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Jeanne Laurence

September 28, 1965

Fairbanks, Alaska

Jeanne Laurence was born in 1887 in Polmar, France and raised by strict parents. She came to America when she was 32 years old. She first lived in Los Angeles and there she met her husband, Sydney. She looked after him because he was so ill. He traveled back to Alaska and everyone thought he looked wonderful. Mrs. Belle Simpson went to L.A. to meet Jeanne. Jeanne and Belle became friends right away. Belle convinced Jeanne and Sydney to get married. They were married and moved to Alaska. They traveled to McKinley in 1929. They hiked 140 miles from Talkeetna to the park. They had wagons and horses, but she walked. They went to stay in a cabin along the way. They finally reached the last house on the road. She enjoyed walking. They then were on horseback. They traveled about sixteen miles and then she got off the horse and walked for a while. They stopped at a mining cabin. They traveled to Poor Man's Creek to spend the night. Sydney owned part of the mining operation there. They spent the whole summer in front of Mount McKinley. Jeanne and her husband painted the whole summer. She talked about a bear that came through camp and was then shot. They were expecting the guides to come to pick them up in September. The guides finally showed up as the snow came nearer and nearer. She walked out the entire way out of the park. They returned to Anchorage, Alaska where they had their studios. They returned to California for the winter and returned to Alaska for the rest of the year. They did this for many years. She talked about meeting with some people that thought Alaska was just ice and snow. This made her decide to make a collection of paintings of the wildflowers of Alaska. She wanted to make a book of 300 different flowers from Ketchikan to the Bering Sea. She thought the price of the book was very high.

She was married to Sydney Lawrence for fourteen years. When he was nine years old he was already painting. He trained under an artist, H. Moran, in New York. At sixteen years he was showing at the International Gallery. He was a stowaway on a boat when he was a young boy. He went all over the world for four years. When they ran into a hurricane he survived by staying with the captain who had stayed with the ship. They floated for five weeks until they were spotted and towed into England. He went to Paris to study art. He returned to England where he joined the Royal Academy and studied again for a year. He was a friend of the Prince of Wales. During the war he was made a war correspondent for the Black & White. He was beat up at one point and was deafened by the beating. His attacker was shot by an English soldier. He then returned to England and was then sent to South Africa during the Boer War.

Sydney came to Alaska in 1900. He came to Alaska because he liked new experiences. He had heard about the gold rush. After a while he returned to Seattle. He returned to Alaska and mined for a year. He traveled up the Susitna River with his own boat. He didn't paint for about nine years. In 1914 they started to build the city of Anchorage. Sydney had a photo shop. He was then convinced to start painting again.

He was shipwrecked going to Valdez and lost everything including some gold he had with him. He had to swim to shore. He remembered a cannery about three miles away. He couldn't get a fire started there so he hiked another six miles to an Indian village. He

slept for three days. He was taken to Valdez to the hospital and they wanted to amputate his legs. He refused to have them removed. This was in November. By Christmas he was able to get around on crutches. He traveled to Mt. McKinley to paint. One of his paintings of Mt. McKinley is in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. One of his paintings is also in the Louvre.

Jeanne describes her first trip back to Europe to visit her family. She said that she has had a wonderful life.

She built a home in 1948 in Anchorage.

She talked more about her education in France and her art training. During the first war she studied medicine and worked in a hospital. Her father did not want any women doctors or artists in the family.