

NARRATOR: MICKEY ROSI

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INTERVIEWER: PAMELA REID

PLACE: MILLER'S LANDING, HOMER, ALASKA

(1)

P: When did you first come to homer?

M: I came to Homer in 1952.

P: Did you have a family at that time?

M: Yes, I had a son, Marshal. He is 32 now and--- he and I came---here.

P: You only have one son?

M: At that time, yes.

P: What made you want to come to Homer?

M: Well, I--- had been down here on two different trips and I thought that the place was beautiful. And I lived in Fairbanks and fairbanks winters were cold and I just thought that I would like to come here and make it my home.

P: What was it, what was it like when you first seen it? What was your impression?

M: Well, my impression of it the first time I saw it, was my impression of it--- that it is today. When I come over the hill and look at the town. It just always put my heart in my throat. I have the same felings about it today, as I did the very first time I saw it just---just it knocks you down. That's all. It is just beautiful.

First Impression

P: It is a really pretty place. This is your stare down here?

M: Yes.

P: When did you buy that?

M: Let's see---we bought, I think the first business license I have on the store is 1961. I think I that is the first business license that I have. And why did I buy it?----- We lived in the little house that is behind there and that belonged to my husand's mother, that acre of property to his mother. And we buy the peice of property with the outbuilding and the house. And that has alittle story to it, because of the bigger building that is over there was one of the first schoolhouses out here. And the little house out here that we lived was the schoolmar'm's quarters and the house had been added on to, you know, a bedroom and a closet and all. It had been much added on to, and it had no sewer and water or anything like that. It had a pump inside the house, when we bought it. And the building down below the store building had been the store.---His, my husband's people, mother and dad, had---stepdad had

it opened as a store and it have been closed for about four years. And the reason I started the store was that there just wasn't that much work to be had around. A job maybe and again at the cannery, but--- I had three children at that time, two small children. And it would have costed me as much to had my children taken care of as I would have made at the cannery, and I would not be home to take care of my kids. So--- we had just purchased that acre of land, and with the buildings on it. And we need more i come because my husband is a mechanic and has a shop in town. And---so we borrowed \$2000.00 from his life insurance. And since I didn't know you couldn't start a store with \$2000.00, I wasn't inhibited with the fact. I did it.

Back in them days, it was different than now, because the freight came on . . . out to the end of the spit. And everything came in cribs. And, of course, hadn't no credit with grocery companies. The store had been closed for quite a while, and they didn't know me from nothing. And. . . so - I would have to go by the book and just figure out right to the case how much my money would buy. And about six, as I remember, about six ships came in a year to the end of the spit. And everyone that came in - it was just like Christmas. It was just. . . a lot of fun to get those groceries in. And at first what I bought was just only what we liked. We didn't have no okra, hominy or anything like that in the store.

But later on, I had a full-grown, blown grocery store. And the reason I started it was for economics. We needed more income to... I guess the main reason anybody works is econmic. We - I had to.

P: Yes, You need more income. Who did you buy this store from?

M: Well, the store . . . like I say, we bought the peice of property from my husband's mother. And it had been open as a store. They built the building and. . .It is kind of a landmark out here. Miller's Landing is on the map. Because in the olden days or days done by, the boats from over across the bay. The fishermen would come and pick coal from up at the stone steps, and buy supplies over on this side of the bay, I'm told. And here at Miller's Landing, people park their boats right out here in the water and used a skiff to get back and forth because there was no boat harbor at that time. When I first came here anyway, there wasn't.

P: Did you, did most of the people that same to the store were like from East End Road or wasn't it from. . .?

M: From town, too. Because there wasn't the grocery stores in town. . . there's another reason I forgot to tell you that I started the store, was: the Inlet Trading Post belonged to George Bishop at that time. He went out of the grocery business, so there was another opportunity to pick up. A lot of people that lived out the East Road traded with George Bishop. I saw another opportunity to, you know, start a store and - so actually, all I had to do was restart a store that had been closed for four years.

P: What kind of customers did you have?

Mikki Rosi/ Pamela Reid (3)

M: Oh, a lot of the people are still here. People came from as far away as Happy Valley, right to the day I closed the store. I had a couple of customers that come every month from Happy Valley and shopped with me. And people from out at the end of the road, Stanley Jones and Rainwater and people, you know, that live that far away. People from all walks of life. Some of my favorite customers were fishermen. They came and got their fishing supplies in the spring of the year. In the fall of the year, I sold case lot orders to people, and they would leave their orders with me. Even people from Anchorage would shop with me.

P: Wow! that's a long ways away.

M: Yes. And... I stayed busy. And my kids, I had three children They worked in the store - sometimes grudgingly, but they did. And the first day I opened the store, we took pictures of that day. And I look at those pictures, I can remember it real well from having the picture to identify with. I hope that if I sold ten dollars a day - that the main reason for me doing it was to gee my groceries cheaper. And the first day I opened I took in \$99.22. It was more money than I thought God had made!

And it wasn't paved then. In fact, it wasn't much of a gravel road that went by here, just - you know - tire ruts practically that went by. And there weren't so many cars, and there weren't so many people. And you knew people's car by the sound they made. And as people would go by, I would run down to the road to tell them I had taken in \$37.47 by that time. Every customer that went by the first few days, I had to count all the loose change in the till

P: That is pretty neat. What, what did you notice over the years, the difference in the amount of people or the kinds of people that came in to the store.

M: Yes, you know, over the years. Then during the '60's and the Vietnam War, we had the hippie movement, you know, came in. And the young people came in with a bundle on their back. But as soon as you know somebody's first name, they are no longer a hippy to you. They are just a young person. My kids were, you know, getting on---getting older. I could kind of identify with these young people because I came to Alaska in 1945. And--- I lived out in a tent in a gravel pit and no one called me a hippy because I guess the term had not been originated by then. And---I could kind of identify with the young people because all of us have been young once. And I could see these young people coming from asphalt jungles and identify with them, understand them.

And one thing I did notice that, when I first started the store and for the first several years, I never even bothered to lock the front door if I went up town. I would just leave a note for the people to either write down what they took and I would charge them, for it later, or leave their money you know, on the the and they did. You know, later on it got so you can't be quite that lenient, or careless - or whatever the word - laid-back, or whatever the terms we're using for that.

M: But - I, I enjoyed the grocery store. People would sit on the dog-food sacks and, you know, we'd discuss the day. Or I would psychoanalyze people or whatever.

P: How did the road, when the road came in, you know, through to Anchorage? How did that affect your business?

M: Oh, I kind of think it was nice that people could, you know, get away and . . . The road was already in to Anchorage when I started the store. And I think that it made it more agitated. More business people could come in with more supplies, and we could be tempted with more goodies. And . . . I think it was a step in the right direction when the road got better and the road came through. The first time I came over the road, it was like a trail expedition between Ninilchik and Anchor Point. It was, you know, they were just nicely doing the road. There were chuckholes you could lose your car in places. It was, , wasn't much of a road.

P: What was the main reason for closing your store?

M: Oh, I guess I had done it near twenty years and I decided that I didn't want to be a grocer when I grow up. I don't know. A number of things. Freight has got expensive. It got harder to do. The cases got heavier, and . . . every case I wanted was on the bottom of sixteen other cases. It - I think every business gets to this point, and I think everyone in business knows when that happens. That you either need to get bigger and expand or you... just kind of kie on hte vine. And I knew when the day came that... you know, the time came that I could have put in a bigger business and, you know... But, maybe laziness has something to do with it.

P: Have you always lived right here in the Kachemak City?

M: No,---in fact Kachemak City was Kachemak City when I first moved here. Kachemak City was a city before Homer was a city. And---it was here---before I came and---I think that it was a---- good idea that---. of course there was a animosity about it at the time but the people that started it saw it as kind of saving themselves from being part of Homer, because Homer voted 4 or 5 or 6 to incorporate for a city and it didn't happen the first time they voted for it. And I think the people that---started Kachemak City were really smart because they didn't, they wanted to be---they wanted to have their own identity. This was kind of rural farm area even at that time. And as I remember it, Mr. Jack Deitz, He is dead now, was a rancher that lived over across the street here. He was one of the originator and-- I can't remember the name of some of the other people but---it was a city before---I think it---incorporated maybe in 1958 or---don't, I won't, don't quote me on that one but-- I can't remember just the year but it was a city before I moved in.

P: When did Homer and Kachemak kind of emerge together because they are not really far apart anymore?

M: The reason for that happening was, like I said was Kachemak City was a city first and so when Homer became a city the line was already drawn, because Kachemak City had boundary lines and Homer moved --- almost like you say their lines I don't know if they--- I guess their lines do touch in places in fact. There maybe a foot or two between them but--- that is why Homer is so close, they came up to Kachemak City lines. And I suppose if it had been the other way around, if Homer had been there first, we would have gone to their lines. But---when I first moved here another thing I forgot to tell you about back before Kachemak City--- you asked about my impressions of here well, Seldovia was the big town. Homer was much smaller than Seldovia. And Seldovia had the doctor and the hospital. And---Homer didn't have a doctor at that time. And the doctor flow over from Seldovia and had a clinic, you know, once every two weeks or once a month or once a week and that the--- the children that were born, in fact, one of my sons was born in Seldovia and---it wasn't until 1958 or 1957 that the hospital opened, but the---prior to that the people want to Anchorage or had their children at home or went to Seldovia. And Seldovia was quite a bustling little town at that time. I think they had four canneries in operation. The---one of the reasons that Seldovia kind of withered on the vine is cause of the freight that I told you about that came in---the Sea Land---started to go to Anchorage. And so the freight filtered from Anchorage down and the---ships didn't come into Seldovia or to Homer anymore that brought freight so it was difficult for Seldovia to get freight in.

P: Do you think that people became, kind of, less freindly as the town got bigger and you didn't know everybody?

M: Actually I, kind of, think my ownself---I think that it is a better town now that---that there are a few more people, I think that our ideas got kind of stagnit and---we maybe remember looking back at it like we were all buddy, buddy and freindly but it was a pretty clanny, cliqu-y little town. In fact, myself when I moved here, I hated it. I didn't like it, it was beautiful and all of that, but you pretty much felt like--- really out--- I don't know. I should just say about myself. I felt pretty much as a outsider when I came in. And everyone was pretty much related to each other or you know, they had lived here along time. And it may have been my own attitude, you know, on looking back at it.

I really liked Fairbanks. It was a bigger town and--- I enjoyed Fairbanks and I probably showed that attitude and---rather than the people giving it to me. I was probably doing it to them. You know, now that I have got 30 years of wisdom here.

But I think---I know that from having the store that the people, that I would really love to see a new person come in. Although I will say that when the big Winnebago would pull up in front of the store, and the fella would get out and he would say, "Boy, howdy ma'am. You sure have a quaint little store here." That would upset me, being called quaint. And another thing he would say is "Where is Homer?" And I would say, "Well, you know, go point westward back down the road, " Mister you went throught it." He knew that I was putting him on. And he would just keep going father out East, looking for Homer.

P: It was pretty little then, huh?

M: Yes, and of course to me it seemed like a pretty big town. You know, and I would say "Don't you remember seeing that big grocery store on the corner and the highway department with the big fence around it?" He must of blinked and hadn't seen any of that.