

1077-82-127-10  
Interviewer:Helen Edens  
Interviewee:Kelley Miller

Date:July 23,1981  
Place:Helen's  
House,East Hill

K-How long have you lived in Homer?

H-42 years last April.

K-What was the reason you decided to come to Homer?

H-Well,our next door neighbor,Garen Svedlund had lived in Homer and liked it very much and he talked my husband into coming up.

K-What did your husband do?

H-He worked in a saw mill back in Washington,he was going to do that for Garen when he came up but it didn't materialize.

K-So what did he go into after that?

H-Fishing.

K-And what did you do?

H-I was just a housewife,taking care of the house and children.

K-Then you were married before you came to Homer?

H-Yes.

K-Had you lived any where else before you came to Homer?

H-Squim Washington. We went through there from Mississippi where we were married and lived in Squim Washington then for more than nine years and then moved to Homer.

K-How did Washington Compare to Homer?

H-Well,I loved Washington state. But my husband wanted to come to Alaska and being a good wife I followed Him,and my children.

K-What did you think about Homer when you came?

[ H-Well,I saw the dock out there and how far it was to town. If I could've,I would have turned around and gone back,but in a few months,I had become very attached to Homer and I would never leave here to go outside to live. ]

1st Impression

K-What was the town like when you came?

H-It was very small. There probably was maybe 200 to 250 people in Homer. And we brought about the fifth car that was in Homer,with us. And the roads,there were about nine miles of roads,it went about as far as where Rita Walker lives now and then out to the West Hill Road this other way. So you didn't have very far where you could drive. And of course,you could get out on the spit.

K-So how did people get around if they didn't have very many cars?

H-Alot of people had...well most of them walked. But some had horse and buggies and some had wagons. But it wasn't very long before people got more cars in here.

K-Can you remember when the roads first came in?

H-Yes, the road started in about...I believe it was in '47 because the day after Christmas in '49, we were able to drive over to Seward but only because the ground was frozen. It was not gravel, it was just hard packed and with snow on it. And we did get over to Seward but that was the first time, that was the day after Christmas in '49.

K-What was the community like, was it scattered?

H-Very scattered. The people, when they got their mail in Homer, some came down from Anchor Point and some that lived way out East. It was very scattered. And there was some people that lived on the hill.

K-What different areas were there, were they separate towns?

H-No, it was just a scattered community. And the only stores at that time were... I can't even think of her name right now...had the store that is now the Inlet Trading Post.

K-Oh, right on the main street?

H-Yes, down below. And then Lillie Walli had this other store. And there was just these two stores that had general merchandise and both of them had a gas pump. So we managed very nicely. And boats came in, maybe once a month and then in the wintertime, when they went into dry dock, there was sometimes two or three months before we had a boat that brought in any mail. The only way we had of getting anywhere was by boat because planes were not coming in. Once in awhile a small one would land on the beach. But not commercially.

K-Did you go across to Seldovia for supplies?

H-They used to do that, but after the dock was built, and that was the fall of '38, they built the dock. And then Alaska Steam came into Homer. And everybody flocked out to the dock to see the boat. And we knew that fresh things would be coming in. And we could get a taste of fruit and fresh vegetables and whatnot when it did come in. So every generally met out at the dock and then again at the stores to get things just as soon as the boat left and the merchandise was in.

K-How did you store your food for the winter?

H-Well, we lived on the homestead, up on the hill. And we had a root cellar for our potatoes and carrots and things of that kind. I canned some things and and we had to can our moose. We could keep some of it fresh for...well until the January thaw. And then when it started thawing, it had to be canned right away. So we had to learn all the different methods of trying to change canned moose into into something a little bit different.

K-What type of things did you raise on your homestead?

H-Oh we had turnips and rutabagas and, course potatoes. And we had lovely peas and greens, things of that kind.

K-Did you have any animals?

H-Yes, we brought a cow with us. And she provided all the milk that we could use, plus all the butter we needed. During the time she was dry, I would have had butter brine that we could use. When she was producing heavily, why, all the extra butter was brined. So we were never without that. And we had our own chickens, and had our own eggs. And we brined our eggs also. We bought Waterglass, which when it was fixed just right would preserve the eggs.

K-Did you sell any of your products?

H-Uh...no. I gave away lots of milk and cottage cheese and things of that kind because our cow produced far more than we could use. And one neighbor had some hogs, and I'd phone him when there was alot of extra milk and he'd come over and get it. So nothing went to waste.

K-What kind of chores did you have...on the homestead?

H-Well, all I did was taking care of the house. My oldest son took care of the cow. His dad was gone all summer fishing and..so his chore was taking care of the cow. And then Brantley took care of...helped me with things around the house. And it was..it just made it very nice because...And then I hired neighbors to come in and put up the hay because Dick was always gone during the time that it needed to be put up.

K-Was it alot of work then?

H-Yes, it was considerable work because it meant with my husband gone, that the children and I had to take care of the garden and, course take care of the cow. then a little later we had a horse also while we were still on the homestead. And it was a pleasure for the children.

K-How big was your homestead?

H-We only had a forty acre homestead.

K-Did you buy it from somebody, how did you get possession?

H-No, a neighbor had 160 acres and he offered a piece of land to my husband with a ninety-nine year lease to get us to build up on the hill. And we were within reasonable distance of where the school was being built so...we took him up on it. And then a little later he said that he was going to release it and if we'd follow him into town, that as he released the forty acres he would..that we could file on it which we did. Right as soon as he released it we got uor forty acres. And then we had to live on it three years before it was ours.

K-And then did you sell it back afterwards?

H-I didn't sell the homestead until, oh maybe, seven or eight years ago.

K-And then you moved down here?

H-We moved down here, we built the <sup>home</sup> where Frank Johnson is living now, first, when Dick Jr. was going to High School. Because it was too far for him to walk back and forth. And especially in the wintertime when the short short days. So we built down here and then Jim Waddell run the school bus, he had his own car that he'd pick up the children and take them to school because we were two miles out.

K-About how many children were there going to school?

H-Well, I know that only one senior graduated, the first year we were off the homestead in '45. And there was one in '46 and one in '47 and then when Dick graduated in '49 there were three, I believe. And there were only two that graduated the ~~next~~ year when Brantley graduated. But then it started picking up, and in '55 I think there was about six graduates.

K-What was the name of the school?

H-Just the Homer Public School?

K-Oh, how do you feel the education was, do you think it was adequate?

H-Well no, it couldn't be adequate in that it was the best that could be done with the facilities that were at hand. And the children enjoyed school. But I know that it was very crowded conditions because the year that Brantley graduated, his classes were held up in the principal's office. There was no room, they had to wander the streets in between classes. There just wasn't a place for them to be, at all. It was just too crowded. And when they built an addition on to it, it gave them a little bit more room but still not enough room. Seemingly, they built to meet the population of that year, and it was outgrown almost as soon as it was built.

K-How did they get their supplies for the school?

H-They would have to come in by boat. Now Juneau, this was a territory then, and Juneau would see that the supplies came in. The territory hired the teachers and saw that the supplies were in.

K-On your homestead did you build your house?

H-Yes, we did.

K-What kind of tools did you use?

H-Oh we had, we brought tools up with us and we bought hardwood flooring and our windows. We knew we were going to build and so we brought things that we felt that we wouldn't be able to get here in Homer.

K-What did you do on your free time, or did you have any?

H-Well, it was in 1944 when my husband bought his own boat and started fishing. And as a family we went down for the summer to Port Dick and put tents up. So we were together there, and the boys fished with their father.

K-Was the fishing good as compared to today?

H-Very good because there were much fewer boats in Port Dick, and there were lots of fish. And so even though the price was very very low per fish, in fact, the first year my husband fished it was 5¢ per fish. And then when I was down there it was frozen at, it was either seven or eight cents a piece for pinks, and ten cents for dogs, and it was twenty-nine cents for reds. And we got four and one-half dollars each for kings, regardless of their size. So even though we got lots of fish, it didn't make a very big paycheck, but everything was much cheaper then too.

K-How do you feel the health care was?

H-We did have nurses in Homer but there was no doctor. And after Seldovia got a doctor, we would have to go over there by boat. Or after the airport was built, we could fly over there to see a doctor. And otherwise we'd have to, after the airport came in, go to Anchorage. So it was a good thing that there weren't too many serious accidents or real serious illnesses.

K-Do you know when the hospital was built here?

H-I believe it was in '56 when they opened it up, the summer of '56 for the first patients.

K-So there wasn't any doctors?

H-We had a doctor come over,I've forgotten whether it was once or twice a week from Seldovia. And Seldovia had the hospital over there first.

K-Were there any major setbacks or hardships on the homestead,like during the winter?

H-Oh we had wonderful times in the winter. Everybody skied. You had to or else go on snoeshoes if you went anywhere. And especially moonlight evenings it was wonderful to have skiing parties.And then too...with Carl Taylor came in the summer of 1940 and started Sunday School and church,both on the hill and down here on the beach. And so it was very very wonderful to have your children to have that needed training.

K-Did you have any electricity on the homestead?

H-We didn't get any electricity into Homer until in '49 when HEA came in. But we did have Bob Smith,a neighbor across the road from us,bought the old school plant and there were three homes hooked up to it, And the only trouble with that was when he went to bed,the motor was cut off. And so you had to do all of your...anything to use electrical appliances for,or your lights before let's say ten or ten thirty.

K-Did you have to haul your water?

H-No we had...we hooked onto the old CAA line,it came along our place and we had dug up to a spring and we couldn't get pipe because it was so soon after wartime that every thing was still very hard to get. And so the CAA,instead of having some of thier pipe exposed,told us we could hook onto thier line and...which we had water from there until we built the home that I am in now and we dug a well then,but the earthquake ruined both the wells,I had two wells on the place. So we went back on the old CAA line for awhile until city water came through.

K-What were the effects of the earthquake?

H-Well,the main damage it did was to the wells and then my cupboard doors opened and some of my bone china crashed on the floor and also,then the other cupboard where I had my peanut oil and cornstarch and a few things like that,when it hit the floor and broke,it made the biggest mess that you could ever imagine And the pantry shelves emptied of some of the jars of pickles,I had pickles mixed with red shoe polish. And various other things on the floor. It didn't hurt anything that was in tin cans but it did anything that was glass. But I came off very light to what alot of people did.

K-Are you glad you lived on the homestead?

H-Yes,I wouldn't take anything for these years here in Homer . The life on the homestead,course we were all together and that made it wonderful.

K-Can you explain the roads,when were they paved?

H-The paving was down as far as Dick Jr's,I believe in '63 and then it was just a short time after that after that when it got right down into Homer. So it was... we had the gravel roads for quite awhile before we had it paved.

K-Did you have any problems with moose or any animals?

H-Well no,they come through here all the time and they seem to like eating the brush around here. But we never had any real problems with them except that two years ago, one killed my little toy poodle that I had. When he went out out of the house,he evidently heard the moose,and rushed the back of the house and one swift kick was all it took to end his life. And that's the only thing that has ever happened to us as far as moose is concerned.

K-Did you used to hunt for any food?

H-I went back hunting with them a few times and,one year I did get the meat. I wanted to be able to say I killed a moose. But I had no desire after that to ever want to shoot. I went back with them though.

K-What do you like most about Homer?

H

H-The beauty of it...

K-The scenery ?

H-The scenery from my window is unsurpassed and I have always thought that it is one of the very prettiest places that could be as far as scenery goes.

K-So knowing how Homer is like,you would come back here if you had a choice?

H-As long as my sons live here,yes. If I had to live here by myself,I would move out where my folks are.

K-Do you find the people in Homer friendly?

H-Yes,Very friendly although there is so many people now that are strangers. It used to be that you knew everybody in Homer. And in quite a few years now,it has grown so rapidly. Well,with me,unless they go to church or unless they go to homemakers, I don't actually know them.

K-What are some of the changes since you have been here?

H-Oh enormous changes, Well,I think electricity is one of the main ones. And then the road system,even though it lacks a whole lot yet. I'd like to see this East Hill Road paved,it's rough so much of the time. And,I wish there ~~was~~ more industries so more people could be sure of jobs. It's wonderful though that we have the work out on the spit that there is. At first,unless you fished or worked on the CAA,there wasn't any jobs unless you hauled groceries or something. And of course there wasn't so many people in Homer then,it was generally,people didn't do much in the wintertime and it was just summer work. But now there's alot of work the year around.

K-Do you like Homer better now or when when you first came? In which would you rather live?

H-Well,if we were all together,each one had it's great joys and benefits. But for comfort now,when I'm a little older. Why...I like the comforts.

K-Well,thank you very much for the interview,I enjoyed talking with you.

H-And I enjoyed talking with you too.