

## Summary for H87-82-19

### Doris Southall is interviewed by Gayle Maloy in Fairbanks, Alaska on 4/5/85

#### SIDE 1

Gayle Maloy interviews Doris Southall in Fairbanks, AK on 4/5/85. She's best known for her nursing career and civic contributions to the community. Southall was born July 24, 1904 in Liberty, PA. Her family goes back to the 1700s in the U. S., to revolutionary war times, she thinks. She's trying to trace her ancestry back to see who was involved in the war, but she needs some more information first.

During the Civil War, her great grandfather was paid by someone else (who didn't want to fight in the war) to fight in it. During that time, his wife and he wrote back and forth to each other. Southall and her brother have those letters now. For the little education he had, he wrote beautiful letters. His wife was a teacher. Southall hopes to have the letter compiled into a booklet.

Her great grandfather had a farm with a small cabin on it before the war. When he came back, he put part of his money into building a large home on the land, and his wife ordered a tea set from England with the rest of the money. Southall still has a few of the pieces today. She and her mother were both born in that house.

When Southall was supposed to have her tonsils out, in Owego, NY, there was no hospital in town at that time, and the doctor would come to the house and take out the tonsils. Preparations were made beforehand. She recalls seeing the doctor and nurse coming up the street, and she hid. She was 5 years old and didn't want to get her tonsils taken out. She was found under the dining room table and carried upstairs, to the "operating table," a small kitchen table set up in the bedroom. She thinks the sedative was probably ether. Her grandmother had surgery back in the family's farmhouse, on a table, too. A doctor from New York City performed that surgery, and was assisted by the county physician.

The first thing Southall remembers when she woke up from the surgery was her father showing her something on her arm. It was a bracelet that he'd gotten for her. She still has it, though it's in two pieces, since she wore it thin.

Seeing the kind nurse in the uniform inspired her to become a nurse at that early age. She played nurse to her dolls. When she was in high school, she became even more determined to become a nurse. The way she got to high school, which was 4 miles away: there were no buses, so you had to walk, ride a bike or a horse, or drive a horse and buggy/horse and sleigh. She first rode a bike, then she and her brother drove. One morning she was driving, and the horse shied and jumped. Her younger brother said he didn't care about her, just worried, "Where's my violin?"

While in high school, she was accepted to Philadelphia General, but her mother thought that was too far, 150 miles away, so she applied to the local school of nursing, 10 miles away. They'd accept students with only 1 year of high school; she had 2. Because of WWI, there was a shortage of nurses, because many of them were nursing veterans. That's why they were letting in students with only 1 year of high school.

She was working in a restaurant and her mother didn't know she was ready to go into training. Her mother tried to persuade her to become a teacher, like her. But Southall went into nursing and neither ever regretted it. Besides, Southall's younger

brother became a teacher, and went through the same college as her mother, in Mansfield, PA. It was called the Training School when their mother graduated, but when the brother graduated it was Mansfield State College. Now, it's a university. Southall's mother was cited in 1969; she was the first woman to receive such from the university. Southall's father was a soft coal miner in PA, and when they moved to Owego, NY, he worked for the D, L & W Railroad, supervising the painting of railroad stations and bridges.

Southall graduated from the School of Nursing at Blossburg State Hospital in 1927, at about age 23. After that she worked at the school, working both private and general duty. Then she went to Shenandoah, PA, to a new hospital, which had asked for 14 nurses to come and help open it. Both these hospitals are closed now.

Her nursing years have been some of her happiest years, because she really felt like she was helping someone else. When she had a critical patient, she was thrilled to see them recover.

In 1929 she went to work for the Locust Mountain Coal Co. as an industrial nurse in Shenandoah, PA. It was very interesting. There were many accidents in the mines. The inside foreman would call the switchboard, and the switchboard would tell Southall how many were injured. Usually the injuries resulted from an explosion or a fall of one of the supports. So they got all the ambulances and supplies ready by the time the men got out of the mine.

The nurses had to scrub the injured area to get the coal out of the men's skin to prepare them for the doctors. If they didn't get it out, there would be blue spots in the skin for the remainder of their lives. Burn treatments back then were done with plain white material, boric acid, and sterile Vaseline. They very rarely had ill effects using this treatment.

Southall married John Thomas Southall in 1929. He was an inside engineer for a coal company. She became a housewife, and a year later a mother. She continued nursing in just a neighborly capacity. These were the Depression years.

Some doctors came to her to ask if she'd do treatments at her own place, and go to people's homes when necessary. Doctors would bring the supplies to her house/patient's house. Penicillin had just been introduced, and she'd have to administer it every 2 or 3 hours. She charged \$1/hr., but all the patients were friends, some of whom she knew didn't have much money, so she was happy to get even a dollar an hour.

Southall has one son, John Thomas Southall, Jr. He and his wife live in PA. Southall visited them last fall.

Nineteen forty-nine was a turning point in her life. Her husband was killed on the highway. She decided to go into nursing again, and worked at the Coaldale, PA-hospital until 1953, when she came to Fairbanks, AK.

She came to visit her eldest brother and his wife, James and Beth McCarthy who lived in Fairbanks (before that they'd lived in Whitehorse and Skagway). On August 22, 1953 Southall arrived, with her mother and brother, J. Ellsworth McCarthy. "Mac" was the principal at the Main Junior High School. Southall's mother substitute taught while visiting, and Southall was asked to help out with private duty nursing at St. Joseph's Hospital. She decided to stay on there and resigned from her position in PA.

Southall had the pleasure of opening the first cafeteria in Lathrop High School. Her brother was the principal at that time. At the last minute, the cook who he'd hired

cancelled, and he asked Southall to take over, and said they'd help her the best they could. This was in 1955.

## SIDE 2

Southall was working at St. Joseph's on and off throughout 1953 and 1955. The doctors, Drs. Schaible, Hagglund, Rebar, Dunlap, Lundquist, and Weston, were all very nice to work with. She later went back and closed the cafeteria she'd opened. She worked there 6-8 weeks in total. She wasn't really interested in being a cook.

In 1956 she went into the school district as a school nurse, she had Main School (K-8) and Denali (also K-8) both. She was school nurse for 14 years. She doesn't recognize a lot of the children now, as grownups.

She was living in the Northward Building in 1956. One day, the basement caught fire; she was on her way home from church and Ralph Bailey said there was a fire and he'd been called over because of the bank. She went up to her own apartment; smoke was coming through the vents. She went down and asked Dan Davis if she should set up an emergency station. At first he said no, and then he decided yes.

Jack Gorley was there, and he contacted Dr. Ryan to see if they could use Main Junior High as an emergency center. Ryan said, "What can I do?" Southall told him to call the Red Cross and Salvation Army, so they could at least set up quarters for the night. The Salvation Army showed up with lots of food. People called in and offered their homes to those that needed such. Some took advantage of this, while others, like Southall, went back into the Northward that night, as the smoke had been cleared out. Southall had always like emergency nursing, as well as operating room nursing.

Southall recounts the Fairbanks flood of 1967: She was wakened after 7 am by the assistant superintendent, Mr. Pressure, who said he'd like her to go set up an emergency center at Barnett School, and call Dolores Schultheis to Denali and Kay Ferguson to Hunter to do the same. At that point there was just a flood in Nenana, and the residents were being brought to Fairbanks.

Southall saw that underwear and diapers would be needed. She got the OK to buy what she needed from the N.C. Co. When she got back, water was coming up through the drains at Barnett. Later that day, she was to go stay at her brother's home on 14<sup>th</sup>. When she and Schultheis arrived, the landlady said, "I need a flashlight battery." So the women went over to Foodland to get one—as they got there, all the lights went out in that part of town. She saw the water coming up Cushman St.

They went back to the house and went to bed, because they were exhausted. A few hours later someone came and said, "Get out; get out quickly." So Southall and Schultheis went to the latter's car, and Mrs. Bailey got in hers. They started for Lathrop High School, and the water was getting deeper and deeper. Big Army trucks were coming through and they were causing waves, and Southall thought they'd better turn around. She said, "I can't swim," and Schultheis said, "Well, I can." It's been a joke between them.

They went back to Gaffney and Cushman, where they got on the radio, saying they were willing to help out at Lathrop High School. Jack Murphy said he couldn't pick them up for at least 1 hour, because they were trying to get people out of the Island Homes. In the meantime, they tried to locate Mrs. Bailey, but did not. A jeep came from

the base, and dropped someone off. They asked to be taken to the base, to help out. All St. Joseph's patients had been taken to the base. It was a wild ride, with debris coming down the road. They were zigzagging across the road, dodging trees and branches, etc.

They finally arrived and went in the nurses' home listening to the radio. Then Schultheis said she thought she heard water running in the basement. Southall was wearing a brace from having a broken leg. They told the men at the hospital, who said to wake up the nurses, who had supplies and things stored in the basement. They woke them and Col. Clark or Col. Smith said, "Doris Southall, what are you doing here?" She later suggested that the two women go to bed. They both woke around 7 am, and decided to try to get back to Lathrop. They hitchhiked a ride to Lathrop in a helicopter, a first for Southall.

There were 1,000 people at Lathrop in the first day or 2. Schultheis went over to Denali. Southall was at Lathrop for 10 days and nights. She used a little room connected to the Home Ec. room to wash some of her clothes.

Southall was 1968 Woman of the Year, acknowledged by the Fairbanks Optimists(?) Club; received in 1973 honorary recognition of life membership in the Alaska Nurses Association; was 1976 Distinguished Citizen from the Fairbanks J.C.s; received the 1977 Senior Careerist Award presented by the Golden Heart Business and Professional Women's Club; in 1981 was Senator Stevens's Senior Citizen Intern; got the 1982 First Lady Volunteer Award from Bella Hammond; received Life Membership in the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce; was 1983 Fairbanks Senior Citizen of the Year; and broke ground with Governor Bill Sheffield for the Senior Housing Project. Golden Towers was also one of her projects (she was chairperson). She says she's only one of many though, that participated. The committees are very dedicated; no one gets paid, all services are volunteered.

Southall's also been working for 9 years on the Alaska Nurses Project. She became involved when Dr. Beisline came by her desk at the Rasmuson Library at UAF, where she was working, and asked whether there was any material on nursing—Mrs. Leach (a nurse) at Circle Hot Springs had just died—and there was only one little booklet: *Nursing in the North*.

Southall got a \$500 grant through the Bicentennial and subsequently archived over 3 cubic feet of nursing material. The next grant she got was from the State Historical Society, a \$2,000 and \$3,000 grant. Now they've got a tremendous collection in the archives. The last two grants will be catalogued this summer. She's happy that student nurses are able to use this material, which covers early day nursing out in isolated areas, diseases, and living conditions.

Southall also contributed 11 years of free nurse escort service for native patients to and from villages. She says she enjoyed it and there was only one time she was afraid: It was right after the plane had got up in the air; the patients had shot part of his face off, and had to be aspirated for the whole trip. A terrific electric storm came and the pilot (Mark Thulla?) said, "Doris, I can't help you now no matter what happens." They arrived safely. On the way back, Mark showed her where he couldn't help, which was going through the mountainous Twin Pass.

Southall also worked at the Rasmuson Library checkout desk for 8 years. She's now 80 years old. She likes to do for others. She'd had so many nice things done for

her. It's her way to work with the public. She hopes nurses continue to contribute their material to the archives here on campus.