Mavis Irene Henricksen
National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park Oral History Project
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My name is Karen Brewster. Today is May 21st, 2010 and I'm here in Skagway with Irene Henricksen.

Irene Henricksen: Mavis Irene Henricksen.

Karen Brewster: Mavis Irene Henricksen, alright, thank you, and Stacey Baldridge is also here and this is for the Park Service's Skagway oral history project. Thank you. You go by Irene or Mavis?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: I use both names. I'm Mavis Irene, maiden name Soldine and married name Henricksen. I was born in Skagway, Alaska July 18th, 1933 to Hans Soldine and Mavis Hukel Soldine. I started life by holding up the train. My parents were residents of Glacier, Alaska and they had to get my mother in town so I held up the tourist train of course. The family, my grandparents, came here in January 1899 and they were basically newlyweds. They got married in June of 1898 in Seattle, Washington. My grandmother was orphaned when she was a week old and was raised by her grandparents who only spoke Gaelic. She spoke Gaelic when she went to live with her father and her stepmother and some of the family, they spoke English and she didn't. She immigrated to the United States through Montana. Her brother was a railroad builder on the Great Northern in Montana. He built most of the stone bridges in the Great Falls, Montana area. Her sister had a restaurant there. I don't know how she ended up in Seattle but that's where she met my grandfather. His family came to the United States from England in 1666. He came as an indentured servant, landed in Delaware and the family lived in Cecil County, Maryland for about 100 years. Then they were, most of the boys in the family served in the Revolutionary War, but there's only records of one of them that settled in Kentucky. My grandfather was born in Covington, Kentucky. His father was a ship captain on the Mississippi River, on the southern Mississippi River. He was an only child and when his mother died in 1882, he headed west. His father was killed in 1892 by, run over with a horse and

buggy. That made the front page of the Memphis paper. They came to Alaska, brought a crew of 150 men, to build the railroad. That crew of men are the ones that struck the railroad and all the workers were blackballed from working on the railroad, so living in Skagway and not being able to work for the railroad was a hardship. The family, my grandfather was, this is things that I guess they try to hide, but I think it's kind of interesting history, he was accused of some kind of a crime and the family left here in September of 1912 and went back to Canada where my grandmother was from. They found out that he was innocent and the family returned the following year, and interesting letters have been written about just before they left is when Kern's castle built, or burned on the hill. In this letter he mentions the burning of Kern's castle.

Karen Brewster: Now what is Kern's castle?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Kern was a person that lived here and had a jewelry store here where Kirmse's is now and he had this castle, kind of, up on the Upper Lake Trail and it was, he is the person where the time clock is on the hill, he had a swastika. Now a swastika, ironically, is an Indian name and an Indian symbol of peace. The German's turned it into a diamond shape and it's really one of the oldest Indian signs that there are. It's not, the natives don't use it in the diamond. Anyway, that was one of the things that was in there that I was able date happenings. My grandparents, after they arrived here in January, they had a daughter in March of 1899 and she only lived a few days. The nurse that took care of my grandmother gave her an overdose of laudanum and she died. They buried her in the cemetery here and when they returned a year later, that part of the cemetery had washed away, and I found that there is no record of her birth or death, so it's just an interesting part. My grandmother had six more children. She never had help having them. She delivered her own children and raised them here in Skagway. The oldest one, Cecil Hukel, with his best friend, George Rapuzzi, Cecil was born in March of 1900 and George was born in November of 1899, they wandered the hills around here and took a lot of the stuff off the Chilkoot Trail, which is part of the Rapuzzi collection but it was actually collected by Cecil and George, who had the Trail of '98 Museum here in the early 1920's. It's where the Mascot Saloon is right now. Some of, my grandmother had had a skating rink here, I know George had those business cards and he also had the records of when they arrived on the ship. My mother was the second one in the family, of the six they raised, and she was basically the one the family always turned too. She, because my grandfather died when she was 16, she always

worried about the family till the day she died. Family were important and they were always who she went to for trouble.

Karen Brewster: And what was her name again?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Mavis. She was Mavis and she was written up in a lot of magazines, Newsweek, you name it, cause she was a real character but she also served on the city council, which gets into another phase of the family. There were three girls and three boys. It was Cecil, Mavis, Jim, Belle, Edith and Duncan and my mom tells stories about climbing telephone poles and live cutting the wires to sell the copper to help bring money home to the family. It was a hard life for the family because there was children from two years to seventeen when my grandfather died in the Pioneer Home in Sitka, Alaska.

Karen Brewster: What did your grandmother do after that?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: I don't know. She worked. She actually worked on the railroad some and she worked at Cowley.

Karen Brewster: What's Cowley?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Cowley is on the railroad and it's on the Canadian side. There wasn't that much about the border, but she actually was born in Canada. They got married in June of 1898 and there was, for a short time, the law of the United States was that if you married an American, you were an American and you didn't have to take out citizen's papers or anything like that. That got a little difficult during World War II to have to carry the law with you along with your marriage certificate. My grandfather died in 1916. He was the 17th person to die in the Pioneer Home in Sitka and he's buried in Sitka. He came from, he had attended Notre Dame when he was seven years old and they have those records. I got them in less than a week.

Karen Brewster: Now he came here to work on the railroad or for the gold mine, the Klondike?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: He came, he brought a crew of men for the railroad, and like I said, that crew are the ones that struck the railroad,

Karen Brewster: Oh.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: and I said, oh the stories, I don't know all the stories because my grandmother said he was homesick and he wasn't guilty of striking the railroad and my uncle always said that his father was a leader in the unions. So, it was what fit who and my mother didn't talk about him much.

Karen Brewster: So he came to work on the railroad and couldn't so what did he..?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: He did go into Atlin and he had a mine in there that his partner was supposed to have done him out off. He seemed to be a person that didn't know how to succeed. My grandmother, being a Scot, knew how to survive.

Karen Brewster: She sounds like it.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: She did not have a, they took her out of school to go help take care of, help her sisters take care of their big families, big farm families, so, she wasn't dumb but she knew her math and wrote phonetically. When she wrote a letter it was phonics, but her family, my Aunt Edith told me they were from Welwyn, Saskatchewan which the farm house was in Saskatchewan but the farm went into Manitoba. Her brother, just older than her, his two boys, one was a doctor who drowned and the other was a lawyer who was still practicing law at 92 when he got hit by a car. The family that went into southern United States, California, were all lawyers or educators or well educated people.

Karen Brewster: Tell us more about your mom and dad?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: My father was a Swedish immigrant. He came here in 1924. He worked in the bridge gang. He had a fancy proposal to my mom. He called her up on the telephone and said he was leaving town and was she coming with him or not, so she was on the boat that night to Tacoma, Washington. They got married in Seattle, Washington in 1929, March 1929, which was when the stock market kind of flopped. They were back in Alaska at the end of November of 1930. Then they came back and my dad was a section hand at Glacier. He was a section foreman and that's why they lived in, if you see pictures of Glacier, there was a woodshed right where the trail to Laughton Glacier started and he fixed that up and that's where they lived. That was my first home and my first crib was a hand box. I lived with the squirrels I think.

Karen Brewster: What is a hand box?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: A ham box.

Karen Brewster: Oh, ham.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: They used to come in wooden boxes, yeah. I was literally raised on the railroad because my father, in most of my more adult life, was head of the maintenance for the bridges and the buildings on the railroad. In the summer, every April, he left town and traveled the length of the railroad. They had cars for the men to live in, and he had a private car but it wasn't very private because we were always there, and then they ate in the section houses, so every summer I spent all my time in different places along the railroad. I remember sometimes my mother was cooking at White Pass and I would go to work with the section crews. It was kind of fun to be playing. I went to work with the section crews, ate lunch with them and went back with them. My younger sister too, my mother was a widow. Her first husband was a Sergeant in the Signal Corps. He had served in World War I and was stationed in Haines, and because he had been gassed, he was susceptible to tuberculosis. He died when my older sister was three months old. My brother was 16 months old. My father met my mother when she was cooking at White Pass and that's why he called her up and said he was going back south. His family lived in the Tacoma area and actually were well known because they were ship builders and had a shipyard. My cousin just died. He was born in Brooklyn, New York but he died at 103 last year, and was all there too. His memory and everything, so that's where my younger sister does live, is in Tacoma.

Karen Brewster: So you said that you went out with the section crew. What did the section crew do and what would it mean to have a kid around? What were you doing?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well, oh, we used to play along the side. My dad didn't take me to work with him because I tried to follow him across the bridges and that wasn't too safe. I had a great time going to work with the section crew. While they worked on the tracks, we went and played, my sister and I, in the mud puddles or where ever around. Then of course in Whitehorse I made friends that ended up being more my lifelong friends than the ones I was raised with here. My grandmother cooked in Cowley and my aunt Edith was with her and a native woman had died and they were burying her and the first plane into Whitehorse went over and they dropped

everything to go into Whitehorse to see the airplane and her husband says "Oh, she'll keep" and off they went, so they went into Whitehorse to see the airplane. I was actually in Whitehorse when the first American planes came into Whitehorse in 1942 and Whitehorse was one of the Lend-Lease stops. I can remember the school got out and we all went up the hill to see the Army airplane that was up there. Here in Skagway, our house was at the end of the airport. White Pass was a early leader, not only in the railroad, but they were a leader with all transportation in the North. They had an airline here, prior to World War II, that flew into Whitehorse, and of course one of them didn't make it. At that time my father was at White Pass and my mother was too because they heard it crash and they went down and found the crash on the American Shed. But anyway, the planes that took off used to almost take our chimney off, so that house, the White Pass bought, then my father bought it back and moved it down to the south end of town. Then of course you know the White Pass was a leader also, not only in putting the railroad in and the airplanes, but they had most of the trucking in the Yukon also. They also had a monopoly so monopolies kind of get you rich. They had ships on the river, the riverboats. In 1945 we went down the river on the riverboat and spent three days in Dawson City and then went on down. Of course about ten years later I think, they stopped running the boats.

Karen Brewster: Was it typical for somebody working on the railroad, like your father, to be able to have their family with them up the line?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Not really, but he was the foreman and he had the car and of course my mother worked. My mother worked at Clifton, Glacier, White Pass and White Pass hospital as a cook. She and her sister, Belle, had Soapy Smith's café here which, it's kind of hard to describe, but where Moe's bar was in recent times. Actually I used to play in the back room there. A thing to bring up there is, I can remember when the Natives did not eat in the front of the restaurant, but they would come back in the back in where the family ate and eat back there. Also, I can remember when they had signs that the Natives weren't allowed in the pool hall and things like that, however, our schools were always integrated here. The Native kids that did live in the town did go to our school. There was the Catholic mission school here that was established in, I believe 1929, and it was unique. It took me a few years to find that out, but it was, the kids that went to that school were all mixed blood and most of them had a white parent. In the other communities in Southeast Alaska, there was Native schools and white schools.

Evidently the parents didn't want their kids to go to the Native schools so they sent them to the boarding school here in Skagway. I didn't, like I said, I didn't realize that it was unique in that it was basically kids of mixed blood.

Karen Brewster: And was there interaction between the kids at the mission school and your school, the public school?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Not too much, however, periodically the high school kids from that school went to our school. Before they closed, a lot of kids in the community went to the Catholic school. Sister Mary Amy at the Catholic school was very, very well known because she was the music teacher for the whole town. Of course that was the one thing that they had in that school that was outstanding is the music program, which of course in any church school music is important. Like I say, there was not a lot of interaction and the boys mixed in the town, but the girls weren't allowed to mix very much.

Karen Brewster: I wonder why the difference?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well, I won't say that there was a lot of mix of the boys, but the boys had the run of the town where the girls didn't.

Karen Brewster: So how did it work with your schooling if you were living up on the line?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well I didn't live up there. I lived up there before I started school and then when I started school, why my dad would go up in April and I might go and he would come back in October.

Karen Brewster: So the family lived in town during the school year?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yes.

Karen Brewster: OK.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well and my mother didn't always go with us when we went. My mother was always busy doing something, but she would drop everything to go for a hike. She loved to hike. My father didn't. He said he went to the top of the highest mountain he could see and all he could see was higher mountains and decided that wasn't worthwhile. He certainly was

an active man but he didn't see much sense in climbing mountains. Then I would like to kind of talk about my mother and her sisters because they were always leaders. Her sister Edith, who is two years younger, served on the school board here. She served on the city council and she was always trying to beautify everybody. She was a beauty operator in the town. Her sister Belle, who she was in partnership here with Belle's café, when she left here in 1939 and went to Juneau and worked in the Baranof Hotel when it first opened as a waitress, and then she and a Pilipino cook, in a partnership, opened a restaurant, Belle's Café which was very well known in Juneau and in early Alaska state history. It was where all the legislators had their coffee. In the Juneau history books, why that's a sister. The boys wandered the world more, that is all except for the younger one, Duncan. When my mother and dad married in 1929, they ended up with my mother's younger brother and sister too. Then Duncan came back to Skagway and was the section foreman at Glacier. He married Goldie Hanousek and had two girls that were raised in Skagway. Edie married Mark Lee, that was another big family in Skagway, the Lee family. The Hanousek family were new. Goldie was the leader of the crew that came here. There are Hanouseks's here still that were her nephews and things like that. Like I said, my dad was a Swedish immigrant.

Karen Brewster: What about your mother's other brothers?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Cecil and Jim? Jim left, Cecil and George Rapuzzi closed the Mascot Saloon and Cecil decided to go and he went to Ketchikan and from there to Montana and California and he ended up back here in '41 or '42. Then he and both Jim worked on the Alaska Highway when it was built. There was an interesting story about Jim. When he was a teenager, he worked on the riverboats and got iced in up North. I don't know, he made his way back to Skagway. Jim also went to Saudi Arabia and helped build the oil fields over there, which I believe that was during World War II. Of the family of six, there was, Jim had the only son of the three boys, so and that only son had one son. The son was in Tennessee and his son lives in Hawaii.

Karen Brewster: You have siblings. What about your siblings?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: My older brother and sister were Emmett and Innes. Emmett is well known in aviation in Alaska. They're both dead, and they were my half brother and sister. Then

I have my younger sister, we call her Tookie. Her name's Edith Ione but the nickname stuck forever. She lives in Gig Harbor, Washington. Her son lives in Anchorage. My husband's family were Norwegian immigrants that went to Ketchikan in 1912 and 1919. My husband, well there was two boys. The oldest boy was killed at Port Chicago during the blast on July 17th, 1944. Then my husband and I have three boys, two live in Juneau and one lives in Skagway. He's in the highway department.

Karen Brewster: Tell us a little bit about you? You grew up here and now you ended up meeting your husband.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Actually, I grew up here. I was born and raised here. I went to, I haven't missed many Washington Colleges, Washington State Colleges. I went to Washington State for a year and a half and then I came home. Then I've gone back and I've gone to North Seattle Community College and Green River Community College. I've gone to the University of Alaska in Juneau and my husband is a graduate of Pacific Lutheran University. His people are fishing people that can document being fishing people to the 1300's in Norway.

Karen Brewster: So did you finally get a college degree after all that?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: No, I actually I got an associate's degree, but I started out in teacher education and then I took, seeing as how I worked in business, I took some more business classes and then I got my degree in transportation from Green River.

Karen Brewster: What kind of jobs have you done?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: OK, I worked for Ellis Airlines in Ketchikan for several years, in the accounting department. I worked for the U.S. Post Office in Ketchikan and I delivered milk in Ketchikan with a milk truck. In Skagway I'm retired from the railroad. I worked as a coach cleaner and a pump operator at the tank farm. I worked on the wharf as a clerk and, let's see, did I mention banking in Ketchikan? I worked in a bank in Ketchikan too.

Karen Brewster: You've done a little bit of everything.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: I was told that you can do anything you want to do, but the best paying job ahead was coach cleaning. Probably the least pay was working in the bank but it was

probably the most education. Then I have served on the city council and right now I'm busy giving the council a bad time.

Stacey Baldridge: Are you still on the city council?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: No, I'm not on city council but I go to as many meetings as the council do.

Karen Brewster: You're a public citizen.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah.

Karen Brewster: That's good. It seems like in Skagway, lots of women worked in lots of things that at the time maybe was unusual. Lots of women worked for the railroad, your mother being a cook at the camps up the line. I don't know if women in these time periods did that in other places.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: I think that up in Alaska, they have done it from the beginning. My mother, she actually had a civil service, during World War II, she was in the U.S. Army bakery here and had a civil service rating as a baker. Actually, my mother, at one time had three jobs. She worked at the hospital cooking. She baked for the construction companies and she telephone operated in between. When she was young she worked for the Daily Alaskan. When she worked for the Daily Alaskan, she worked with Irene Adams who ended up being her maid of honor when she married my father. I think that's where my name came from, was her friend Irene.

Karen Brewster: It seemed, you know, women were doing a lot of things that, you know, I think women in other places were just "you have six kids, you raised six kids", you didn't go working three jobs too.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: No, no. They were, they were very poor. Mom said that when she was in Skagway she thought she was poor. I've been told since that the house they lived in here didn't have a floor in it. It was the dirt, and it was up on about 17th Street there. She said "I thought I was poor until I went to Saskatchewan". I guess they were sod houses when she went there. My grandmother's father was also a stone mason, but she says "I found out I wasn't as

poor as I thought" when they came back here. My grandfather, before he died, worked as a janitor. Like I said because he was blackballed from the railroad, he couldn't work for the railroad so he worked as a janitor in the school until he got so sick that he went down to Sitka to the Pioneer Home and died three months later. He did beautiful wood carving, and I don't know that he accomplished much other. I do know that a cousin that I got in contact with when I found the family in Saskatchewan, and he was a lawyer and he had stayed in the same area as the family was raised so all the family kept in contact with him. This is where I got the genealogy on the McKenzie family and that was a large family. I think my grandmother was one of, I think, ten kids, the youngest one, and her father had two more children and they all had big families. My grandmother with six had the least of all the girls in the family.

Karen Brewster: So your memories of growing up here in Skagway, was it still kind of a company town?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Oh, it was definite, Skagway has been definitely a company town and it's never lost some of what goes with a company town. They're used to the company taking care of them, and they get lost by not being responsible totally for themselves. A company town does not develop, people raised in a company town, they either have to get out of that town or they have to learn to think for themselves. I was born and raised in Skagway. The time I spent away from here was important, because you get into a groove that you don't want to, you want to know more about what goes on in this world. Well, my early days in Skagway, of Martin Itjen and the Skagway streetcar and "Ma" Pullen. My mother worked for "Ma" Pullen and my mother cooked at the Pullen House, and my sister Innes, Keith's mother, she used to wait tables over there. Then one winter I lived with my grandmother. I lived with my grandmother a lot in my younger days, and I lived with my grandmother and my sister and my dad lived in the Pullen House. My mother cooked there and my sister wasn't in school.

Karen Brewster: For people who don't know, maybe you can tell us what the Pullen House was and what it means to Skagway.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well, I think the house was originally built by Moore. Mrs. Pullen made it into a hotel and a visitor. The people in the 1920's and 30's were quite innovative and entrepreneurs, and people like the…oh…the streetcar people, the

Karen Brewster: The Itjens?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah, people like the Itjens and then "Ma" Pullen, the Tropys and I think that they were Italian and so were the Rapuzzis and "Ma" Rapuzzi had a fruit store downtown. Then, let's see.

Karen Brewster: So the Pullen House was sort of the first tourist accommodations here?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: That and the Golden North. The Golden North was built by the Dedman family, however, my family bought it and made it into, they said it was an old hotel and they weren't going to make it a fancy new hotel, so they are the ones that, my mom and her sister, Edith Lee, they and my dad, he had to do a lot of the work because he was the carpenter. They fixed up the rooms and you know the old bathtubs. The bathtubs in that place are interesting. I mean they're deep and short or deep and huge or I think they are some of the more interesting things in the place. They fixed the hotel up and, with the old theme. I think it used to have, the dome used to be painted red. I think my dad was the one that painted it gold. They had that. For years my folks had what they called the Portland House that they are fixing up now. That was the Soldine Apartments. There were eight apartments in there and that was, I think that building was originally owned by the Moores. It was called the Portland House.

Karen Brewster: Why was it called the Portland House?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: I don't know. It was called the Portland House and like I said, I think it was originally owned by the Moore family because I believe that was the edge of the Moore homestead, on State Street. Now that's just kind of guess work on that one.

Karen Brewster: What about the building that's in the Jeff Smith Parlor or the Soapy Smith Parlor? Do you know that building on Second?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah, it was originally on Sixth, and Sixth Street was called Holley Street and it was originally right next to where Sergeant Preston's Lodge is now, but I don't ever remember it there, because when I was young they had it across the street and they had the first fire hall there. Now basically that would be in back of the Elk's Building. The Elk's Building was built during World War II and that was the Army bakery. It had a huge, huge chimney on it. That's where my mother worked. OK.

Karen Brewster: That Soapy Smith building, after it was the fire hall,

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well the fire hall was next to it.

Karen Brewster: Oh, it was next to it.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: and then George Rapuzzi moved it down to where it is now.

Karen Brewster: OK.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well the buildings in Skagway on Broadway all came from someplace else.

Karen Brewster: It's confusing.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: They all came from someplace else. The Golden North was someplace else. The Red Onion used to sit on Sixth and State Street and the front of the building now is what was the back of the building. Sixth Street was more the street where the prostitutes, it was, OK. Also Holley Street, the Sixth Street, was where Kirmse had his original store, and the building that is now called Kirmse's is where Kern had his store. Old pictures of the Kirmse building, because I had Kirmse's store at one time, if you look at that building, one third of it is kind of built and then there's another section that's about a third where the doors were. The second set of doors north was Smith Drug. Next to that was (Ask's?) store but (Ask's?) store was originally B. M. Baron's I believe, it was a company out of Juneau. They still have Baron's, well they have B. M. Baron's Bank down there. The (Ask's?) family, (Ask ?) had worked for Nordstrom's, I believe, in Seattle and he came up in 1898 and he married a girl from Juneau so that's an old Juneau family. The Juneau families date back earlier than the families in Skagway. Juneau was a community in the late 1880's or earlier. See, right after statehood I believe, or not statehood, after Alaska was purchased, what I didn't realize was gold miners follow a path. They were in California and they just started coming north. There were some in the Cassiar district and they came down the Stikine River and they ended up, there was gold mines in Sitka, which I didn't know. There was a gold mine and they went to Sitka. Then they went, Joe Juneau, went in Juneau and found Gold Creek and it's just, I guess there's gold all over the country and they find it. It's funny but all these, they started in 1849 and you'll find the same ones that were in that gold rush came up to the Yukon and then ended up down somewhere south

of Anchorage, I don't know. Loren Leman, one of our legislators, his family came through here in the gold rush. It's kind of funny the people that came to Skagway, how the families ended up in other parts and a lot of times very well off. Like the Rasmussen family, somebody was just asking me today, I was talking with Walsh, Jim Walsh, and his family went into Nome in 1898 and it's just funny how they just seemed to all come through Skagway and end up someplace else.

Karen Brewster: It's the gateway right?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah, it was a gateway. I know what we were talking about, the Rasmussen family, and he was telling me that Mr. Rasmussen that started National Bank of Alaska, Edward Rasmussen, he came to Alaska as an Indian Agent in Yakutat, and his wife was from Sweden and she came to Yakutat as a missionary. Mr. Walsh was telling me that all these people that came up here in Alaska history, the famous judges and everything else, they were all political appointments and that Rasmussen must have been a political appointment up here to be an Indian Agent. He was telling me about all the political appointments and like Gruening, and I knew that Gruening had been in the Caribbean and that he was a personal friend of Roosevelt and Walsh was telling me about how they were all political appointments. It was kind of interesting the ties.

Karen Brewster: You had mentioned your mother working at the bakery for the military in World War II. Can you talk about the Army coming here in World War II and what happened to Skagway?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well, I guess the first thing they did was march down Broadway. I didn't remember seeing that and everybody comes out and watches that. The first detachment in here that I remember, came in early '42. They were a railroad detachment and they were put up in the Johnson House, the Pullen House, the building they called the Johnson House. There were about 22 of them and that was a railroad detachment. They brought black troops in here and the black troops were all sent into the Carcross area and they worked together on a particular part of the, mainly from Carscross to Teslin or in that area.

Karen Brewster: They were working on the railroad?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: No, they were actually working on the highway. They were stationed here in Skagway for, I mean we had about 10,000 troops here I think. The area, let's see, the area up on this street, north of 11th I'd say, no 12th north of 12th was the old airport and that were tents from there clear to the shops. They had Army going through here. The 18th Army Engineers and different ones going up to build. They built the highway north and south from Whitehorse and cut the time of building the road in half due to the access through the White Pass. There was Army and construction everywhere. The whole town had a building on it. All the old buildings that had been empty were filled. We weren't allowed to go up on most of the hill. That didn't stop my sister. We could go down to the picnic area on the beach, but we never went down to the waterfront. The guys that came in here at the beginning and learned to unload cargo and everything else, those fellows came here, they went in the Army and were sent up here. They never had basic training and they sent them from here back to the States. They gave them basic training and they had the training in loading and unloading here all the stuff. They were the ones that were sent on D-Day. They were assigned the loading and unloading of all the cargo that you can imagine how much stuff that they had to handle. Several of them came back to Skagway after World War II. Marvin Taylor, who ended up being president of the railroad. Chris Rolph, who ended up with $8,000,000 or more, and Kalenkosky who married Barbara Dedman Kalen . All three of those guys originally came with the original ones that were for loading and unloading ships. Marvin Taylor never was sent overseas, I don't think. He stayed here and became president of the, he came back and became a major player in the railroad.

Tape 2

Karen Brewster: So we were talking about World War II and what happened.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well, I was talking about the people that originally came here during World War II, ended up over in Europe on D-Day and ended up back here after World War II. Chris Rolph, he ended up well to do, but he, there was a time when you couldn't get a bank loan in Skagway. If it hadn't of been for Chris Rolph and my parents, but Chris Rolph mainly, people won't have had any place to go to buy a home.

Karen Brewster: How come you couldn't get a bank loan? There wasn't a bank or?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: No, we had National Bank of Alaska, and National Bank of Alaska ended up being the biggest branch bank in Alaska, which started out in Skagway and Wrangell, but Skagway was the main base. They were a very conservative bank and they didn't make, the loans they made they knew they were going to get their money back, however, that was another subject that I got into today with Walsh. They made a lot of their money on oil money in the Kenai Peninsula. Mr. Rasmussen, who came up as an Indian Agent and then came to Skagway and started National Bank of Alaska, of course his son Elmer did go to school in Skagway. He went to his freshman year and junior year of high school here, of course Anchorage claims him. He left the Rasmussen Foundation in Anchorage $90,000,000.

Karen Brewster: How was it that your parents helped people with loans?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: They would go and loan them the money to buy houses. I could tell you funny stories, but the problem is that it gets personal. My mother had a fetish almost, that everybody should have a home. Sometimes people didn't go with the idea that they wanted to buy a home and my mother would say "You need a home".

Karen Brewster: It was very generous that your parents had the money to be able to do that.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well, my mother worked and she just kept money moving. I mean when people would pay off, there was another place to help. My parents weren't, didn't think in relation to making a lot of money for themselves because they also had a building supply

business and I can remember my dad was so proud that he got such a good buy on the lumber, but so did the people that bought the lumber from him. Of course he said that when he grew up in Sweden, he thought the people with the hardware store were the richest people there were. He loved that, but Chris had grown up as a farm boy and not with a lot of money. He could tell you what that light cost you to run. He could, he was a very bright person. He always lived like he was poor because he didn't know any other way to live, but like I say, he left a huge estate.

Karen Brewster: So your father had a lumber yard. That was after he worked for the railroad?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yes, after he worked for the railroad. They had what is now Skagway Hardware. They had that lumber yard. They had Soldine Building Supply.

Karen Brewster: When was that?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well, he died in '72 so they had it prior to '72 for a few years. They got that building because somebody wanted to sell it and so they bought it. I mean they got a good deal because somebody to buy it and get out of town, I mean sell it and get out of town. That happened a few times, when people wanted to sell things and my folks and their sister, Edith Lee, had the Golden North Hotel. They had, another sister and her husband, had Soapy Smith's Café. I don't know, they had the Soldine apartment building and they used to have a duplex right here.

Karen Brewster: Right, on this property.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: On this property here.

Karen Brewster: Mile 0 is,

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah.

Karen Brewster: So did you work at the Golden North Hotel when you were a kid?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well they never got it until after I got married, but I did work at the Golden North Hotel a little bit.

Karen Brewster: Doing what?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Actually in the restaurant, waiting tables and kind of organizing the help and things like that.

Karen Brewster: So did you meet your husband in Ketchikan?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yes. I met a Norwegian family that I was actually staying with. I met him on Christmas Eve, but actually where I went to work, I had to go right by their house. A couple of months later he asked me out. It didn't hurt to be a Scandinavian in Ketchikan, even if it was only half Scandinavian.

Karen Brewster: What year were you married?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: 1955, but we were married here in Skagway. We had a double, my sister and I had a double wedding.

Stacey Baldridge: Which sister?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Tookie, my, two years younger than me, on her 20th birthday.

Karen Brewster: So you mentioned that your mother was a cook at the White Pass railroad's hospital?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah.

Karen Brewster: Can you talk about what that place was like?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well, of course Dr. Dahl was there and Dr. Dahl was the doctor that brought me into the world. If he hadn't have been there than I probably wouldn't have been because I had the cord around my neck three times. He was my doc.

Karen Brewster: He must have been a good doctor.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: He was a very good doctor at telling you what you had wrong with you and get out of town or take an aspirin and stay here. He, and the clinic here is called the Dahl Memorial Clinic. Dr. Dahl was trained at Northwestern. He came from a North Dakota family, a farm family that believed in strong names. His name was Peter I. Dahl and come to find out, I think he used to call it St. Ignatius, but anyway, come to find out it was Iverson. He

was my doc. I mean he did house calls and when I was sick I wanted the doctor but nobody would do but him. Then when I went to college at Washington State College, he was one of the two doctors there and so when I got homesick, I used to go down to the clinic and go home with him for dinner. It was kind of neat.

Karen Brewster: What kind of medical care was there?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well he actually did operations and everything. If you have appendicitis and there's a boat every ten days, you take care of what you can take care of and he was just a general practitioner. Actually, when you talk to Wanda Warner, he was the doctor here when she came.

Karen Brewster: He was the only doctor?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Oh yeah.

Karen Brewster: And how many nurses were there?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Oh there were usually three. There was a doctor in Skagway because the law used to be that where there was a railroad, they had to have a hospital. It was required and of course when that law went out, so did all the hospitals.

Karen Brewster: So when did that hospital close?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well, I don't know exactly. I think it might have been in the 60's, 50's or 60's. Carl Mulvihill, have you talked to him, well he's the one that would know the answer to that one. He's really got the history and the pictures.

Karen Brewster: I thought that you mother, having worked there, you might have spent time at that hospital as a child.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: I did, but I wasn't a young child when she was working there. In fact I used to mop the floors there once a week. She, my mom made sure I had jobs.

Karen Brewster: I was just trying to find out what the place was like.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: It was a two story building. Nothing fantastic, but it was probably as good as most small hospitals. He was the only doctor and like there was three nurses, but you see, that was another thing. In this town, the families that stayed here after the gold rush, I'd say after 1911, I think about 1911 things kind of got down to what families were staying. The men married the nurses and the teachers and maybe the waitresses from Bennett and the women married the soldiers from Haines and mainly I guess maybe some local boys, but everybody is sort of related here. It's not, there's always new blood coming in because there are always the teachers and nurses and what have you. It's kind of funny how much in streaks that it took that they were married to soldiers from the Haines area. Not so much from people from other Southeast towns, but the different people in their jobs that came in here.

Karen Brewster: You were still a young person when the Army came in during World War II.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Oh yeah, I was second or third grade. I was eight years old or so.

Karen Brewster: Do you remember what that was like and how it changed town?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah, but to me, I don't know, we always had soldiers around the house because I had a teenage sister. They mixed with, into the town, I mean and I don't know, we were occupied but it didn't bother me much. Then we had a theater that was built here around '41 and of course that was a popular place for the kids and the Army.

Karen Brewster: You got movies huh?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: We had probably a different movie three times a week or so. They never got new ones. Newer ones you had to go to Juneau. I can remember in the 30's everyone going to Juneau to see *Gone with the Wind*.

Karen Brewster: It was a big deal.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: *Gone with the Wind* was a big deal. Of course they had Tropys see it, I mentioned Tropy, he had the Golden North for a while and he also had the theater. It burned during World War II and I was in the building when it caught on fire. The building was full when it caught on fire and you know the old film used to go.

Karen Brewster: That's what caught it on fire?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well yeah. You saw the movie, the screen, the flames go to the side and the next thing it was on fire and we were out the fire door, but earlier they had the piano down front and of course I got to go to the Shirley Temple shows. That was the only time that I went to the show was Shirley Temple.

Karen Brewster: And that was a big deal?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well yeah, well I guess it was a big deal. I think that it was a treat, it was considered a treat for me. I liked Shirley Temple. Anyway, that theater was packed the night it burned, and then by the time you went outside and went around to the front why it was explosions sort of across the street.

Karen Brewster: It sounds pretty scary.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well, it's kind of, but nobody, it burned the building but nobody got hurt. Although one time during World War II, the construction dormitories down on, about where the Westmark Hotel is, they had one of those dormitories burn and three women were lost in there because a heavy woman fell against a door that opened in. We had some big fires when the Army was here. They burned down the Elk's Club. The Pullen House had a big fire and down south of us, there was a building that they used for a motor pool burned down and yeah, there was a warehouse. They called that one a fire sale. They figured there was too much stuff missing, so it was easier to burn it, I don't know. You would be surprised where there were buildings around here. Great big Army laundries and like I say, the building, let's see, just over here on what's that, 8th Street, it's across from the church, that was built U.S. Army Engineer's building. That was stick built. The city shop was stick built motor pool. Up at the end of this street, the White Pass building at the end of Alaska Street, that was a stick built. Why I say stick built is because there was an awful lot of prefab buildings. There was at least two Army mess halls and then there were one, two, there were several construction mess halls. I mean, it was just a big Army camp and construction camp.

Karen Brewster: So the construction was not Army, that was a separate, or were they part of the Army?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Oh no, they were, the construction were not part of the Army. Big, big Metcalf, there are still big construction companies. Worldwide construction companies and it was a cost plus job.

Karen Brewster: What does that mean?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: They got whatever it cost them to do it plus profit money. I mean it wasn't the lowest bidder or something, it was just get the job done. It was a lot of the big companies went together in joint efforts. Then of course I can remember when they built the Canol pipeline. I was at White Pass and watching them go by with the pipeline, just welding one thing after another. That pipeline, the Canol pipeline, was built out of Skagway to Whitehorse and it was unique in that it was built so that fuel could flow either direction. They were shipping fuel into Whitehorse. We had a tank farm out here until quite recently, built by the U.S. Army, up just across the bridge. When I said I worked for the White Pass as a pump operator, I worked out there. We used to have to climb tanks in the middle of the night. That was in recent years, when the White Pass owned it. They pumped oil into Whitehorse for the construction and everything, but they also built it up to the Northwest Territories with the idea of pumping oil out of there and was supposed to refine it in Whitehorse. It was only a four inch pipeline but it was unique.

Karen Brewster: Did they use it?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Oh yes. It was used up until about, what was it, late 1980's.

Karen Brewster: Did they use it both directions as planned?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: No, it never pumped oil out. It was always pumped in. They took the line up to the Northwest Territories, but there is a road that goes up that way now. That project was a pretty big project, although a four inch pipeline is almost unheard of.

Karen Brewster: In our days yeah.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Then they built, the Army built a pipeline out of Haines that went all the way up to Tok and western Alaska. I think that one was probably an eight inch pipeline.

Karen Brewster: One of the things that you were talking about earlier, you said today you walked up the valley and you noticed all these changes in the landscape. Maybe you could talk a little bit about how that's changed?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well, the railroad was built in a hurry, but originally it crossed the river down here, close to this bridge that goes across the river and went up the valley on the east side and up toward the end of the road…

Karen Brewster: The Klondike Highway?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: No, well not the Klondike, the low part of the Klondike Highway is built on the rail bed, but as soon as you start up the hill, that's different. Then you kind of go down along the valley next to it, well the rail bed went there. Then it crossed the river way up. In 1939 they made a deal that the railroad came down on the east side of town, and they took out the bridge across and all the rail out there. When I lived up there with my grandmother on the Atchison homestead in the late 1930's, my sister and I lived up there with grandma, she had cows. My grandmother made her living in the later part of her life by selling milk with cows and chickens and that's how she made her living.

Karen Brewster: You don't think of cows in Alaska so much.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well they had a, the Catholic mission had a dairy up there too, but actually there were dairies here in 1898. There was one in the middle of the river. There used to be an island in the middle of the river.

Karen Brewster: The Skagway River?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: The Skagway River and that was the Baker family had that. I think it was the Baker family had that. Yeah, there was an island in the middle of the river if you can believe that. I can't even remember it, but they had a dairy there. When I was a kid, they had a dairy up across the bridge, and of course they also had a truck farm. The Clarks had a truck farm up there and the Clarks made their living selling vegetables during the summer and they cut trees and sold wood. They raised two girls and sent them to school and things like that. Mrs. Clark was part of the people that helped build the Skagway Women's Club and the library. The Skagway Women's Club had the library originally. Then the Catholic Church bought the dairy

and of course they used that for the mission kids and then they sold the milk too, but then my grandmother also had her two cows. I used to deliver milk with two leather satchels on a bicycle. If you can imagine riding a bicycle with 20 glass quarts of milk but I didn't break any.

Karen Brewster: That was here in Skagway you did that?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah, I delivered.

Karen Brewster: What about in the winter?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well my grandmother delivered her own milk a lot and she did it with a wagon. She would be out bright and early in the morning with her milk, of course that's raw milk too. Nobody ever heard of raw milk anymore. I lived with grandma a lot, like I say until I was about eight years old, I spent quite a bit of time living with grandma.

Karen Brewster: Why did you live with your grandmother?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well my mother was up the road, up there cooking or she was doing something. You know, my parents came back in the 1930's over the depression. I mean it was the wrong time to change jobs in 1929 and you did what you could. She had two sisters living here and both, and her sister Belle's husband was an engineer on the railroad so my older brother and sister lived with them when my parents were up the railroad because they went to school in town. The family just helped each other, and the community just helped each other because during the depression, they took an automatic 10% deduction off all the salaries just to keep the railroad running. Nobody was rich but nobody was poor. It was not a bad way to live. It's almost a better way to live. Skagway has not ever really been a poor, totally poor community because of the transportation corridor.

Karen Brewster: How has it changed since you were a kid?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well the biggest change has been since the railroad closed in 1982, and it has become a totally tourist town. It was almost a better community as a year around town. Right now it is a, they call dysfunctional families, well we're a dysfunctional town. We are totally dysfunctional. The Chamber of Commerce doesn't know what Chamber of Commerce is all about. They are, they take care of the 4th of July and all things like that but they

don't take care of, they aren't there to promote business, other than some more interest to the tourist business. When I was on the Centennial Committee, I promoted the centennial and things like that, basically that's what they're doing right now. The Eagles and the Elks are fraternal orders but in Skagway, they're more like the, well they're always doing, they do fabulous things for the community. I mean like the kids that graduated from high school, all they had to do was ask for a grant or…

Karen Brewster: A scholarship?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: a scholarship and they all got $1000 dollars. Now they gave some more, that were top students, but the Eagles and Elks went together with this thing raising money for breast cancer and it was so successful that they help any family with cancer period. Men, women and it doesn't have to be breast cancer. They do things to help all of the families. The Chamber really is having a hard time existing because you have some many outside companies that really, they might join the Chamber but there's more to Chamber than just paying the dues. Like I say, it's totally dysfunctional because it is so seasonal.

Karen Brewster: What about changes in the landscape? Have things changed?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well yeah, we don't have old, empty buildings. We might have old buildings and there's been a lot of buildings and building and prettying things up. I mean sometimes they get too pretty, like they almost changed our Gold Rush Cemetery, because I call it Skagway's Boot Hill, but they've prettied it up. I mean they damaged history in a way.

Karen Brewster: Is that the one that's up behind the shops?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah, they needed to put the outhouse in but, the whole idea, it basically was a Boot Hill.

Karen Brewster: What do you mean Boot Hill?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: You know, like Tombstone. It was, it's not a fancy cemetery. It's very rustic and on a hillside and it ended up having a flood go through it. The one over, the other one across the way, a lot of the, if you really go and look at the graves, if you go way back why

all the fences are gone. We got a lot of Boot Hills around here, you know. How did I get on that subject?

Karen Brewster: You said how the place has changed.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well to me it's changed a lot, but that's because you don't know everybody all the time anymore.

Karen Brewster: So was this a good place to grow up?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Oh, it's an excellent place to grow up for young children. It's safe. That's one thing about Skagway. It's considered a very safe spot.

Karen Brewster: And for you, was it a good place for you, growing up here?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Oh yeah, but I had, I didn't live the same life as all the kids here because I did travel. A lot of these kids have never been out of Skagway and they are proud of it, and I just don't understand that. I go to, in 1950 I went to New York City and I could not believe that people there hadn't been out of the city, that people don't go places. I'll climb in the car and go 900 miles in a day. Distance is not something that bothers me. I didn't travel too much until around 1945 but then I was only 12 years old then, but I've done quite a bit of travelling in my life.

Karen Brewster: Where do you think that sense of exploration comes from?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well I think it might come from people that come here in the first place. One day at coffee, we were sitting there talking and I says, well I just finally found, I've done genealogy and found out about the family going back to 1666. I said to Barbara Kalen, I says "Your family were early in the United States weren't they?" and she says, "Oh yeah. The Dedman's came here in the 1600's." and I says, "Well I was talking about your mother's family, the Whites, didn't they come on the Mayflower?", "Oh yeah." Then Ed Fairbanks was sitting at the table and I said, "What about your family Ed?" and he says "They came on the next boat after the Mayflower to escape debtors prison." I find that a high percentage of people that live here will go back and come from families that have always been the lead in moving. I don't know where the families come from that decide that they don't want to go anyplace, because I'm

always ready to go. I think the exploration and things runs that way. Of course our nation has changed into a very fluid family. Like the military kids who never spend any length of time in one spot, but it's not all bad because they don't get into a rut. I find that the people that I have known that were military brats, they adapt very fast. Your Park Service is about the same way because the people keep moving around.

Karen Brewster: Stacey, did you have some questions?

Stacey Baldridge: I don't think so.

Karen Brewster: Is there anything that we haven't asked you about you and your life and your contributions to Skagway that you want to make sure we talk about?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well when I was on city council, I ran for city council so we could get a new library. That was my main goal. I felt that we needed a library and a newspaper. The newspaper happened soon after.

Karen Brewster: So how did you get the library to happen?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well the library board, I mean the Women's Club actually, were a leader and started a library here. Jenny Rasmussen was an important part of it and Mrs. Clark and all the women in town. The library building, they closed it up in the winter when it got cold and that's when you need a library the worst. Then I found out that they had used Skagway for an example of a small community that couldn't afford a library and the state had where you could get a grant and only have to put up 10%. Then I was told that Elmer Rasmussen had told them that he would help them with the library. Well then, like I said, I found out about this 10% but then we had a strike here when I came back, I had been living in Ketchikan learning to be a fisherman's wife, but they had a strike here and they says "Well we had a strike and I don't think that we can build a library right now." Boy the thing you need most in a strike is to get your mind off the subject so I ran for council. I never told anybody that's what I had in mind, but the next thing I did is I went to Elmer Rasmussen and I said, "They tell me that you said you would help them build a library." or something about building a library. Then he says, "Well I'll help you, but the initiative has to come from within." Of course it was kind of neat the Elmer knew my family real well because he had been raised here, so when I asked to see him I walked into

his office in Anchorage without an appointment or anything else. He said, "The initiative has to come from within." So I went back and I figured out what he meant and the library board, through money that the city had given them to operate and cake bakes and everything else were trying to make a library and they had $5000. Well forget that $5000, but it actually was the amount that they needed to write up a proposal for what they wanted. They needed, so they said what they needed. Well they needed land. The city had given them land where the fire hall is right now, but then they decided to build a fire hall there and they had no land, so that was a big issue of trying to find land. It was a big issue, but where it is right now, it belonged to Mary Kapaski, who is Mrs. Pullen's granddaughter and Maxine Selmer's mother. She really didn't want to sell that piece of land, but she sold it to the city for $20,000 because it was going to be a library. She believed in libraries and so she sold it to the city. That was $25,000 so that was 10% and so when the library was half finished, Elmer Rasmussen sent me a check for $10,000 – made out to the City of Skagway, but he sent it to me personally. Somehow I knew when I left there we were going to get that $25,000. By gosh, in the end, he ended up giving another $15,000, and I found out later that actually, this was from him personally. It wasn't part of the Rasmussen Foundation. He sent the city the other $15,000 but the thing is, and then he gave the money, and then the city had already spent the money on the land so they just gave the library the money which they spent all on books. I mean over a period of ten years or so. So then the next thing, my sister was on the library board and she was putting cans around town to raise money so, you see the city wasn't buying books. They ended up taking over the library when it got built with, you know, the new library. The Women's Club gave their building to the city so they got their money, $25,000 in two different places. Anyway, they ran out of that money and she had these cans around town and I says, "You're not going to raise money that way. It makes people aware but you doesn't raise enough money." I says, so I went to the library board and I suggested that they get a plaque and write to people and set up a fund to buy books, and you weren't supposed to spend the fund, you only spent the money from the fund.

Karen Brewster: Like an endowment. Is that what you're saying?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah, and they, Mrs. McMillan, a wonderful teacher here that knew how to raise money, they took my suggestion and she wrote and within a few months, three or four months, she raised $50,000. They still have that endowment. On two different, and of

course Rasmussen put $25,000 into that endowment and the Kirmses put in quite a bit. They did raise the $50,000. I mean two different times I've come up with getting them the money, but the library, we have a library we can be proud of.

Karen Brewster: That's good.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: You know it means a lot to the kids that come here and spend the summers. They go over there and they have to sign up for a time on the internet, but I don't think they get charged for it. That was my main mission, but then also, City Hall, all I could think past was water and sewer and streets and sidewalks and being short of money, that's the next thing after running a school. I said well you know recreation is really important and I tried to push other things than libraries but, and then it ended up it was the last time this town has been bonded, the water system that was put in while I was on city council. All the wood stave pipes gave up and we weren't sure where the water and sewer system were different. It got really bad and so…

Karen Brewster: So that got fixed.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah, that got fixed.

Karen Brewster: What years were you on the city council?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: The late 1970's.

Karen Brewster: When was your library completed?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: That was in the late 1970's too.

Karen Brewster: During that same time then.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Yeah, during that same period. The library was my mission when I ran for council because they weren't going to get past that city council, past the fire department and the street department, unless they got somebody on the council. It's no different now. They've got to get somebody that backs an idea and they get their way.

Karen Brewster: Did you like being on the city council?

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Oh yeah, but I guess the rest don't like me that well. I still do come with major ideas to this day, and Stan Selmer, when he was mayor and the centennial was coming up, appointed me to the Centennial Committee and I was the only one with time to be chair.

Karen Brewster: Tell us a little bit about the centennial and what that was all about.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: It was the 100th celebration of the community. I barely made it to the 100th celebration, being on the Centennial Committee, but they had themes each year and one of the most productive years was when the theme was the schools. That was about '93, which is about five years short of the centennial, but we had finally a school reunion. The school doesn't seem to have reunions, but we invited anybody that had been in either the mission school or the public school that we knew that was alive anywhere. It was very successful. It was healing because the mission school, when the kids were here, they were always the mission kids and there was a separation and this ended up being a joint celebration. It was, I think, a healing experience also and I really, that was part of it that I liked the best. The 100th anniversary, I mean the 50th anniversary of the Alaska Highway was celebrated. I learned a lot of history about the Alaska Highway, the building of not so much the Alaska Highway but the airports that preceded the Alaska Highway that was the Lend-Lease program to Russia. The airport in Watson Lake, it was built by taking the equipment up the Stikine River half way and then trucking it up to Dease Lake and that, even today, I have never been on that road but they say it's still hardly a road. They trucked it to Dease Lake, put it on barges and barged it to Watson Lake and I still haven't totally figured out the barge system. It was interesting and so everybody told their story of the Alaska Highway. The original Alaska Highway went from Carcross to Teslin and then to Whitehorse and then later on they built the section that connected Teslin and Whitehorse and went by Carcross. It's a shorter way. In all the different stories that got told about the building of the Alaska Highway, Skagway was so important in the building of it because it cut the time in half over its access to the middle. They were building it in four different directions.

Karen Brewster: Well it sounds like that 100th anniversary commission was pretty fun.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: It was. It was fun but it was real active and a lot of, with the Canadians and Dawson City and that relationship, it was a lot of fun. I worked hard on it and I just, I quit right at the centennial, before the centennial of the White Pass and the city, because the city's 100th anniversary was in the year 2000 I guess. I mean, I believe we became a city, we were the first city in Alaska and I quit just before that because I got mad at the city council over economic development. I was the head of the Economic Development Committee too and I just said, "I'm done." It was a real active time and a real fun time.

Karen Brewster: This has been great. You've told us a lot. I feel that it's getting late and I think maybe we ...

Mavis Irene Henricksen: OK, well I can't think of anything more off hand unless I tell you everybody that's related to everybody in this town.

Karen Brewster: That's a whole other story.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: I mean, it actually is an interesting thing but…

Stacey Baldridge: You should write it all down.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: Well Bea Lingle does pretty good at writing them down too. She made a chart and they says, "She made the whole town related." and I says, "Well, you know." My kids said "Well I'm supposed to be related to them." and I says, "No you're not related. You've got relatives in common, but you aren't related to them and there is a difference."

Karen Brewster: Well this has been great. Thank you so much for your time. I don't want to tire you out by keeping you up.

Mavis Irene Henricksen: No I need to go. I like to talk.