

Stacey Carkhuff and Polly Hyslop interviewing Ada Gallen  
Northway, Alaska, October 10, 2008  
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**ADA GALLEN:** One white man, and one Indian, they both go because they're going to build the road, so they go to with dog team. They went all the way to Fairbanks. They arrived in 1942- that's when they start building the airport and road. They had to camp all over. You go to them, and there's a lot of those black people, they cut fresh with ax, I think, or chainsaw and they come with the Captain and build that road. Up [?] Creek we call it, up by the road where our house [were?] they had big camp for highway. And Camp J down there.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** How old were you?

**ADA GALLEN:** About 18, between 18 or 19.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Were you born here?

**ADA GALLEN:** Yea, we used to go out there and get everything. Right now, it looks like no moose. Things change. When we don't have a road, we just walk. Up Beaver Creek when I was living near [shore] there, we would walk up there and hunt this time of year. We'd take no tent, we'd just freeze. Cold! My uncle take us out there, my dad die when I was 11 years old, so I go with my uncle, he's got two girls. Around the same age as me. I don't really know about highway, all I know is, a lot of black people go head up, and they come with the cat and built the road.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Did you think that was scary? Or weird?

**ADA GALLEN:** We were scared to death-we don't know. We never seen that kind of people before. They go to the uncle's house and ask him a question I guess, and oh, we just run into a room and just...we don't know what kind of people come around.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** What is your Uncle's Name?

**ADA GALLEN:** Walter Northway. He lived until he was 130 I think.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Who was the chief then?

**ADA GALLEN:** Him. It was Chief before that, Frank Sam's dad. But he gave it to Walter Northway, because he know Walter Northway is good; for his goodness in heart. That's how he got that Chief job. That old manned passed it to him. Chief Sam is his name, the other one.

**STACEY CAR KHUFF:** Do you remember your parents talking about when the highway went through, or your other family members talking about the highway?

**ADA GALLEN:** My parents? My mom [?] my dad died when I was 11 years old. I have my mom. That's why I go with... my uncle and them get me. Walking back, no shoes. We would wear moccasins.

**STACEY CAR KHUFF:** Did you make them, did you sew your moccasins?

**ADA GALLEN:** Yes. This time of year. We're by the creek, and uncle would pack us three up because he had two daughters and me.

**STACEY CAR KHUFF:** Did people here try to stop the soldiers from coming in with the highway?

**ADA GALLEN:** No. They don't know. You didn't want to stop them, or you couldn't stop them?

**POLLY HYSLOP:** When they come and have meeting with Chief here and tell them about the highway? What did the Chief say?

**ADA GALLEN:** Ok, I guess. I went over there, in the old village. They get permission from Frank Sam and Walter Northway. They can't do nothing-they just let them go. They glad to get road. We usually walk. They used to walk to Tetlin, and Tanacross They get their groceries down in Dawson. They walk. They start in May, walk down to Dawson with all those packs and all those things. Than in August...That's about three months they go. That's a long time. Yea, they pack their stuff and they go like that, and lots of loads, they stop where they put their stuff.

**STACEY CAR KHUFF:** And then the road made that a lot faster, didn't it?

**ADA GALLEN:** Yea. That's why they're glad to get road, I think.

**STACEY CAR KHUFF:** Before the highway, were there any white people here?

**ADA GALLEN:** The store keeper and them. When we grow up, there's no store, no nothing. After we had some people who start store there across the river in the old village. One gentleman built a big store over there. He used to make a good Christmas for us. He'd get a big tree and in the community hall they put lots of goodies under there. He was from Germany.

**STACEY CAR KHUFF:** What's his name?

**ADA GALLEN:** There was another one across the way, he got store, he buy wood and gave people groceries and those things. They buy for two.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** The store keeper- his name?

**ADA GALLEN:** Herman Kessler and Milo Hadjukovich all live in Northway. They go back and forth. They go to Tetlin and Tanacross. They have a big boat to bring groceries. That's how they went to Dawson; No road, no nothing; just Indian trail. Three months it took them to bring those things. Clothes, groceries, 100 pound rice they pack. And dogs, blankets and clothes for kids. I Was 11 years old, I don't even own shoes. I have moccasins.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Do you think the highway helped change that?

**ADA GALLEN:** You got shoes, you got...Yea, we got a new house.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:**Who owned the first car in the village?

**ADA GALLEN:** I think Oscar Albert.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Did you go for a ride?

**ADA GALLEN:** We go all over! We just jump in. He had a big pickup too. Kids hide under the car and everything. Herman Kessler, after old village, move down here by river and he start store again. That's where he died. He's buried over there in Northway.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** So, can you tell me a little bit about the airport, when they built the airport?

**ADA GALLEN:** Oh yea, I got about 10 boyfriends.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** You're popular.

**ADA GALLEN:** We ride around with cat, me and Cecilia and Helen and Eva. Eva got kid at that time, so right there by the road by that little bridge, right there by the creek they build a big camp right there. No wash machine; we got to wash our Cat driver clothes, the mess hall was where Army people cook. The white ones. We had stick and we don't...They put lye in there so we can't put our hand in there. All the girls they would wash their clothes, Cat driver too we wash. You know, they get dirty. Stick it in there and we just, then put it in another water, another water and change water. Then we hang them.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Did they pay you?

**ADA GALLEN:** Yea.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Did they pay you a lot, or...

**ADA GALLEN:** I Don't know. I can't remember. They pay us for the clothes and mess hall they'd pay us too. What's left over that day they eat, they give us too. That's how I

survived my family. I'd go to mess hall and they'd give me all those leftovers with dog team. They'd just load me up and take them back.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Well that's nice. That's very nice.

**ADA GALLEN:** I run mail, mail plane come. I used to pick them up with my dog team. They just give me flour and rice and lard from school. They don't pay me. They should pay me right now; they're rich- Mail people.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Yea, they should. How long did you do that, picking up the mail?

**ADA GALLEN:** About two or three years. After they built road to Northway, I catch ride with them in the summer time. No dog team. I bring teacher's mail in some village. Right now they they pay people...They should pay me. But everybody only... [Oscar]. My dad, die, 1940's he died, so I end up with I don't know how many kids. That's how school, they gave me a little groceries. That was the only way I could live. Me and my brother go. [???] Steady today and they would get rich. I still do like what we did years ago got fish and cut fish, put it away. Dry fish, dry meat. No refrigerator so they got to dry their food. And when they build airport highway, around 1942 I think they go to there. We never go no place, no car. Oscar go to village or go up the street, they have a bar up there. [?] Oh, shucks.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** So where did you go to...Did you go to school? Did you go to school here?

**ADA GALLEN:** No, I was over in the old village across the way we go to school and teacher come down from Tetlin and we go to school there. In my uncle Walter Northway's house. I went up to about 4th or 6th grade, but of course I got to take care of my brother and sister. I wish I could go some more.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** So you were the oldest?

**ADA GALLEN:** No, my Oscar and my sister Pauline, and my brother Abraham. Abraham is younger than me. They help us.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Did they keep going to school? Did they go to school longer than you? Like 8th grade, 9th grade.

**ADA GALLEN:** No, they just start about two years, and pretty soon all village kids and man and woman they go out and cut wood and they built school by hand. We had all the school kids go out there with box [slip] they call it, two strips tied together and the wood would...They would put log on, and we'd pull it back with our neck.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Oh, wow. That's hard work.

**ADA GALLEN:** And some way, some kind of company with 50 cents an hour they built that school. Everybody paid 50 cents, an hour... yeah! As we pull in this log, we don't get paid. Pretty soon all the cats come from Nabesna bar way up there at Nabesna road. Cat come down and bring gas and everything for airport. One guy from Copper Center, we always ride with him halfway and walk back. After they built the road they had ACS building, that's way up there. UP [there the Navy?] they use for an apartment. That's where ACS...The G.I'S. My kids dad was from there. After they build airport then G.I come around, they help build road too. Those people, like stockade people they help. We walk to village, dog team, we get our wood with dog team, we go to trap line with dog team. All those things.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** How about, do you go in boat?

**ADA GALLEN:** This man job in summer time they go hunt and they had canoe and go.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** Only man does that though, Huh?

**ADA GALLEN:** Yea, when they go hunt with canoe. Me, and Celia and Eva, we go to Northway we take canoe. We plant our canoe here, across the ground. We go village and Joe Dimet's brother live over there. We go visit him.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** When army, when G.I come with highway, you live here at fish camp?

**ADA GALLEN:** Over fish camp.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** School, first school, was it before highway come through, or after.

**ADA GALLEN:** I think same time, it might be no highway just big airport when they bring gas and oil and all those things with the big machine. So...All young girls after Walter Northway take over as chief, all young girls he sent out house to house to clean their house, and clean their kids. They do really good. Right now we gotta get paid; nothing, we don't get paid. And how we learn to live in their world. All our grandma can do...Old grandma, we go there and make tea for them, and that Chief Sam, he was a couple...Nobody takes care of him. Only me and Celia, We were only about 4 or 5 years old I guess, we're small. This big guy, he can't turn over. Cry cry, we go over there and look. Try to turn me over, he says. One day we started to take care of him, every morning we'd go after we play with leftover food at our house, we'd take it to him and he can't even drink coffee. Me and Celia we'd always cup it and make tea cold enough. I'd pull his arm, and Celia would push his back we turned him right there, we'd grab his leg and we'd turn him over. We do that every time until he died. No doctor, no nothing. Only one nurse come from Teltin. Come down and help some people. She come with plane and he stay at school. And that stupid guy, that river don't freeze so we got trail way up there, and we go across where that ice jam. Big wind blowing, she try to go see her boyfriend, and she got lost and she froze to death. That nurse. I forgot her name.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** That's too bad.

**ADA GALLEN:** Next day we know she go up that way. Tetlin people know her name I think. I know her name, but I forget her name. Next day, next day, where's that nurse? We meet her, so go to airport, but she went in the woods. She walk all night. She should have walked over this way instead to go out. Pretty soon it's dark and a big wind blows, she just digs under tree, so go there and die. She die.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** that's scary. Uh -hu.

**ADA GALLEN:** That [medicare,] I wonder he died? Tom Brady his name. He go plane, he bring mail. In winter time he land right there by [?] lake. We go over there with sled and pull back.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** That's before highway or after highway?

**ADA GALLEN:** Before highway when they build airport, but no highway, 1942 highway go through. Oh, those G.I Always pick up those girls.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Was that a good thing, or a bad thing?

**ADA GALLEN:** I don't know, it's just the world, I guess.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** The G.I, They want to date Indian woman you know? What they say, what village people, like Chief. They make girls come home early or they say it's ok?

**ADA GALLEN:** They don't care whatever we do. Except Steven Northway, he'd beat up all the girls.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** Could you tell Stacey how they build that highway? You told me yesterday. You know, when they built that highway in the road? What kind of trail they follow?

**ADA GALLEN:** That guy went in one and went to winter trail and just...Go the Indian trail and they go down here. They go on site highway.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** So you're saying they follow Indian trail for highway and for road for Northway.

**ADA GALLEN:** No, it's down here. And so they go to highway up on higher ground.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** And when you were 16 years old, or 18 years old they built that airstrip. Do you remember, do you want to share with her when they, you have grave site right there, right? Where they built the airstrip was there graves there?

**ADA GALLEN:** They used to burn them when they died. They burned people up there because it was up high. You can't start a fire.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** too cold?

**ADA GALLEN:** The ground is too cold. They go no lumber, no nothing, so they go up airport and burn people. And down here at that little bridge, they say too if people die over in fish camp, they take them down there and burn them. Some, very few people if they had actually put birch box, birch casket. Birch basket casket. After they get ax they split the wood, and they trim it down and make box. You got to be rich man to do it. They put lots of necklaces on them- like they make potlatches right now. Put them all kinds of stuff where they burned them.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** When you die, you want to be burned like that?

**ADA GALLEN:** Yea. I'll already be dead. That picture. Show here. The one with Annie, and Bessie and...See those white blankets they get from Dawson? They make coat. And those other coats I think they get from G.I Coat liner are fur coats or something.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** That's beautiful.

**ADA GALLEN:** Like fur coat.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** Was it warm?

**ADA GALLEN:** That white blanket you know, they cut half and half and people make coat out of it, two coats out of it.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** Is that called Hudson's Bay blanket?

**ADA GALLEN:** Yea.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** Ok [Upper Tanana].

**ADA GALLEN:** Walter Marx, Joe Marx sister Edna.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** Edna?

**ADA GALLEN:** No, Younger sister. Celia. Celia Ok. Bessie Sam, Annie Sam, that's Roy's mom. Andrew and David Sam I think.

**POLLY HYSLOP:** That's an old picture, because these two I think are passed away. Look at their moccasins. I make that kind.

**STACEY CARKHUFF:** When was this picture taken, do we know?

**ADA GALLEN:** I don't know, around 1940 something.