

RICHARD WADDELL

ON

KODIAK

AND

Area Fisheries

1964 Earthquake

By

SUZAN WILLIAMSON

On March 10, 1993

At Richard Waddell's Home

Completed, April 17, 1993

Restrictions. None

HISTORY OF ALASKA
KODIAK COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

On March 10, 1993, the following autobiographical interview was conducted with Mr. Richard Waddell. The interview took place in Mr. Waddell's home. The interviewer is Suzan Williamson.

SW: I Think the first question I have for you is probably having to do with our church since that's where I know you from; the chapel on the Coast Guard base. And you've been going there ever since you've been in Kodiak?

RW: Ever since the wife and I have been here. We were married here. We weren't married in the base chapel but we started going there right after we were married. It's been...well almost 25 years now.

SW: OK. Do you know much about the church itself; how long it's been on the base?

RW: Oh I know a little bit about it. It was...used to be an army chapel. I believe it was moved to that location shortly after the end of the war, where it met all services, both Protestant and Catholic services. And its never had much of a renovation. Its pretty much... other than some coats of paint and a few improvements in the sound system. It's still the old building. Basically structured it was the first one built. Chaplain come and go in the time we've been there.

SW: Were you in the Coast Guard when you first got here?

RW: No.

SW: How is it you came to be here?

RE: Well I was in a missile operation in Texas. I attended a base chapel...so the programs that they had at their services...when I got up here and wanted to carry on the same style of worship we had there. I find it interesting. I like the idea of the chaplain rotating every so many years. We always hate to see 'um go, but with the passing of one we get a new chaplain with new ideas and new goals.

SW: You said missile operation?

RW: Mm hum. I was, uh, in the guard unit while I was in high school. I was in the National Guard; we had NIKE missiles, we went six months RFA to Texas and New Mexico, and then I transferred in the Air Guard.

SW: So with the Air Guard you came up here to Kodiak?

RW: No, I uh, I served my time with the Guard unit and I came up to Alaska, uh, let's see...it was either right after school or just prior to flying on some forest fires and some charter services flying down there with the air lines to earn money to get into schooling.

SW: Ok, so what year did you get here in Kodiak ?

RW: I think it was '62. '62 we came up here and I fished out of Soldovia. Fished... uh, shrimp. We drug up shrimp out of Soldovia and came down to Kodiak, Two Headed, then to Old Harbor, and then to Santa Flavia. The cannery was there. Of course Kodiak. Then we'd make a long run...we didn't do it year 'round. Think we fished six months out of the year. That's basically how I wound up in Alaska.

SW: Uh, did you meet your wife here?

RW: No. Let's see...prior to coming up here I was working for an electronics company and her mother was one of the group that I was in charge of. And it was in computers and she invited us all to her house for some kind of summer picnic or something like that. And it was right during the time of the Gold Cup races and, uh, I didn't want to miss those so I stayed and watched the Gold Cup races. Then I went over to their house. Well by that time everybody had come to the party and gone and there was still a few things left to eat. So I stayed and we met and got along since.

SW: Let's see here; your family. You have two children?

RW: Yea, Richard and Sara.

SW: They were born here?

RW: Yea, m hum, both of them.

SW: How do they like Kodiak?

RW: Right now, not too good. With all the rain and this miserable weather. But in the summer time, you know, we try and go various places.

SW: Let's see, I take it you no longer fish, but you have a business in town. How long do you...did you have the business? [Waddell Marine Supplies]

RW: Um, I had it for around ten years under my own name, but I've been involved in that type of business for

probably 15 or 16 years.

SW: Do you, did you find there's a lot of competition in that business? There seems to be a lot of marine supply...

RW: Oh, there's...there was some competition. I don't think it was excessive, the competition. We all had our own spot. Everybody had their own customers. We just did our thing and they did theirs. Didn't pay much attention what to anybody else did.

SW: One thing I noticed in Kodiak, and other places too, is that some businesses come and go. Do find that true here in Kodiak as far as...

RW: Oh sure, yea, businesses start up and then go for a while and for whatever reason or some reason or another fold up and go somewhere else.

SW: Was your business always located where it is now?

RW: No, um, the first year we operated was in the NAPA building down on Shelikof Street and we uh...which is now currently the little Speedy Market. ...Yea, liquor store in NAPA building...we operated out of that for one year then our parking requirements that were so much more than what what they could provide. And they kept raising the rent on us...not a very good spot.

SW: Did you find it hard to get some supplies that you needed to run the business?

RW: Oh, I don't think so, um, if you take into consideration the money. If you had the money it wasn't all that hard. No, I mean it definitely adds to the cost. The speed that you want something, if you needed it real fast and that, well, it's gonna cost. But if you have lots of time and pre-plan your needs it still costs some, but, not a tremendous amount. But I could usually get the things I needed.

SW: Do things get here faster now than they did ten, fifteen years ago?

RW: Oh, I think so. Yea...especially with the advent of United-UPS service, Federal Express, and you got Northern Air Cargo and the advent of all the freight haulers, and Sea Land it's larger, faster...five six days from here to Seattle isn't too long.

SW: What are your plans now for your business?

RW: Oh, there's um, I'm not, uh, just sure what I'm going to wind up doing...I'd rather not say too much about it.

SW: OK. Kodiak itself. What are some good memories you have of Kodiak?

RW: Oh, I think, uh, um, earlier memories of Kodiak that it was sure a lot happier town than earlier.

SW: Really?

RW: Oh, yea. Um, when I first started coming through here, sailing through here we...there was still a small portion of the barter system left. Jesse, at Krafts-Krafts have there store in a more or less in line with main street there wasn't...there was still a few things being exchanged; fur and a few things for money and, uh, those that had money, it wasn't uncommon for 'um to leave large sums with certain establishments. Either a bar or with Krafts or with somebody who could lock it up. Then they go off on a big party and no matter how drunk they got and they wanted to come back for more money, most of the time they were told "You know you told me you couldn't have any more money than that". And that's where it stopped. Once in a while they'd give 'um some more money. Otherwise they would just take it and party it all up till it was all gone and then they'd have no money to do anything with. The town is a lot looser in that respect. We didn't have the amount of cannery processors at that time. I think we have maybe four...three or four at the most, and, um, nobody ever thought about locking their cars or houses. It was just, uh, something...didn't have to worry about it getting stolen.

SW: Interesting. Do you have any bad memories of Kodiak?

RW: Oh, I don't really think so. I don't have any bad memories of Kodiak. Um, no, hun uh. I don't have any bad memories of Kodiak.

SW: Have you seen some good changes in Kodiak. You talked about it doesn't seem quite as close?

RW: Any good changes?

SW: What are some good changes that you've seen?

RW: Good changes. Lots and lots of changes. I'm not

sure how many good ones there are. Um, well let's see. The Sea Land dock. That area looks pretty good. That's a good change. The sewer water treatment plant. [Land opening up for houses]...yea that's a pretty good change. Uh, lets see...yea, there's quite a few changes even though as much as people hate to change farther down the road I think they see it a good change...[paved streets] yea.

SW: No paved streets?

RW: Oh, no.

SW: So this would be the early sixties?

RW: No, she [Mrs. Waddell] got up here '68, yea. [Airport] yea, that's a change in itself. Right there where the end of the runway is right now just to the... as you look down the runway from the road, just to the right, where they have the fish haul airplane parked; that was the terminal. It was a little shed. It wasn't much bigger than this house. And if you wanted your bags, they were outside whether it was snowing, raining, blowing. If you wanted them, they were outside in a cart. And, uh, I remember one time coming in, it was snowing and there was a pile of snow about as big as the building. And Rudy had his little land otter with him. That land otter was climbing up to the top of that snow pile and just sliding down on his...on his belly. Just up and down as fast as he could go. But it seemed like that was more typical of the old, old parts of... Kodiak.

SW: Could you tell me a little bit about your fishing experiences. You said that you were fishing when you came up here?

RW: When I came up, I started fishing...dragging shrimp out of Soldovia. Uh that would have been '62, um, we would fish...drag shrimp out at Katchamack Bay. And, um...the shrimp would migrate with the tides in different seasons and certain portion of the habitat would turn green. I don't know-something that's in the water or something they do. And they turn green and... and not be acceptable as a food product. So we would leave Katchamack Bay and run all the way down to Kodiak. We fished in Santa Flavia. We fished in Old Harbor. Fish Two Headed. And then we turn around, back into Kodiak and get fuel and take right off again for Soldovia through the Barren Islands. That can be a real nasty, nasty trip through the Barrens and tide rips and all. And our

product...we didn't have anything but ice. We could only carry it four days. And, uh, after that the product would start going downhill real rapid because of the heat build-up in there. And when I first started fishing here, there was only a handful of boats and we never had codes. The cannery would call us on the radio and want to know how much we had put up. We fished twelve months out of the year. And pretty soon we had a few more boats and codes to tell the cannery what kind of a load we were carrying. And a few more boats, and the season started getting shorter. And until, like right now, there is no shrimp season. It's all fished out, or I don't think...somewhere they...with the advent...decline of fisheries and crab stock and other species. Those boats would put on drag gear and jump in on the shrimp fisheries. So, um, a lot of the boats were dual fisheries where they'd fish crab, uh, for a while, shrimp for a while, halibut for a while, and salmon for a while. So it, um, made an awful lot of effort on all of the species. Pretty soon the shrimp fisheries was a thing of the past. Most boats were wooden boats. [Then the Bender Boats came.]

SW: What kind of boats?

RW: [Bender Boats] It's a...it's a shipyard. It's a name of a shipyard.

SW: Oh.

RW: The first Bender with double drag...was Chuck Peterson. He was fishing with one net off the stern. One reel. That's a tradition. And down there they depleted their shrimp market...their fisheries a long time ago. So they put outriggers and then they put a net on each outrigger. So one boat fished two nets. And...where we would tow for hour and a half on the Gulf it wasn't uncommon to tow for eight, ten, twelve, fourteen hours just trying to get enough shrimp in the nets to make some kind of a trip. And we had all kinds of apprehensions about the double rigged trawler out here in these rock piles. They proved that to be pretty successful. We were, we were getting four cents a pound. [Not a lot of] junk fish [in it.] We made, uh, we made, uh, four cents a pound and a automatic deduction of five percent for ice. And they would hire three or four girls to pick fish. And if they couldn't pick your load clean enough to suit them with those three or four girls, they would hire more girls but you paid for 'um. And all of this five percent of your total trip was deductible for ice. Plus, um, you paid for the extra

help. And if it got to be too much, they'd make you dump your load. They wouldn't accept it. They were...it was a lot of work but not much money.

SW: Yea. Was it...was it dangerous work fishing?

RW: Oh, fishing is always inherently dangerous no matter where, uh, where you're fishing. Up here...with our weather and boats and everything. These are some pictures. [Their boat-Pacific Pearl]

SW: Is that a bad change or a good change?

RW: What's that?

SW: Boats.

RW: Oh, it's a good change. These old wooden boats. They can't last forever. But we usually tie up at the cannery at night time if there was one around and we would take water. Everybody...you know you just don't use that much water. Gone four or five days. That's what you're supposed to be gone. Lots of times we'd get weathered out and we'd have to restock. Sometimes they can smell you coming.

SW: So there weren't a lot of Coast Guard regulations then?

RW: No, there wasn't Coast Guard survival suits, and EPIRBs, and things like that. They were hardly even thought of let alone mandatory. Right now they are mandatory you carry placards that say this and say that. Different rules and laws that are on the books now.

SW: The canneries, what changes have the canneries...have they changed much?

RW: I don't think so. Canneries are...the only changes there's more of 'um. Right now I can only name a few that...Jim down at East Point, Jim Major ran that cannery for Bennington, Earl Bennington for all the years that I can remember. And, uh, as far as changes goes, uh, majority of the processing is done in Kodiak and Dutch Harbor. Larson Bay has a small...operation there. But I think earlier you had several more smaller canneries around the island. And right now they're more consolidated because of labor and freight and stuff like that. The fact that there's more canneries here means a change. That hasn't changed a whole lot, though, with the exception of surimi, cod fish, and pollack, and, uh,

those kind of fisheries we didn't even concern ourself with. In fact most of the stuff they are making out of surimi we had to throw away. The tanner crab we never...yea, you never even thought about a miserable little tanner crab. Usually they were just a nuisance you know. Now it's really highly sought.

SW: Tell me what you remember about the earthquake and tidal wave from '64.

RW: Well I wasn't in Kodiak at the time of the tidal wave. I was over in Soldovia. And, uh, it was 5:30 in the evening. And we just sat down for evening meal and we were on, like 30 foot pilings. And the building started to shake and everybody just kinda stopped eating but nobody got real excited about it because earthquakes up here are pretty common. And, so we just sat there for a few minutes and it kept shaking. And it didn't stop. Then we knew we had problems. So we bailed out of the mess hall which was on the end of the cannery...at the end of the warehouse. And the hallway that we had to run down to get to the boardwalk was long and narrow and it was like one of these spooky houses where the walls twist one way and twist the other way but not at all the same direction at the same time. They'd go in different directions. And got out of the building, ran along the boardwalk, and up the side of the mountain, and, uh, um, we didn't actually have a wave. Not like Kodiak did. We listened on the radio to all of the MAYDAYS and all the calls; Seward, and Kodiak, Selief. Um, I still remember, um, the Coast Guard asking Selief, "where are you now"? And he said, well the wave, the last wave just took him up past the...I think it was the Beachcombers or one of those establishments there and...one of the places. And the next wave took him back a little further closer to the waterfront. I think they wound up putting him on a big lowboy and taking him the rest of the way. That was a real...it almost seemed like one of those Orson Wells scary radio stories. Everybody was talking about how big the damage amount of heavy damage was. But in Soldovia we just had a surge. Our tides went up and down, um, oh, about four hour period we had two or three huge surges. And they would surge ten, twelve, fourteen feet and some of the docks there, uh, the Trade Wind was tied up to them. Not a stall. We didn't have stalls. They were just tied to the rail caps of the floats. And, uh, they ran down the ramp before it collapsed and got it fired up and headed out to sea. But in doing it, the caps would just break like little match

sticks. And they were, you know, 12x12 timbers. So we spent the rest of night, uh, pretty much up in the woods in a tree waiting for somethin' else to happen. They sent several people back down into the village to get blankets, and food, and candles, stuff like that to spend the night with. Lot of the old timers, Tennisons, Frank Tennison, Norm Erson, Johnsons, George and Barbara Johnson, myself, Sutherlands. There was a bunch of, um, a bunch of us that were there up in the woods. Then it seems like after everything kind of settled, well we all migrated back to Kodiak. [The Tennisons are still here] here, whether they're actually living...well our next door neighbor, Claire, was there. Claire and Betty. Then ...and Dotty. Actually when you said Soldovia went down, it did. It sunk about five feet. See, our retorts in the cannery, we were canning salmon. After the title wave, the retort would be the bottom of it would be in the water... be in the ocean. You couldn't cook anything because you can't heat the whole ocean. You have to wait until the tide is gone. Then you could cook in that. So there'd be certain periods of time when you couldn't...anything. You'd have to stack the cans to be cooked on one side and so that when the tide went out....I really didn't see, know much about Kodiak other than what we heard on the radio. They had it a lot worse here than what we did. Then they had the actual wave come through here and we didn't.

SW: How long do you think it took to get Kodiak back on its feet? Was it years?

RW: Well as far the bars were concerned not very long. They opened up tents. Right there where Corky's, the Harbor Master, there were several, I think the Mecca had a tent. The B and B had a tent. They were in operation. I think they probably missed one or two shifts and they were back in business again. But, uh, as far as the whole town goes, they have, uh, they took probably a couple of years...plotted and planned waterways and utilities. They did do pretty good...getting power and all that back right away. But the next installation step two of their project and we did a little more planning than the original. That's why some roads and things are so screwed up now. Because nobody ever planned, you know, for anything. And those houses up on the hills and that are still there. But, uh, urban renewal came along. But they did it. Took them a couple of years to finally get the initial phase. That [bakery and bank building where the bathroom now exists near harbormaster] is still part of the old, old regime in

town.

SW: Are there any changes you'd like to see Kodiak make?

RW: Changes I'd like to see Kodiak make? I think there's enough changes being made for us, and by us, to us. Any changes I'd like to see? Whatever I would think of if I waited 15 minutes it would probably come along. They're talking about changes in everything we do, roads, assessments. Some of the changes are necessary for one reason or another, but...There's, uh, there's a lot of changes going on...more changes. They try to do what's right and proper. They've come a long ways. I mean they've got a...Engineering group for projects. They have rules and regulations for permitted areas. Those basic things are at least a step in the right direction. Where as before if you wanted a porch on your roof well you could go up there and put a porch on your roof, you know. Didn't have to be supported or anything else. Now days it's for your own safety or other reasons. They have inspectors. If you're involved in it, it seems like a nightmare. They've made some changes.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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