming in the winter time and about the green grass and the teacher told her not to lie. So, she started telling how we lived in Igloos made of ice and we used to chew blubber whale...chew blubber like that. How the the house burnt down one time...didn't really burn down, it melted down because it's not burnable. The teacher believed it.

So, as you can see a lot of people have the wrong information. If the people didn't have it, they would say that you were lying. Really you weren't lying. A lot of people didn't know that Alaska, especially even the Interior, got hotter that it does state-side. And the people here in Alaska

don't think anything of it. They go swimming and so forth. But, in them days nobody got out of the states so you really didn't know that Alaska was anything but snow and ice. Even Kodiak, when we came up here in 1948 and the whole Woman's Bay was frozen over. In 1948 you could drive your trucks across that ice in Bell's Flats. It was that solid. Since then I have never really seen it that solid before. Your weather in those days since I was in the weather central, your average was about 28 degrees. But it got down to a minus 10 to minus 15, not chill-wise, but other-wise, just regular weather...Fahrenheit. It got up to 80 degrees in 1949 or 1950. On July 4th it got up to about 80 degrees. Nobody did nothing..they just all layed-out. They were just too hot to do anything. They just sweated in whatever you did.

But, life in Kodiak was slow and you walked everywhere you went or you hiked wherever you went. Nowadays it seems like you got Chiniak an hour or two hours away. The first time I was out to Chiniak was when I was in a jeep. When we got out there to Middle Bay, we were about half way out of town there and I thought I'd never get back. It was pretty good, but the more times you go somewhere the easier it is.

The Air Force came in here and they built the ^{Loran} ~~Lorane~~ Station. They built the air force tracking center out there in Chiniak. At one time they had over a thousand people working for them...living out there and working for them. White Alice on top of Pillar Mountain here. When they worked on that, they had quite a crew working on that. When they got 99.8% done it was obsolete. So, instead of taking it down..they left up half of it, left up two for telephone control. The way we used to talk in the old days, if you were calling state-side or something, you were on the airways and everybody would listen to you. So, you had to watch what you said.

Back when we first came up here about the only thing they had to do was just get-togethers like playing cards or dancing or something like that. And naturally being in the Navy, you know now we had a lot of Navy in those days, You know we had a lot of talent in those days too. I can remember South Pacific put on by all them Navy guys on base there. It was just about like the picture was...mainly all men. Because that is where they were, there weren't many women around. They had a couple women there, but they had men and a lot of them were dressed up like women. It was pretty good.

But mainly you stayed in your kitchen and you drank coffee and had

popcorn and then had your spaghetti dinners and macaroni and cheese dinners and stuff like that. You'd get together like that in the daylight duping the summertime the summertime and maybe you got but...you didn't have daylight savings time, some light comes up at seven like it does now, actually you'd say it was 5:00 in the morning. Sometimes. So, what you did is by the clock you changed that and you didn't change anything else. So, people up in Kodiak remember their dad and grandfather used to wake them up early in the morning to go out fishing at 5:00 in the morning but now it is 7:00 in the morning.

AB: And you do the same thing with your grandson.

CM: When I first came up here I came from Iowa and we didn't have sunlight coming up that early. I remember that sometimes we would go to watch at 6:30 in the morning and sometimes the guy would forget to wake up and put you in there. That was in the barracks then in Singleton. In the weather central. I remember one time I woke up and the sun was hitting my eyes and I thought "they didn't wake me up." I was mad so I got up there and I shaved and got ready to go and I looked up at the clock and it was 3:30. So, I went back to bed. But it is kind-of hard to get used to it unless you've been in Alaska for a long time getting used to the sunlight coming up as early as it does.

And under the same reasoning when you'd go out there at night hunting or fishing or something like that..walking up over the hill, we wouldn't get back until 10 or 11 o'clock. We wouldn't think nothing of it because we'd think that it was 5 or 6 o'clock. We'd get three or four hours of sleep and we'd be ready to go again. Then in the winter time it is just the opposite. Winter time you'd think "well it must be about bedtime" and here it is about 4:30 or 5:00 in the afternoon. Then you'd get up and go to work when it was dark and come home when it was dark. It's kind-of a short day.

So, we was right along the highway one time and picked up this young guy from college. We picked him up and started talking. He was from Pt. Barrow. He was talking about what it was like to be in Pt. Barrow. He said the first time you see the sun in spring time you see it for 1 second. He said you've been there all this time and you know that it is there but it is just like a flash just for that one second, it is like heaven is opening up. He said he would never forget it. Because you never see it (the sun). It's like when your cold and you see a match burning and you remember that match because it is so warm,even though it didn't last long.. Well it's the same

way with the sunlight. You don't know what it is like to be in the dark so long. Then all of a sudden you start seeing the sun come up for just minutes at a time. And you know in another 24 hours it will come up for maybe two minutes at a time and it's getting brighter. So, a person starts to think about that and you see...you don't really miss something until you don't have it. And in those days, like I said, you walked everywhere you went, most of your socializing was done in the kitchen, where everybody had coffee on.

The biggest thing I guess is you'd be hiking somewhere and you'd be about a mile out of town or 3 or 4 miles out of town and you'd see a house there and you would know that you were welcome to go inside the house and if they were there they would give coffee and something to eat. If they weren't there you would know that it was all right to go in and make coffee and drink coffee and do the dishes and leave some money or cut some wood for them. They'd never be locked up nobody ever lost anything.

So, that has changed quite a bit. People used to have these hunting cabins. They used to be open and you'd get stuck out there and you'd go to these cabins and they weren't locked up. And nobody would bother the cabins cabin or nothing. I don't know what it is but you can't leave your car open today without somebody doing something to the windows or something.

So, whether it is a passing fancy or whether someone figures that they are gaining for it or if "you're going to have it, I'm going to have it," I don't know. But it would be pretty nice if you were living when you didn't have to worry about it somebody taking it from ya. But, Kodiak is a good place. If you like fishing and hunting. It's kind of rough on the women. It used to be rough on the women. Men used to love it because of the hunting and the fishing and that. But the women didn't have enough to do, so...If the women liked the outdoors or if they found something to do they like it. We had a friend of ours in the Navy with us up here. He wasn't married and then he came back up here three or four years later and he brought his wife with him and he had a couple of kids, and boy she just hated Kodiak. Started talking to Mary, my wife Mary, and she started talking about us and you know we just loved Kodiak. She said well how can you love Kodiak, I mean it have nothing to do with nothing. I said well, all of your friends don't like Kodiak either do they? She says "no." I said it is kind-of hard because, Kodiak, even when I came up here because Kodiak was temporary it is not permanent. If you think of Kodiak as being temporary, then you really don't belong here, you don't even feel like you are here. In

them days when they was up here in a year and 18 months the the people don't feel like they are going to be here in Kodiak long enough. They really don't want it , they don't like it. So, I said get people like Mary and I, people who really like Kodiak. I said you may be surprised. Well, she did because a year later when she left she was crying because she didn't want to leave.

So, people you hang around with if they don't like Kodiak, you will have a tendency not to like Kodiak. I guess it is the same thing today. People that take drugs and you hang around with them you will take drugs. I think it is the same thing you run around with people that are what you want to be and not what somebody else wants to be. People in Kodiak what they say is they generally stand on their own two feet because when you go out hunting or something there may be nobody around to help you. Nowadays you take radios and stuff with you so you have a little protection. But, before that whenever you went out you didn't have nobody to help except for maybe four or five guys come out to help you. Nowadays there don't seem to be as much of that, they have it, it just doesn't seem to be near as much as they have on the other side.

The kid as school are the same way, they didn't have as many kids in the school as they got nowadays. Quite a few has changes, your people have changes, your houses have changed. Your houses now...you wouldn't dream of houses as big as you got today. When we came up here you'd figure with anybody with a house that big you didn't know what they wanted a house that big for. It's just like your car and anything else..Why do you want a car for, you can walk anywhere you want to go . Now, if you don't have a car you can't go anywhere. Unless you have the time. Seems people don't have the time anymore.

We are talking about today and you might say yesterday or a quite awhile ago. I can remember when I was a child growing up and if something happened it was your fault. It was never somebody else fault. Seems to me that when you take responsibility that responsibility isn't age, it has nothing to do with age. It is the day that you take responsibility for what you do. Nowadays it is always somebody else fault.

We came up to Alaska in 1948. I can remember we went back in 1963 like I said and bought a house and a man says that this insurance covers the person he says he got hurt on the property we will give him \$500.00. I said well I don't see that. He said well that is just it. If a person does get hurt on the property we will give him \$2,500.00 if he don't go to court. That is

wrong...I mean that is no right and he said well that is the way the world is today. That is what everybody pays for, you are paying for this and everybody is paying for it.

So, nowadays the idea is that you are not responsible for what people do. You are not responsible for your own actions. I think that is the biggest thing for kids today. Same way as it was when you were young. If you didn't do it right, then you got your hind-end spanked or you got picked-up by the ear. I mean this was your correction. nowadays you do that and they will put your mother and father in jail if you do something like that or they will take your kids away from you. Responsibility has to be with the kids. I mean it has to be with the individual. And if they don't take responsibility then who is?

So, I think that the biggest thing is that today and that you go today you can always tell you what you want and what you expect and it is not your fault if something happens. I think that in the old days it was always your fault, if fall off of something and get hurt...it is like today if someone spills a cup of coffee you can sue the company for spilling the coffee on you. Yet at the same time, you are the one who got the coffee and should be your responsibility for what you do with that cup of coffee. You get hurt, then that is up to you, but seems like today nobody wants the responsibility, everybody wants to give it to the government or the government wants to give it to you or they want to tell you what to do and everything. I think that the philosophy has changed quite a bit. It's not the old and the young, it is how you was raise. If you were raised to take care of yourself and to be responsible for yourself, I don't think that you will have any problem. But if started being in a gang or you have to rely on someone else to take care of you and do what they say. That is not very much better than if you didn't have a life of your own. If you got a life of your own then you ought to be responsible for what you say. If you believe what you say you can do it. But to say something that you know is wrong, you know it is wrong, and somewhere along down the road you will have to pay for it.

I think that children in school should learn about responsibility and that it's got nothing to do with age. Responsibility is being able to understand what is right and what is wrong. I shouldn't have to be because...for instance in 1948 I went down to the bank and wanted to borrow some money and I didn't have any collateral. Banker just looked at me and he says, "Well how much do you want?" I said I want \$100.00 to bring my wife up here today a month, if she can't make it I will send her back home. He said well, I don't think \$100.00 will be enough. If you want \$200.00 or

\$300.00 I will be glad to give it to ya. I said, well I don't have any collateral, he said "I didn't aks you for collateral did I?" He said that it means more the them on what they thought of you as a person or the people they met and that they know that you mean what you say. So, they loan you money on what you do, not on what your background is. A lot of people tod, you take your resume', if you write your resume you may get something out of that resume that is true, but if you get some professional that will make that resume, you read it yourself and say "Well who are we talking about here?" They can change it around to make a person look a lot better than he is. But I was always told, if you're good you're good but if your not there is nothing you can do. I think you do the best that yofu can and that is the biggest thing. If you do the best that you can then people respect you. But ifyou try to do something and you're not doing it right, and get by with itn then I don't think that people will respect you. So, I think with me the biggest thing is earning respect for yourself and ae parent . A parent should have respect from their child not just expect to have respect just because they are their parents, but because they have earned that respect. The biggest thing in school it that you should learn how to take care of yourself and help other people out. Not listen to people who are trying to make you do what you shouldn't.

Overall, I think a person should take care of himself, or try to take care of himself and I think that you canget along in this world. People are trying to get something for nothing and I just don't think that that seems to work. It doesn't seem to stay that long. I think it is the same way with being healthy and so forth. I'm about 67 years old and I haven't been sick hardly anytime in my life. I can't think of any time I really got hurt. Due to martial arts for the last 40 years I never got hurt. The people I teach don't get hurt. It's the idea that you learn to take care of your body and don't think negative. If you think youare going to fall all the time I'm sure you are going to fall. So the idea is to try to take care of yourself and not do something that you know is going to hurt ya. I think that is the biggest thing to try to do is take care of yourself.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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

96-49-01_I01.pdf