

## Summary for H87-82-28

### Tilly Link is interviewed by Gayle Maloy in Fairbanks, Alaska on 10/18/85

#### SIDE 1

Gayle Maloy interviews Tilly Link in Fairbanks, AK on 10/18/85. Link's oldest daughter has a birthday on October 13 and she says they always get the first snow. It's 22 degrees outside right now.

Tilly was born Matilda Urtel on November 11, 1907, in a little town in Germany. Ten years later they moved to a bigger town. Her father, Simon Urtel, had a winery. She was schooled in a Catholic girls school. After graduation she worked for the telephone company in Landau. She had many friends and they had a wonderful time.

One day her granduncle, who had immigrated to America in 1869, Nicolas Urtel, showed up. Her family had no idea they had relatives in America. He encouraged Tilly to go to America. Her mother would not hear of it. Tilly had an older brother and an older sister. Tilly begged her mother to let her go and said she'd only stay 2 years. Finally her mother said yes. In the summer of 198 she left for Baltimore. It was a sad departure.

There were lots of young people on the boat going to America, and after they got their sea legs, they had a good time. Tilly, though, didn't like the beds—she was used to feather beds. Rooms were cold in Germany; you always had a hot-water bottle and a feather bed and kept very warm.

Tilly met her uncle and her Aunt Margaret in Baltimore. In 2 weeks she started working as a nursemaid for the Rothschilds. Barbara and Arnold were the children, and Felix Arnold Rothschild was the father. Tilly got room and board and \$15/wk. She met other German girls on walks doing the same thing.

She went to night school, where she met her future husband, Frank Link. Her uncle made her save all her money. He put it in a building association with 6% interest. They were on the verge of going bankrupt when Tilly asked to get her money out. They wouldn't give it to her. She cried and said she was getting married, and they did give it to her. The Links bought some furniture for their brick house, which they rented for \$25/month.

Her aunt and uncle encouraged her to get married and stay in America. They told her a man doesn't need to have any money here, as long as he likes to work. They got married in 1930, and their first child was born in October 1931. Tilly's husband had learned the sheet metal and plumbing trade in Germany, and was working.

One day in 1931, Frank's brother Paul wrote them from Fairbanks and said the future was there. The new schoolhouse, post office, and courthouse had just been built. They said, why not, we're young. Tilly's sister said, "Before you go to the end of the world, go visit Mama." They had a hard time selling their furniture, as it was the Depression. The neighbors bought their player piano for \$15.

Frank left on the Greyhound bus in March 1933 for Seattle. Tilly went to Germany with her daughter, Marianne. Her mother was delighted to see her first granddaughter.

The Links thought if Frank didn't like AK, they could always move back to Baltimore. Of course, like all men, says Tilly, he liked it. Tilly's mother didn't know if she'd see her again. When they parted it was very sad for her.

Germany had changed when Tilly went back in 1933, politically. Her people didn't belong to "the party," so they were sort of blacklisted. Tilly wasn't that affected by the change, but her family and friends were somewhat depressed about it.

On the boat Marianne got sick. The doctor said she couldn't travel. So they stopped in Baltimore for 2 weeks. Tilly's aunt had some home made medicine. They took the Greyhound bus to Seattle when Marianne was better. Tilly met a woman on the bus who said her daughter would be on the bus in Seattle and she wanted them to meet. Her daughter was Mrs. Earling, whose husband was the superintendent for the F. E. Co. in Fairbanks.

When they got to Seattle, the boat had just left for Seward, so they had to wait a week. Mrs. Earling brought them to the Young Women's Christian Association. In the afternoons Tilly and Marianne went to the show, which was 10 cents. When Marianne started crying, they'd leave.

They took the boat to Seward, and the train to Fairbanks. The train stopped in Curry, actually, and everyone got off to stay at the hotel there, which later burned down. Tilly didn't want to spend the night there, since she'd been so long in coming. (It took her 7 weeks in total, from Germany.) She took the Brill Car, which brought mail once a week to Fairbanks. It was a chilly morning and the conductor offered her some coffee.

She arrived in Fairbanks on that sunny day in 1933. Frank was at the depot. They walked together to the Kitty Hensley house, their first house in Fairbanks.

Paul stayed with them that winter, and paid \$8/wk to them. It was a very cold winter, getting down to -66. The wood man wouldn't come around in the severe cold, so they had to borrow wood from the neighbor, and gave it back when they had extra.

The water was terribly rusty. Tilly's first washing of her German linens was a disaster. Then she discovered if you put lye in the water, it formed a scum on top, which you took off to reveal soft and clean water. In the summer, they'd put cheesecloth over rain barrels, and the water caught was clean and soft and nice to wash your hair.

That winter, George Bacchner and Ches Ross got her husband into the Eagles' Lodge. He was a member from 1933-1977, when he died. They played pinochle with another neighbor, Adolph Stock, on Saturday nights. Gus Conrad lived on the corner. Everyone was friendly and helpful.

There were about 2,000 people in Fairbanks, wooden sidewalks, and no paved streets, at that time. The Kitty Hensley house was on 8<sup>th</sup> Ave. Captain Smythe lived in the neighborhood too; he was Kitty Hensley's boyfriend.

Frank was very lucky and got work at the new post office. He made \$1/hr., which was quite good. You could buy a little housedress with this, says Tilly. The women didn't wear slacks back then. And you always dressed up to go to the Eagles' Lodge.

In the spring, Frank worked for the F. E. Co. In the fall, they bought a house on 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave., where the Doyon Building is now. It cost \$1,000. They paid \$25/month to the First National Bank, without interest.

It was a nice house, without running water. Frank drilled a well that winter. Mr. Gilshire, who owned the sheet metal shop, said Frank could build Yukon Stoves for him that winter, and he'd pay him \$40/wk. In the spring they built an addition, and had a

bathroom, and running water in the kitchen sink. Frank worked for the F. E. Co. again that summer, with Ches Ross. The N. C. Co. laid pipes along the street so people had water for their gardens. They took them away in the winter.

The next year Frank worked for the F. E. Co. again, in Ester. That winter Marianne got scarlet fever. In early January they were quarantined for 4 weeks. Dr. Sutherland came to the house three times a day, for free. A neighbor, Ontine Horlaus (?) came every evening and played pinochle with them.

Frank was getting restless, so he took a sled to the Independent Lumber Co. and got cement to build concrete blocks back at the house. The next year he built a chimney with those blocks. The chimney was still standing when Doyon bought the house and did a controlled burn. Tilly watched this; they always lived in the same neighborhood.

Mr. Scheffler worked for the News-Miner in the Lathrop Building. He had a bed of pansies out front. Tilly had a garden, too.

The Links built a bigger house on 3<sup>rd</sup> and Dunkle. George Bacchner was the contractor. They paid him \$1.50/hour, and the carpenters got \$1.25/hour. Bacchner got \$2/hour from Cremer's Dairy, but the Link's couldn't afford that much. Their credit was good and they got lumber from Dawson Cooper, who told them to pay what they could every month (without interest—those were the good old days).

Tilly's second daughter, Francine, was born at St. Joseph's Hospital, and brought back to the Dunkle St. house. They had nice neighbors, like George Black, who freighted on the river in the summer and had a wood saw in the winter. He lived with his wife and daughter, Adriana; his brother-in-law, Bud Lowmeister; and a horse, Nellie, which pulled his wood saw in the winter. He'd come around and cut people's wood to any size they wanted it.

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Sometimes in the winter, Frank flooded part of the garden and the kids could ice skate by the house. They also walked to the river and skated.

Francine liked to run off on Tilly. One day Jimmy and Mary Nordale and Marianne were playing hide and seek and were supposed to watch Francine. Francine disappeared though, and Tilly couldn't find her. She called the police, who found Francine in 5 minutes. She had walked up to Charlie Main's variety store, across from the Pioneer Hotel.

Bud Lowmeister would dress up as Santa Claus at Christmastime. They had a good time; there was a togetherness of friends and families. Houses were not as large as now.

A few years later, they heard Kathy (?) Nordale was selling her house, as she was moving to Juneau. They bought it, and lived there for 17 years. Frank put up his own sheet metal shop there, too.

The children belonged to 4-H and Girl Scouts, walked to the library, etc. There was an old-timer who lived next door, called Leavers (?). He was almost blind. Francine would walk him to the Nordale Hotel to get his hair cut; he'd give her 25 cents which she'd spend at the Co-op, and she'd walk him home again. She still has a teddy bear from him.

There was an open community pool where the Rose and Thistle is now. The summers seemed very hot then. There was a swinging bridge over in Graehl, where the girls used to walk or bike. The girls walked to school; there was no bus. The bedroom in the house was so cold, the kids had to use a hot water bottle. The kids listened to the Lone Ranger on KFAR on Fridays.

Francine went to the Catholic school at the Catholic church. On Sunday mornings they'd walk across the ice to church, and on the way back stop at the Model Café for goodies for breakfast. There were dog races in the winter too; everything was downtown.

When Frank opened his shop, they often had time to go fishing. Tilly loved the wide open country, too. When she went back to Germany, it seemed so small she hardly liked it anymore. They had a little place at Harding Lake. They fished at the Chatanika sometimes.

They insulated the shop's roof with sawdust. They worked very hard. Every fall they went out on Farmer's Loop and picked potatoes from Mr. Johnson.

They rented out the houses they moved out of. Tilly's father lost everything when inflation went up in Germany. He was not well. He sold their restaurant and land and a home. He died young, at 53.

Frank had a serious heart attack in 1960 and could not work anymore. He told Tilly later he felt so bad he wanted to die. She said, "We'll move back to Dunkle St. and rent out this house." Art Moore rented it, and later bought the property from them. Frank had his shop open for 10 years. Manny Barr was one who gave him work.

Tilly tells about the Yukon stoves Frank made when they first moved to Fairbanks. Miners bought a lot of the stoves, which were made out of a drum, with cast-iron tops and doors, and were used for both heating and cooking.

Frank also fixed pipes, etc., for women on the Line that winter. He came home one day and said, "Tilly, they all call me honey." Tilly didn't like that—she never called her husband or children honey; she called them dear.

In 1950 Tilly took her daughters to Germany. It had been 17 years since she'd seen her mother. During the war, there was no writing at all, though ordinarily they wrote quite a lot. After the war, Tilly sent them many packages. In Europe they visited castles, and went to Italy. They had a nice time, but it was a difficult departure, since Tilly's mother knew she'd never see them again. In 1954 she passed away. Three months earlier, she'd written in the will that the children love each other [unclear].

Marianne got married after business college, and had a baby. Francine was quite a few years younger, and still in school.

Tilly's brother died in 1965, her sister in 1966, Frank in 1977, and Frank's last brother John in 1978. Everyone was gone, and everyone in Germany, too. Tilly has her children and her grandchildren. She's so happy she is here.

She bought a condo after Frank died, so she wouldn't be so alone. She never knew she'd wind up in a condo after all the hard work of the early days, she says.

In 1978, Tilly was Queen Regent, and Mr. Marlon was King Regent. Mr. Marlon had been a neighbor. He and the Links went in on a lot in between their houses together, to expand each of their lots. Mr. Marlon was 92 years old in 1978, and very spry.

Tilly contributed a lot to a book that Claus Naske and another put together. Tilly's friend, Gladys Terry, wrote something to her, which shows how special she is. Tilly reads it on the air.

Octoberfest is going on tonight and tomorrow in Fairbanks. Tilly will be selling pretzels, as she doesn't dance anymore.