

Bette Day Interview, March 27, 2001. *We are meeting at her home at 550 Kentshire, Fairbanks. Present are Nancy Kuhn, Al and Bruth George. Mileages given are for Chena Hot Springs Rd. unless otherwise noted. Transcribed and edited by Bruth George. After Bette's death, her daughter Jo Ann, added some notes in 2010.*

BR: *Where did you folks come from?*

B: Montana, Kalispell. I was born and raised there. Jim was raised there, too.

N: *When did you come up? And what brought you?*

B: We came in '47. You couldn't get any work after World War II was over with and Jim said the guys were sitting there sucking suds in one of the little pubs and he heard something about Fairbanks. Yeah, we came in '47 and he went right to work the next morning. For BGL¹ at what they call Wainwright.

BR: *A couple people have mentioned that Jim filed on some property up on Amanita Rd.²*

B: He didn't file, because he couldn't file again. He got someone else to do it. Johnny Cole. They worked together in regular construction, too.

BR: *When did you move out there (to 7 M)?*

B: Jo Ann was in kindergarten. Mike was just a baby. He was in the car with me when I upset that Pontiac going up Henry's hill³, going to town to get her at kindergarten. He was sitting in the back seat, not in a car seat, like now, and he wound up in the front seat with me. He'd wedged through this much room between the seats....(*Jo Ann adds: We moved prior to me being in kindergarten. I was three or four, so I would say it was 1960 or '61.*)

BR: *Jim must have had your house well started before you moved out. You didn't live in a little log cabin like a lot of people.*

B: No, we stayed in town until it was ready, well, we did some finishing.

BR: *Don't I remember that your bathroom was unfinished for awhile and you had a bunch of little chickens in it that Jim's dad brought up?*

A: *I thought it was goats.*

B: Yeah, that and horses and anything else he (*Jim's dad*) could get loaded. Oh, yes, we had chickens in there. The bathroom wasn't finished and we had to keep them warm. We had a little clean-out on that deal everyday.... (*Jo Ann: We never had goats in our bathroom. It was chickens.*)

¹ Burch, Green and Liddle (spelling and order of names both uncertain)

² 5½ M

³ Henry Brockman's hill, about 6 M.

BR: But you don't remember who you bought from?

B: Well, we bought part of it from Wolfe (*sp.?*) and you know who he was. He was the band leader for the army band. In the summertime, he'd take a boat and go down to Ft. Yukon and down in there. Really nice old man. Odd as a three-dollar bill, but a really nice guy.... Then the Ward kid bought part of where the cabin was. That old guy was Russian.

BR: Was his name Sherrer?⁴

B: Well, he used to bake on an old stove...

Of course, when we proved up on the land we worked on there, we had that quonset hut. We didn't have fancy cupboards, but we had cupboards.... No inlaid floors, but linoleum. I tell you, it sure did surprise the kids when they had to go to that john outside. Of course, I was raised, and so was Jim, with those little deals.

BR: Now, where was this? You homesteaded, you said.

B: Yes, where the quonset was. We homesteaded that part. We bought that other part where Ward was. His wife was Cozette. She married Don Kimmel later. The homestead, itself, started down over the hill.... Where the quonset hut was. Below the present road. We proved up on all this below the road. Don't you remember, Le Ann started school from out there?⁵ When the roads were bad in the spring, we walked out. Carried the groceries back in.

(added in 2010): Mom always said when Le Ann started school, it was just a fifteen passenger van that picked up the whole road. By the time I started there were three school busses.)

Al: This was the Ward kid that went to jail? Cozette's husband?

B: See, we bought from him, where the cabin was. That's where the old man was that was the baker. Sherrer, that name sounds familiar (*looking at a 1953 school district map*).

BR: Did you know Johnny Kalina?

B: Oh, yes. Really nice guy. Here's Carl Lindstrand and Henry Brockman.... Ace Metcalfe, for heaven's sakes, I know who he was. I think he moved out there after we left... I think he came from Montana... Oh, there's Ladd Field. You say that today and they look at you like, where's that at?.....

You remember, we used to have a big gas tank... in the garage? For our farm machines. And the sawmill.

N: You had a sawmill, too? Did you commercially do timber?

⁴ Adolph Sherrer, in other interviews, was reported to be an "escapee" from the WWI German army and a baker.

⁵ Probably in 1959.

B: We sold a lot of stuff for houses, where they wanted big timbers. (*Jo Ann added: Dad was partners with John Cole with the saw mill.*)

BR: How much land did you farm? It was mostly that part down below the road, but some up around the house, too?

B: Yeah.

N: What was your crop?

B: Brome grass and oats for a nurse crop, then you bound that.

BR: Did Jim do any farming for anybody else?

B: Once in awhile. But he was working a job.

BR: He worked for the Laborers?

B: Yeah, he was president for many years. Then he worked in the office. It was small, just him and an assistant, but there were a lot of guys going out. (*Jo Ann: Dad was a laborer until he became president in 1965 and was president of the union until he retired in October of '76.*)

BR: So, he worked construction until he got into that.

B: Yeah. He worked at the Union hall, I think it was thirteen, fourteen years.

N: Were you a stay-at-home mom in those days?

B: You betcha, unless there was an election.

BR: Did you know Earl Herning?

B: Oh, yeah. Not real well. Knew Carl, of course. People felt so bad when he passed away. All the kids loved him. He used to take them, by the bus load, and get them candy....⁶

N: When you homesteaded, did you have a well right away or did you have to wait?

B: We had it drilled right away... We hauled our water for the quonset, down below.

N: Where from?

Al: From Brockman?

B: Yeah, from Henry. He had an artesian well. He was always a nice guy. This well was on the part down below the road....

⁶ Carl Herning owned and operated the local school busses, including the original 15 passenger van.

BR: About Henry, someone said he worked down at Kennecott.

B: Oh, he came up the hard way, over the trail, I think. The Chilkoot.

BR: Were he and Tilly married when they came to Fairbanks?

B: Oh, I don't know. She worked at the Peerless when it was right by the USO....⁷

N: Did you have a telephone when you first moved out?

B: No, no.

BR: You must have gotten one of the first ones when they came across the flats. We came over and used your phone.

B: A lot of people did. We were glad to share.

N: What phone company would put a line across the flats?

B: North Pole. The city line came as far as Henry Gettinger's.⁸

BR: And that was only because TransAlaska was coming across and threatening...

B: ...to take up the whole thing clear to town.

Al: We'd been after the city for years to put phones out here. When the city gave Henry a phone, that stopped TransAlaska from going west.⁹

N: Was the (TransAlaska) line overland, on poles?

Al: Yeah, I suppose. Certainly wasn't buried.

B: I guess I was the first one (to get a phone), then it went on east.

Al: They were overhead lines and they picked up all the static—the guy with the welding rig in his garage—you could tell when he was welding....

BR: What did you ever do with those goats? How many were there?

B: Sold them. There were ten or so. That was Jim's dad's idea, that he was going to flood the world.... Here Jim was working a job and we still had to stay up till midnight, building fence for those dang goats.

BR: When did Johnny come up?¹⁰ Were he and Elsie married when they came?

⁷ The USO was located on the river side of First Ave between Cushman and Lacey Streets.

⁸ About 3 M.

⁹ Presumably, TransAlaska could have installed phones right up to the city limits.

B: Oh, yes. They had all the kids. (*Jo Ann*: They came around 1960.) We'd been here quite awhile and had the house already built. They lived in the quonset hut. Johnny died in April and Jim died in December of the same year, 1993.

I agree to share this material with fellow interviewees and others interested in local history.

name

date

(By the time this was ready for Bette's signature she was no longer able to sign. BRG)

¹⁰ John Day was Jim's younger brother.