

Summary for H87-82-12

Ingeborg Wilson is interviewed by Gayle Maloy in Fairbanks, Alaska on 1/18/85

SIDE 1

Gayle Maloy interviews Ingeborg Wilson in Fairbanks, AK on 1/18/85. She's best known as an original member of the Board of Trustees for Mt. McKinley Mutual Savings Bank. She became a member of the Pioneers of AK in 1983 (she was qualified as a 30-year resident).

Wilson was born January 19, 19--, in Berlin, Germany. Her father worked for the railroad. She had one brother, who was MIA in Russia during WWII. He was not in the "Nazi" army, but the German army. The Nazis were a political party that took power. Wilson was a teenager during the war. Berlin was bombed heavily. Hitler took power on January 30, 1933. Wilson is in her 50s now.

She met her husband in 1945, after the war. Berlin was divided into 4 zones; the Americans occupied her sector of the city. English and French had been mandatory languages for her. She became an interpreter. She knew Ed Wilson while he was in the army, for 1 year. Then he went back to the States. There was a ban on Americans marrying German girls. It was lifted on January 1st, 1947, right after Ed left Germany (he did come back though, and they were married for 33 years). They promised to wait for each other when he left. They wrote for 2 years, but when he didn't write for over a year, she started dating again. Then he wrote and said he was coming back to marry her, and she said she wasn't sure she wanted to marry him anymore since it had been so long (3 years). But they did get married, and she came to Carolina, and moved to Ohio, and then in 1953 to AK.

Berlin in size is larger than New York City. It was a very green city, and wasn't divided when she lived there. She said to the U.S. by herself. She would've liked to fly, but she didn't want to make her transition from Germany to the U.S. in 1 day, so she took a freighter. It took 13 days—she says this was her "vacation." It was in May of 1950. Ed was from North Carolina. They moved to his parents first, who had an apple orchard, in a small town in the mountains. It was beautiful, but for her, coming from the big city, it was not a place to stay too long. She'd promised herself when she left Germany she wouldn't let things make her say, "Oh, Ed, I want to go home!"

They moved to Dayton, OH, where Ed worked for a bus company. He had a cousin in AK who kept telling him how beautiful it was, and they decided to visit. Ed came up in the summer of 1952 by himself (by that time they had a baby) and the next summer he wanted to go again. She wasn't that keen on it; Ed said, "just for 6 months." So she came and the 6 months stretched into 32 years (in May).

Wilson's first impressions of Fairbanks were awful, coming from a city of 4 million to this town of 9,000 with very few paved streets and a very small airport. There was a big housing shortage at that time, and they were lucky to get a trailer and park it on Ed's cousin's ground. For the first time, she had to use an outhouse and a pump in the yard to get her water. Ed was working construction that summer, and his job extended through the winter. They moved into an apartment, and then they rented a house, and the next year they bought a house. The day their daughter was born they moved into the house, at 1003 9th Ave. It was built in 1905, with later additions.

Her son kept saying he wanted a baby sister. So she gave him a doll for Christmas. When he picked it up, and discovered it was not a baby, he threw it across the room saying, "This is not a baby; this is just a dolly; I want a baby sister." Every night he prayed for a baby sister. His wish came true 9 months later.

Wilson's mother had gallbladder surgery and Ed said, "Why don't you try to see your mother?" but she waited for the next year to go, with her children a bit more grown. One of her sons, Brian, was 6 and he said, "Why are there so many people on these streets?" when they finally went.

The first friends the Wilsons made were people Ed knew from his home state. She worked in the U.S. Attorney's Office, then at Alaska Insurance Agency. She had a friend who dates back to those days.

Wilson is proud to be a German and an American. When you come to a new country, she says, it's what you make of it. You can adapt to the new culture, and have the advantage of knowing 2 cultures, or you can put the new culture down and say the one you come from is better. She became a U.S. Citizen in 1954, 2 weeks after her second child was born in Fairbanks. Judge Forbes, who was the first president of the Mt. McKinley Mutual Savings Bank, was the one who swore she and others in. Wilson took a little course in U.S. History, and went to the swearing-in ceremony.

Wilson started writing in Germany. She was working for a Swiss newspaperman who needed someone who spoke good English and could write. He took her articles, edited them a little, and sent them to Switzerland where they were published under his name. She was just happy to apprentice. She then worked for the U.S. State Dept. as an interpreter and administrative assistant. Then she started writing articles under her own name: Ingeborg Beify. She's had hundred of articles published in the U.S., Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. Most of her U.S. articles are profile stories of people. For Germany, it's things about AK and Alaskans. She published a book called ALASKANS I HAVE MET. She's also had nine fiction novels published, in German, mostly published in Nebraska. She had a bush nurse friend name Margaret Grey who she based a story on bush nursing on.

SIDE 2

Ken Thompson is the chairman of Mt. McKinley Bank's board, which Inge Wilson is on. The bank was an idea of Julian C. Rice, a well-known Fairbanks attorney. In 1963, Rice started going on this project. In 1964, people were able to buy "debenchers." Wilson's husband was working at Clear, so she went to the meeting and was elected to the board. She was made secretary by Rice, because she said she could take shorthand. Don Remmers was the treasurer for the board.

Of the original board, besides her only two others are still on it: Remmers, the owner of Tesco Lighting Center, and Leslie Rogers, an architect with Ellerbee. Ted Lowell died last year. He came to AK in 1926 and lived in McGrath, trapped, hauled freight, and he and his wife were both U. S. Marshals at one time.

The bank had a very old safe in the beginning, from around 1904. On opening day, it was -20. They opened 237 accounts, totaling \$130,190, and they used that old safe to store the money in. One time they couldn't get it open, and they had to call Larson's, who finally got it opened. Now, of course, there's a modern vault.

The bank is on 3rd Ave. Sourdough Fuel used to have their office there. They remodeled it for the bank. The bank was later extended, near Evelyn's Dress Shop. They also put a second story on, which is rented out to John B. Hall Company, an insurance office.

The bank opened in 1965 and in August of 1967 was the flood. The water came over the desks, files, and paperwork. The papers were flown to Anchorage to dry out. The bank was one of the first businesses to reopen.

Wilson was at Hamilton Acres during the flood. They were evacuated to the UAF campus. Friends of the Wilsons, Marion and George Simpeden picked them up and let them stay at their house in the country. Wilson's husband and son cleaned up their waterlogged house.

Going back to when she was a teenager in Berlin: Hitler's party came to power in 1933. Children changed to high school at the age of 10. On Saturdays during National Politics class the talk was all about the good the party would do. There was a movement called Hitler Youth, divided into four groups: young girls, young boys, older girls, and older boys. Every Saturday, the teacher would ask those who had not yet joined the Hitler Youth to stand up. Wilson was one of four who wouldn't stand. Two were Jewish girls who the teacher would look at and say, "Well, they don't want you in there anyway." Another was Mariana, who the teacher asked why she hadn't joined and she said, "Why don't you ask my mother?" Then he'd ask Wilson and she'd say, "I don't know." And she'd go home and cry a little because she wasn't in the group. Finally her aunt convinced her father to let her join. Basically, Hitler Youth wasn't that different from Girl Scouts/Boy Scouts. It was very patriotic, stressed a healthy mind and a healthy body. They learned songs, marched, and did calisthenics.

When the war started, of course she wanted her country to win. Then she lost her brother and two cousins, and she realized Germany wasn't going to win. Her father never liked Hitler and criticized him. Once, two Nazis came to express condolences about Wilson's brother. Her father threw one of them down the stairs. Everyone in the neighborhood said, "Beify's going to get picked up tonight." He was lucky, however, and didn't get picked up.

Most everyone raised their arms and said, "Heil Hitler," but Wilson's father never did. He just said, "Guten tag." Her mother said Heil Hitler, but took solace in the fact that she could still think what she wanted, and just raised her arm to not be bothered by people.

In the beginning, Jews had to wear a big yellow Star of David that said JUDE (Jew) inside, on their clothing. Wilson felt awful inside seeing this; she felt bad for these people. Food was rationed, and Jews got a lower ration than the rest of the population. Wilson didn't really know what was happening (about concentration camps) when she was a child. If anyone did talk about them, it was in whispers, because they were afraid they'd be sent away, too. It was not only Jews that went to the concentration camps.

Toward the end of the war, in 1944, German general tried to assassinate Hitler; these were not "Nazi generals," just plain German army generals, says Wilson. The attempt failed. A man she knew who was against Hitler was asked how he felt about the attempt on Hitler's life, and he said he wished it had worked, since then the war would be over. He was sent to a concentration camp (and was not a Jew).

Wilson recalls the Crystal Night in 1938, when Hitler's storm troopers came through and broke all the windows of all the Jewish shops. Wilson's mother used to shop in these places. She also had a Jewish doctor, and seamstress. She couldn't go to them anymore.

Newer buildings in Berlin had air-raid shelters. Wilson's family's apartment was bombed once, and she was down in the shelter with her mother. While the bombing was still going on, though, she went upstairs with an ax and buckets of water, trying to extinguish the smoldering of the bomb under the wooden floor. A couple men soon came and helped her. They dug out the bomb and threw it out the window. The war ended in 1945.

When Wilson came to the U.S., she had dreams about the war. In her dreams, bombs and planes came down from the sky. Russians occupied Berlin first when the war ended. She dreamt for long time that a Russian was chasing her. Once she had almost been shot by a Russian who wanted her to move off the sidewalk for him. She wouldn't move and he pulled out his revolver. The other Russian with him quickly talked to him and thanks to that man, she's still here today.

Wilson says AK has grown on her, though sometimes she thinks the winters are too harsh.