

KODIAK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Lena Metrokin

By Ron Granstra

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RG: When did you marry your husband?

LM: 1926 in Chignik.

RG: When did you move to Kodiak?

LM: In 1927.

RG: How many people were here when you first arrived?

LM: I guess there were about 400 people here.

RG: Was the church here?

LM: The church was there, an older one, this is a newer one.

RG: Does the present church look similar to the older one?

LM: No, that was an old log building that burned down to the ground.

RG: Do you remember the fire?

LM: Oh yes, I'm trying to remember what year that was. It was after the war.

RG: Were you a member of that church?

LM: Yes, I used to go there.

RG: Was the Russian Orthodox community without a church then for a while?

LM: No, they moved into where the priests used to live. It's all gone now, it caught on fire too in a few years because of the oil heater. What happened was that the wind was blowing and the downdraft put it out and so it just exploded.

RG: Were there any people there when that happened?

LM: Yes, there was an old priest living there. He singed some of his hair getting out. I remember that it was around 2 in the morning.

RG: You mentioned that when you first came to Kodiak that there were around 400 people living here.

LM: Yes.

RG: Were any of the businesses that are here now here then?

LM: Yes, Krafts was here.

RG: Were they located in the same place as they are now?

LM: No, I think it was a little bit different. Now it's hard to picture after that big tidal wave you know.

RG: I understand that women had to leave the island sometime during the war.

LM: There were a few of them that left. I used to do some work for a family and this man was with Fish and Game and he traveled a lot, all over the Aleutians. Those kind of men were valuable, he sent his family out because it was really kind of scary days then. We had to be all prepared in case there was an air raid and be on the go. I knew of another man who was taken and he ended being really high up in the Navy. He was running the boats. I knew him too, his name was Cookie Anderson.

RG: You said you were kind of scared during the war.

LM: Oh yes, in fact we had to make trenches! There was a bunker down below us so my husband made two trenches for me and the kids, but we never used them. I had a friend who had a cabin in the woods and when Dutch Harbor was bombed we spent about a week out there. It stayed foggy for three days straight, the fog was so thick!

RG: Did you have to turn out your lights at night during the

war?

LM: Oh yes, my husband used black tar paper to cover the windows. We had to close all of the windows.

RG: So you were able to keep your lights on inside, you just covered the windows.

LM: Exactly.

RG: Was that a community wide project?

LM: Everybody, everybody was all blacked out, and when you walked at night with a flashlight you had to have darker light too. I was halted once with my two little girls, I guess I wasn't being very careful and the light showed some and some soldiers came and halted us. They had an outpost right below where I lived.

RG: Where did you live here?

LM: It's still right here in Kodiak. After my husband died I lived there alone for three years. I figured that the oil was really high and it was a pretty good size house so it was expensive. So I sold it to my daughter.

RG: You mentioned that you had children during the war.

LM: Yes, two girls.

RG: Were the kids aware of what was going on during that time?

LM: Oh yes, they were big enough to be afraid because I remember this night when the soldiers halted us the little one started crying.

RG: What did you use for transportation?

LM: Well, where we lived it wasn't too far to town so I

walked all the time.

RG: Did most of the people in town walk during this time?

LM: Yes, there weren't too many cars back in those days.

RG: I guess there weren't too many roads then.

LM: No, no. Mission Road was the very first road built in Kodiak. It was a very narrow road and it was dangerous to walk there in the evenings.

RG: What did you and your family do for entertainment during the war?

LM: We were home all the time. My husband was gone a lot. In the winter he trapped. He did that for quite a while. That was when the price of long furs was good, it's never been good since. Then he started bear guiding, he was a real good bear guide. I think he was one of the best in Chignik. He started when he was a young boy with his father.

RG: Where did he go for his trapping?

LM: Chiniak. He had two cabins built out there. I guess you could call them barabaras. I never did see them, but I've been out there once or twice. I really do like it, I think it's nice out there.

RG: Of course there were no roads to Chiniak in those days.

LM: No, they had to go by boat. I think they used to call them codfish boats, they were really good built boats.

RG: How long would he be gone?

LM: I think he would go in late October, trapping season would open in November. He would come home for Russian

Christmas. He was Russian, he had lots of Russian in him and then he would go back again.

RG: What would he do with with his furs?

LM: He sold them to Krafts.

RG: With the war going on did you have any problems getting food?

LM: No, that was o.k., we lived very plain and whenever my husband came back from trapping he would bring ducks. The ducks were nice in those days, I think now they get into too many things they shouldn't.

RG: In your home during the war, what did you use for heat?

LM: I can't remember when we got a wood stove but we had an oil stove.

RG: Did you have electricity?

LM: Yes we had electricity, there were a few people who had it.

RG: So it was kind of a luxury.

LM: Oh was it ever! Just a few got it at first.

RG: What did you use for lighting in your home?

LM: We had those gas lamps with the mantles in them.

RG: Do you remember when the war ended, did Kodiak celebrate like the rest of the country?

LM: Oh were we happy! My mother lived right below me and we knew the good news the day before, I even think the dog happy. Everyone was hugging and jumping, happy and crying.

RG: Did any of the men from Kodiak that you knew of not come

back from the war?

LM: I don't think so, I think they all came back.

RG: Did your children go to school?

LM: Yes, they went all the time.

RG: Where did they go to school?

LM: It was downtown here, the old school.

RG: Were you here for the tidal wave?

LM: Yes we were here.

RG: Was there an earthquake before the tidal wave?

LM: Well it was just a few minutes before. That was in 1964, it was on Good Friday. I had been working down at the cannery, we had been working for three weeks, ten hours a day with no day off and this was going to be our first day off. Our boss said that we could go and stay home until saturday morning.

RG: Did you see the tidal wave when it hit?

LM: I didn't see too much of it. I saw my husband coming from his shop and I could see he was walking like he was on high seas and he disappeared so fast to check on his boats down there by the waterfront. So I turned on the radio and it said to take to high ground immediately because there was going to be a tidal wave in thirty minutes. I looked for my husband but couldn't find him, so I took my two kids with me. What I saw when I got up to the school there were so many people there I only got just a glimpse of the big one rolling in, it was white and foamy. I think what saved a lot of people were the

islands, they just cut a big chunk of it off.

RG: Did the people that lived in Kodiak during the war get along well with the soldiers that were here?

LM: Oh yes they got along well. On sundays I would make a cake or salad and take it to the boys that were at the outpost by our house and they liked that. After the war I would still get cards and letters from some of them. I was working for a long time with the boys. I worked in the cleaning plant downtown and there were a lot of Army clothes to take care of. There were a lot of soldiers here, really a lot.

RG: Did you ever see any Navy ships come into Kodiak?

LM: No, if they came they would have come in the other way. But I did see soldiers come, I was working in a restaurant downtown and they would come in there. That was the time that they were going to invade Kiska I guess. Poor boys looked so sad, I tried the best I could to talk to them but they were so quiet. But when they went there (Kiska) there everybody was gone, there was only a dog left.

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