

IVER MALUTIN

ON

GROWING UP

IN KODIAK

BY

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On April 17. 1995

Editor

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Restrictions, None

KODIAK COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The following autobiographical interview was held on April 17, 1995, with Mr. Iver Malutin, an Alaskan Native, living all his life in Kodiak, Alaska. The interview was conducted at the home of the interviewer Brenda L. Kramer, a student at Kodiak College.

BLK: Iver, if you could just tell us a little bit about your family and then your growing up years here in Alaska.

IM: My Mother and Dad, Pelegaya Malutin (Mother) and Senofont Malutin (Father), were born and raised on Afognak, which is another island roughly 27 miles from here. My mothers maiden name was Pelegaya Laktonen. Her father came from Finland, and she also has Russian blood, and also native. Laktonen is fairly easy trace, until you get to the Russian and the Aleut. For some reason it gets very difficult. My dad, Senofont Malutin, was born on Afognak. His Grandfather came from Russia, and also he was a native. What the blood quantum is, nobody knows, we just estimate it is 50%.

My Mother and Dad got married and they moved to Kodiak in 1914, and lived here ever since. I have three sisters living and one brother. When they got to Kodiak, money was relatively nothing. Money didn't mean anything. Time was, we had nothing but time. In those days, people, everybody worked with one another, everybody helped each other, everybody shared everything.

Probably, still like a lot of the villages up north. I know that when the whalers go and get a whale the whole village gets the whale, and thats basically the way it was here. The only difference I could see between us down here and the natives up north was we were exposed to the western civilization more so than the natives up north were. The western influence was then a good example of my mother Laktonen. Her dad came from Finland and my dad came from Russia. Relatively speaking, I think that you could say that the people that were living in the cold climate were European influenced. Only up north were you have your major streams did the Russians go into. The Russians went into the Kuskokwim and the Yukon and basically that is were the rivers are. That did not happen down here. The Russians stayed here. They stayed here because the resource was here and they could make a living. They went up north and most of them had to move right out because there was really nothing there for them, other than living the life-style of the native people, which most of them did not want to do. They wanted to work and they wanted to earn money and up to this day there are still a lot of them up there. Thats what made the people down here, much different than the people up north.

Getting back to my family, I think that the European influence because my Dad and Mother went to a Russian school. They were fluent in the Russian language.

BLK: Was that here in Kodiak.

IM: Agognak. Aleut was their second language. By the time I came along, they were learning English their third language. It was really funny because every time my mother would talk to me, she would talk in one or two or three languages. If she needed a word and she could not find it in anyone of the two, she would go to the third language and that would usually be English.

My sister Annie, the oldest sister who is 80 now, when she started school she couldn't speak a word of English. Only Russian. And the same with Moses (brother). He's 78 right now. Russian was our dominate language.

Afognak was divided into two sections. The north end of the village, Aleut Town is where most of the Aleut's lived and it was dominated by the native language. The other, the southern end of the village Darefna, is where my Mom and Dad stayed, was mostly Russian.

My father went to the Russian school and then to training kind of like a seminary. He was really involved with the Russian church. As he grew older he was a reader, and a choir director. He wrote songs for the church and music for them. He did not have a drinking problem but he did drink alcohol and because of that my mother would not let him become a priest. She thought that would be awful; for him to be a priest. He stayed with the

church. When they moved to Kodiak they stayed in the church house. The church is in the same location where it is now. We stayed in the church house there until 1958 when I bought a new house. My dad died in 1954. So then we moved into another house in 1958.

Now getting back to some of the earlier things, I can remember when I was a kid, I was probably about four years old and at that time, I was born in 1931. In 1935, I am just estimating we used to go fishing at the Buskin River. There was one processing plant right where the ferry terminal is now and another one right where King Crab cannery is now. That used to be Kodiak Fisheries. In those days, as I can remember, there was very few boats that had engines in them. They used to use oars. They had a big net in the back and we would go out and I was just probably four or five years old. I would just stay up in the bow, and we would leave about 3 or 4 in the morning and go out the Buskin River. They would make one haul and we would load the skiff up with fish, then we would row back to the canneries, and if there was enough time they would row back again. If the weather was nice, we would get another load and come back. I remember that very clearly. Very few vehicles, well not in 1934, but I can remember later on, it must have been 5 years later on in 1939, when they started building the Navy base I was still going with my dad to the Buskin River and we were still rowing, and I remember the huge big trucks that were out there. I counted the

wheels on them and there was 18 wheels on them, and I could not believe it. I used to tell my dad "I could not believe that big truck has 18 wheels on it. There were a lot of them out there and finally, as time progressed the war came on, and we could not go out there anymore. Just about that time or just before, we used to go up to Mission, where the mission is now. We did not call it the mission then, we call it Shaofka. They have Shaofka acres now that was named after that. Right on the outside beach were Norm Sutluff had his cabin (house) we call that Solowinea. That was a place that always had a nice little beach up there. We had a small seine and a small little fishing boat out there.

BLK: Now this was out by Woody island?

IM: No this is where the Salvation Army is, out at Mission Bay. There were potatoes gardens from one end to the other. My Mom and Dad had a potatoes garden right where the Salvation Army building is today. They also had one where KEA (Kodiak Electric Association) is.

We would go out to Shaofka and there was a little old man out there and he stayed in a baraba (house). He was a good friend of my Dad and we would have tea with him and then go out fishing. The Dolly Varden are out in the bay now. They should be coming in. We would just set by the bay and watch for them. As

soon as we saw them we would make a haul and get the fish. If we got a lot we would take the skiff to town and put them in tubs. We would give them to everyone in the village. They are the first fish of the season that anyone would get. After this the war came along.

BLK: What was that like? Were you involved at all?

IM: No, I was only 10 years old. I did not have any involvement by running up the hills when we had a air raid. We had a lot of them. They had the civil defence people and we had the black on our windows. Most of the people had wooden shutters or they would put there lights out when the sirens went off. The civil defence were very strict and you had to comply and most of the people did. They gave each person in the household a gas mask. Every time we went any place we had to take the gas mask with us. The houses by the Russian church and Standard Oil had designated places they had to go to at the time of a air raid because of the oil tanks. We would have to go out to a little building where the rotatory is. You would be at the movies and the alarm would go off, the sun would be shining, and man for the hills we would go. The planes would be all over the sky. Every time we had an air raid the planes would be in the sky. The planes from the base. They had allot of them. They had submarine nets, I remember. They had a

big battleship here one time. They had it on display and took the people out. They had the submarine nets out by Puffin island and then some out here. My Dad was fishing and at that time you could only travel from daylight to dark. They had to be in by dark. You could not leave until daylight. The gates were closed. They watched them.

At that time there were very few vehicles in Kodiak. Everyone was walking and there were cows on the streets, I remember Fed Sargent had cows. I would go help him. He was our neighbor. Everybody had chickens.

The diet of the people of Kodiak, Afognak and of the island was fish. That is another thing that is different with the native people here than those up north. The people here live off the sea. The people up north live off the land also with hunting. We would have a special building just to salt salmon. They would salt salmon by the barrel and I mean big barrels that weighted 200 pounds or more.

BLK: Was this for resale?

IM: No, this is for your personal use. And then we had the potatoes gardens. One thing about the people living in Kodiak was that it did not cost them anything to get by with because they

did not need money because the canneries were here and they could get the salt for next to nothing. That is all they needed to prepare the fish and they planted potatoes. When they had potatoes and salmon and that was all they really needed. When the tides were right they could get clams and what ever else they wanted from the ocean. Then they would go duck hunting, seal hunting, ptarmigan hunting, sea lion. Seems like we did not need any money.

They dried fish; salted fish and that is basically all they did. When the canneries came in they got canned fish; then the freezers came in and they froze fish. It takes allot of salmon for one person. And I told the fish and game when they gave me a 25 limit that will not do me any good I will just go out and get what I get.

BLK: One event in the history of Kodiak was the tidal wave (1964). Can you tell what that was like here on Kodiak?

IM: We were building Reznof and I was working construction. I was clearing trees almost to were the hospital is today. That night I was sitting down at the dinner table; I will never forget it; my brother had just finished eating and got up and got himself a glass of water. He put the glass right there on the table and the

house started shaking and it was a big kind of rolling. It was not just a shaking but a rolling. We went outside and the trees were like fishing poles when you jiggle them real fast. Everyone was screaming and my mother was try to calm everyone. There was a lot of navy people (wives) and my mother was calming them down.

After the first shake stopped we went down to check my brothers boat. He had a seiner. We went down to the harbor and walked down the rack that went off to the boat. It was tied off next to another one and we put more lines on it. I happen to look at the pilings and I noticed that the water was coming up an inch at a time. Just really fast. I told my brother, Hay we better get out of here because it looks like the water is really coming in. So we went running through the docks and it was quite a way. By the time we got to the end of the dock the water was level with the dock. Then it started coming over the dock. I said we better get out of here, so we jumped in the car and then I went home. From the height of the dock it must of come up another 15 or 20 feet. The reason I know that is because after when we went back to work they took all the equipment and all the construction crew down to the docks to start cleaning up. There were big barges up all over the place. We started cleaning up and I will never forget that Kraft and son had the grocery store and they had a big safe, 6 feet wide, maybe 7 feet tall, and 3 or 4 feet deep. We found it

across from the police station in a ditch. We got a loader and got it out and took it back to Kodiak Motors. That safe had moved a couple of thousand feet. Everything was in tack inside the safe because my niece was the bookkeeper for Krafts. After they got the water out everything was OK.

I remember the next day we went to look for my brothers boat. The harbor was wiped out. There were boats all over the beach. There are still some of the boats on the beach. We went all over looking for the boat Kodiak (?) had a huge building that they used for keeping there airplanes in and the roof was floating out there. We went into the building and there were all kinds of supplies in there. I said we should just anchor this thing here. And they said no they will find it. Everything was floating in the bay. We did not find the boat so we went back.

BLK: How long did it take before they started getting in supplies for the people? Were they able to do it right away or did it take a long time?

IM: There was a lot of confusion. Once they got organized and decided what they were going to do it did not take long. Lumber was coming in. Supplies were coming in and going to the villages. No, it did not take that long. As far as the building were concerned I do not think that there was one building that fell down because of the tidal wave. It was all water damage.

BLK: I thought that the tidal wave collapsed the buildings.

IM: No, none of them. And when we cleaned up the down town, everyone talked about under your door ways was the safest place. Probably that is true but if you could get upstairs to the gable of your house that is the strongest place. If you look at all the pictures after the quake, everyone of those houses, the gables are still in tack and when we were out in the bay they were floating away. The rest of the house was gone but the upstairs was still in tack. It would be like a raft. I am just trying to think about what else to say about anything.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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