

Summary for H87-82-23

Bernie Rinear is interviewed by Gayle Maloy in Fairbanks, Alaska on 5/17/85

SIDE 1

Gayle Maloy interviews Bernie Rinear in Fairbanks, AK on 5/17/85. Rinear is best known for his photos of Fairbanks, and is the "biggest liar" in AK, for his story, Moose Creek Charlie and the Quick Freeze.

One of his daughters brought him in this morning. He's back visiting Fairbanks. He has three daughters and a son that live here. He's living in Springville, CA. He came to AK in April of 1942, and to Fairbanks in January of 1943.

Rinear came to Sitka with Everett Hepp. They hitchhiked to AK in 1942. Rinear worked in Sitka and Hepp went to Fairbanks and became head of the office of price administration. Hepp said, "Why don't you come up here and get out of the rain?" So Rinear says he left the rain, for -35.

He was born January 1, 1914 in Chandler, AZ. He can't remember what his parents were doing in AZ. He remembers starting the 1st grade in Porterville, CA in 1920. He went to school there through 1932. He has four brothers and one sister.

Three of his brothers were up in AK in 1955, as the western band The Rinear Trio. They sounded just like the Sons of the Pioneers. Unfortunately, Raymond Lakso, who hired the band, has just passed away. They were crowd-pleasers, and were very good on the violin, bass fiddle, and guitar. They played at the Town Club in Fairbanks and the Chena Bar, and the fiddling brother, Glen, played at KFRB-TV with Dub Haynes, Johnny Cox, and Mike Young on steel guitar.

Rinear has many photos, and the News-Miner is publishing more of them now. He's never made his living as a photographer, though he's worked in camera shops.

When he started roaming the Sierra Nevadas, he became interested in photography. He'd go out for 2 weeks at a time with a burro, his camera, and a fishing rod. He went to the top of Mt. Whitney with a box camera.

He married in 1932, to Helen, and had three children, Sharon Rollins of Manteca, Edward Rinear of Orangevale, CA, and Rick Rinear at 22-mile Chena Hot Springs Road, where they held the solstice for the last two summers. Rinear made Ripley's Believe-It-Or-Not. He married his stepsister, because his father and he married mother and daughter on Thanksgiving Day in 1932.

When Rinear went to the top of Mt. Whitney, he was going for an endurance record, walking 144 miles from the west side of the Sierras, spending the night atop Mt. Whitney, and walking all the way back. Frank Adams and he did it in 1933 in 4 days and 2 ½ hours, and Freeman Douglas and he did it in 1936 in 3 days and 9 ¾ hours. He was 18 years old and only weighed 112 lbs. the first time. His pack weighed about a quarter of his weight—he got rid of part of the pack in a hurry.

In the 1930s, he was with the Civilian Conservation Corps, which is not like the modern CCC. This was FDR's project for boys (who wanted to participate) to get them off the streets and out of pool halls. They were taken out to the woods to build trails and fences, etc. He says it was one of the most pleasant experiences of his life. That's where he had a little darkroom, at the camp, and continued his photography learning. He

basically taught himself. He also worked in nice darkrooms in the army. He had no instruction for a teacher or book. All his work has been in black and white.

Everett Hepp, who is retired now from being a superior court judge, was Rinear's friend. They tried to come to Seattle on fishing boats numerous times, but Rinear was always rejected because he was a 112-pound weakling. Hepp would always go back to Porterville with him. On April 12, 1942, Rinear called him at Metropolitan Life Insurance and said, "If you want to go to AK, have your pack ready, because I'm going if I have to walk there." Hepp was reading the next day. They hopped a freight train and arrived in Juneau May 9th. In those days, they wanted to make an adventure of it. When they got to Prince Rupert, they bought tickets on the Northland or Northsea. They were in their 20s. Rinear was no longer married at this time. Hepp was married, and would send for his wife later.

They thought Seamus Drake, a Puget Sound construction company, was going to hire them, but as it turned out they got in the wrong line and weren't hired. Al Sealegger, who used to be with the F.E. Co., hired them on the spot though, in Sitka.

In January, Rinear went up to Fairbanks, where Hepp was working for the Office of Price Administration. He came in on a Pan-American C-47, without heat in the cabin. He arrived in just a suit of clothes at 35 below. He had no heavy coat, just a metal tripod and his camera on his shoulder. He went to live with the Hepps until he could get a job. Hepp got him a job with Herb Pickering at Consumer's Co-op. He worked there until the government found out he was no longer employed on a national defense project, so he went to Ladd Field on July 2, and became part of the Air Force, in the photographic department.

Rinear started taking so many pictures of Fairbanks, he couldn't figure what the first was. But he supposes the last one shown in the News-Miner in the Interior Scrapbook, with the flooded intersection, was one of them. He had definitely started before that, however, in the winter.

He was sent to Nashville in the Air Force, but not overseas. They made light of the fact in Fairbanks that they weren't overseas fighting a battle by saying they fought the Battle of the Chena.

Rinear photographed people of importance that came north, accidents, and technical work. Many others shared the work he did. He was in Nashville when the war ended. He went to McClellan Field, Sacramento, and was released on October 18, 1945 (Alaska Day). He wasn't intending to come right back, but he heard on the radio that Fairbanks had had a big fire, and he felt homesick and came right up. Howard Mackey put him to work salvaging the stuff in the old Smith Gun and Hardware Store.

Then he went to work for Herb Pickering at Consumer's Co-op again. He worked in the Rose Apts. taking care of the building, and working in the grocery store.

Rinear married Dorothy Babe Kettendorf on January 7, 1947. He'd met her Outside. She was 10 years his junior. She came up to AK with her mother to start a new life. In 1948, they had Robin Rachele, who died in March of 1949, and is buried on Birch Hill. They also had Rebecca Rae, who works for the Literacy Council of AK and is married to Jim Owen, a mechanic at Ft. Wainwright. They have two children, Tina Owen, a freshman at Lathrop, and Keith Owen, an 8th grader. Born in 1954, Debra Lou is married to Gary Smith, an FAA electronic technician, with Laura Riannon, 2 ½ years

old. Cynthia Sue married Fred Bethune, a forester with the state Forestry Division. She's worked for the Pioneers' Home and for forestry also.

All three daughters now have properties on the Rinear Homestead, which used to be the Rainbow Valley Ranch, where everybody had such a great time picnicking in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It's at 1-mile Chena Hot Springs Road. They had an airplane ride there for kids. The N.C. Co. and the ARR wanted a place they could hold picnics and let their hair down. The railroad brought in tables and a fireplace. They built a dance floor, with a jukebox. Lots of organizations had picnics there. Rinear was working full time at N.C. Co. as well as overseeing Rainbow Valley Ranch. He took 1000s of pictures there over the years.

In the summer of 1947, he photographed every child under 6, 320 children. This was for a contest at Cooper's Hardware.

In April of 1948 he got a job with the AK Railroad, where he worked for 5 years. That winter he was the official photographer for the Winter Carnival. He got paid to do this. He's saved his negatives all these years, and now the pictures are being revived by the News-Miner. The collection of negatives is going to go into Rasmuson Library's collection.

He was first a trucker/checker for the railroad. On his own, he photographed construction of the new rail yards. When he got ready to leave AK on January 1, 1966, he asked the railroad if they'd give him \$75 for the negative collection. They gave him \$100.

Elaine Griffin, a cashier, his first day at the railroad, gave him the name Bernie. He said his name was Bunny Rinear, and she said, "Bunny? That won't work here." Bunny was what his mother had called him since childhood. He was Bernie from then on. Elaine and Al Griffin run the Desert Inn on Airport Way.

Bernie entered a contest for the Biggest Liar in AK. He wrote a story at his desk at the railroad--a several thousand-word story. He didn't think of it again until he was setting up his camera to shoot the winner at the Nevada Bar. He was sitting up in the rafters and they called him down. It was a frame-up actually; everyone knew he was the winner except him. Somebody else turned around and took his picture when it was announced. There were 3,276 entries.

Moose Creek Charlie and the Quick Freeze was the title of the story. Moose Creek Charlie told him the story and Rinear believed every word of it. They talk about some of the hyperboles in the story. Rinear was supposed to go on Don McNeil's show in CA, but he was too shy. He picked up his money at Hollywood Bank, and went up to the mountains of Sky Forest, and was caught in the heaviest snowfall, 8 ft. People had to tunnel into their businesses at Lake Arrowhead. He was glad to get up to Fairbanks, where there wasn't as much snow.

"Berman M. Rinear" told tall tales on his tour, too. It was a very snowy season in the lower 48, too. The Literacy Council of AK revived the story in 1982, by putting out a little booklet. It was also published in AK Magazine in May 1985.

Rinear has been reliving all his pictures as they're being published in the Heartland Magazine. One of his favorites is Tess Schneider dancing with Governor Gruening, way back in 1948 at the Golf and Country Club, because he was a celebrity and she was so pretty, and it made a great shot. There is also a picture of Vera Siders and

Dan Bodie, who was lost in Valdez in the earthquake and tidal wave. It's a great candid shot.

Other images include Herb Hillshire; Gareth Wright's team in 1948; Eva McGown; GI Jill; a flood; Mike Agbaba; a native family; Bernie, Babe and Alabam; Kitty Kittendorf (a kitten). Dermot Cole used Rinear's pictures to do an article on old Alabam in Livengood. Jim Cassidy, Al Bramstedt, Rinear's family, lots of kids, and Queen Kathleen Crosson (Hutchison) and her royal court of 18-year-old girls, are other photos.

Rinear left AK in the winter of 1966; he couldn't take another winter, after 24 of them. It was -55 when he left Fairbanks, in a 1961 VW, with little cold weather gear. He reached Tok, and it was -64 there the next morning. He got down to Destruction Bay and his car system froze up. He got it fixed and at -60 he started again. He went 2,500 miles, and it never got warmer than -25. The mechanic at Destruction Bay had taken his hat and flashlight, too. So he really did want to get out of the North.

Rinear wants to say thanks to editor Tom Gresham of AK Magazine, and thanks to Terrence Cole, editor of AK Journal. They've been using his pictures, as well as Tricia Olson of Heartland Magazine, who has brought his pictures to the forefront. Rinear wrote down names of people and dates of the photos.

In 1947, four men with cameras hitchhiked down the railroad on the train, and walked the Glennallen and Tok Cutoff, back to the Richardson, up to Fairbanks. They had to kill a bear for food when they ran out. They took lots of pictures. Red Riddick went on the trip. Alan Brown was another. He and his girlfriend from Ft. Wainwright were killed in a plane crash at Phillips Field. Jerry Kettendorf was also along (Babe's brother). He died recently.

Rinear lives in CA now, and comes up to visit his family.

His parents divorced in 1929. They both took new spouses. After 43 years, they remarried, and lived together their last 9 years, probably happier than when they were first married. They died 9 days apart, in 1981.

Rinear has his cameras with him, but he's kind of turned off about taking pictures. Sometimes he wants to cry when he sees Fairbanks now, because so many of the things he used to love about Fairbanks are gone, the pioneering things. When he came here there were 4,000 people, and one school. It's amazing. If he'd been living here all along, with the changing town all these years, he might feel differently.