



Virginia Abston

Transcript of an Oral History

Conducted by

Anjuli Grantham

at

Kodiak, Alaska

On May 27, 2015

(With subsequent corrections and additions)

Kodiak Historical Society

About West Side Stories

This oral history is part of the West Side Stories project of the Kodiak Historical Society. West Side Stories is a public humanities and art project that intended to document the history of the west side of Kodiak Island through oral history, photography, and art. The oral histories chart the personal stories of individuals with a longtime connection to the west side of Kodiak Island, defined for the scope of this project as the area buffeted by the Shelikof Strait that stretches from Kupreanof Strait south to the village of Karluk. The project endeavored to create historical primary source material for a region that lacks substantive documentation and engage west side individuals in the creation of that material.

The original audio recording of this interview is available by contacting the Kodiak Historical Society. Additional associated content is available at the Kodiak Historical Society/ Baranov Museum, including photographs of interview subjects and west side places taken during the summer of 2015, archival collections related to the west side, and journals and art projects created by west side residents in 2015.

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Note on Transcription

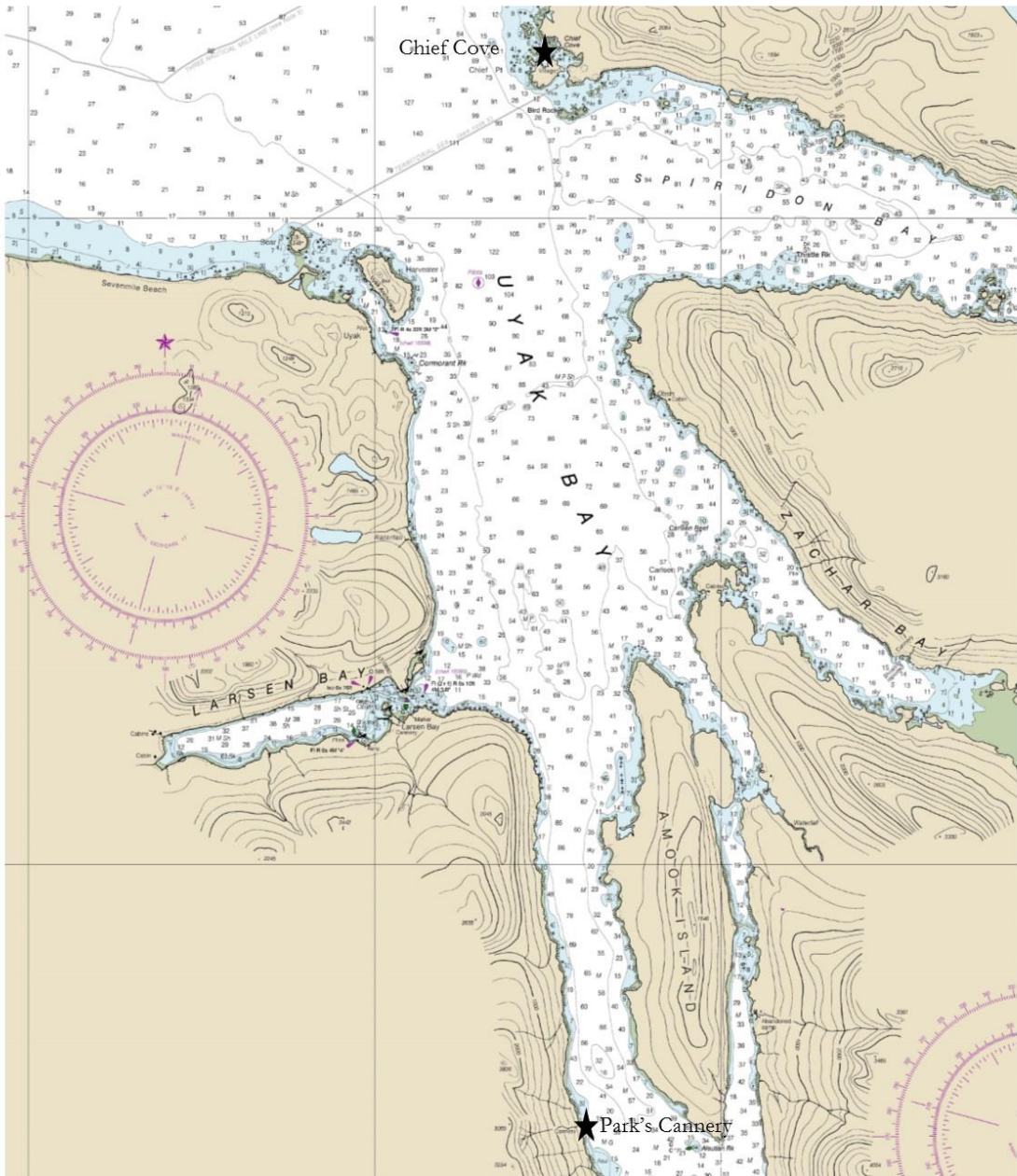
After the initial transcription was completed, a second transcriber performed an audit/edit by listening to the oral history recording and verifying the transcription. The following transcript is nearly a word-for-word transcription of the oral history interview. Editing is intended to make the interview easier to understand. Bracketed words indicate they were added after the interview. The use of [...] indicates that something that was spoken does not appear in the transcription. Often, these are false starts. In some cases, it is information that the interview subject retracted later. The original audio file is available for listening.

Citation

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Cover photo: Virginia Abston, photographed in her home on May 27, 2015. Photography by Breanna Peterson for West Side Stories. P-1000-2-6.



Select locations within Uyak Bay mentioned in the oral history.

Oral History of Virginia Johnson Abston

AG: So we will start by just saying that it's May 27, 2015, and I am sitting, this is Anjuli Grantham, with Virginia Abston at her home in Kodiak. And, Virginia, do I have your permission to record this interview?

VA: Yes.

AG: Thank you. Could you maybe start by introducing yourself, just saying maybe your name, what your maiden name was and when and where you were born.

VA: Okay. I was born Virginia Johnson. Born in Karluk, Alaska to Tom and Annie Johnson. And she was a Norell. Oscar Norell [was her father]. He was from Sweden and my father was from Sweden and they both worked at Alaska Packers because they called it beach seining then. [...] I know dad came up from California, but where Grandpa Oscar came from and what area I don't know. And I know that I was just born there because there was no midwife in Park's Cannery. So after I was born we left and then I grew up at Park's Cannery, but we all had to leave to go away to school because there was no school. There was only my mother and my father. So we appreciated our family when we got home for three months. It was kind of nice. [...]

AG: Could you tell me what are the names of your grandparents and could you tell me more about them and where they were from?

VA: On my mother's side was Oscar Norell. He came from Sweden and I know he spent two years in Afognak and he must have been on his way to Karluk when he met his bride in Uganik 'cause he married a lady from Uganik and we know very little about her. I don't. My Aunt Clyda does in Larsen Bay so you'll have to talk to her. And they moved to [...] Karluk, and then they ended up in Old Uyak at one point, but I only remember Grandpa Oscar being there. She wasn't there. She died young of TB, I believe. And on my [...] dad's side was also Sweden, mother and father, but he left there when he was fifteen 'cause his dad was going to put him in the Swedish Navy. He wanted him to be his pride little boy. He wasn't up for it, so he skipped country and they never, never contacted him again [...], but my oldest daughter and myself went to Sweden in 2015 to trace down family. It was awesome.

AG: And you found some?

VA: Uh-huh. There's a second cousin over there. He took us to where dad was born, where he was baptized, where he moved to and then he just kind of floated off the Swedish records forever.

AG: Can you describe how your parents met?

VA: [...] They must have been fishing in Karluk and dad saw mom and he told Grandpa Oscar that he wanted to marry her, I believe, and I think she was fourteen. Grandpa Oscar told him, "You have to wait till she was sixteen." That's where they met.



Oscar Norell, Abston's maternal grandfather. P-991-1.

Daria Norell, Abston's maternal grandmother. P-991-2.

AG: Was he quite a bit older?

VA: He was twenty-some years older than her. Yeah. One of those “here she is” type things. But they’ve had a good marriage. Of course, all by themselves in the cannery most of the time, even without their children in the winter. I went to school in Larsen Bay which had a school. [Grades] one through eight all in one room, til seventh grade and then I came into town and stayed with Bob and Helen Hall for two years and then I went to school in Bothell, Washington. Then I came home and my dad died so my oldest brother and I stayed home at Park’s. Stayed home with mom for... I stayed half a winter and then came back to Kodiak and Jimmy stayed the whole winter and then we, everybody, moved to Homer that next fall. Jimmy, he kind of...he went to Mt. Edgecumbe. And then somebody took a liking to him and he ended up in Minnesota and went and graduated from Minnesota and then went to Mankato State. He came back. We all came back.

AG: Um-huh.

VA: Tommy, he was [...] in Bainbridge Island with a couple that dad and mom knew, in the winter for school, but I believe he graduated in Homer. But, yeah, we were just kind of farmed all over the place for school.

AG: And was that starting when you were in first grade?

VA: Uh-hum.

AG: Wow. So who would you stay with in Larsen Bay?

VA: Dora Aga. She was kind of the matriarch of Larsen Bay. I think she probably took care of dozens of children from the village and from other areas and she was just one of those women that took in everybody. Yeah, we stayed there. [...] Tommy and I did. Stayed there.

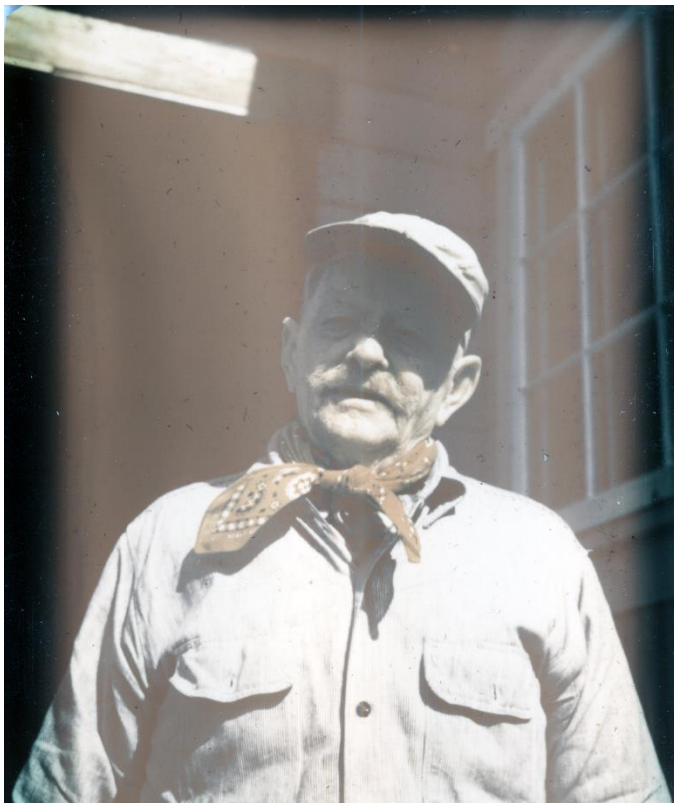
AG: Do you have any memories of her that you'd like to share from when you were a child and staying with her in Larsen Bay?

VA: She was just... she was a good person. She was a subsistence everything. I mean, they had enough food for the winter come fall. It was good. I mean she gardened. We all had to help dishes, cook. And yeah she was good and we went back to see her every year. Just she was part of family practically. Very strong. She was, I think, Aleut and Finnish.

AG: It seems that there are many people on the west side that are Scandinavian and Alutiiq, huh?

VA: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

AG: Why do you think that is?



Oscar Norell, beachseiner at Karluk. P-991-4.

seem to like the Native women.

VA: Probably because of the Karluk River and bringing them in to come fish. I think it was mostly, sounds like a lot of the Chinese wasn't till after Dad and Grandpa Oscar. Then they started bringing them in. And then they'd take them out every fall. But, yeah, as far as Karluk I don't have much for memories. I went down to see what it was like and I was pregnant with my second son, but I didn't like the river. So I kind of left my mom down there with her sister.

AG: [...] your grandfather and then your dad, instead of going back at the end of the season, they stayed in Karluk or Kodiak. Why do you think they decided to make Kodiak their home or Karluk or Larsen Bay instead of return to California with the rest of the fishermen?

VA: Probably money from fishing and they were... just the lifestyle here. 'Cause I see a lot of similarities, after going to Sweden, here. I mean a lot. Open water, lots of lakes...yeah, it's green, it's nice and they

AG: They didn't have problems finding wives, huh?

VA: No. Not at all.

AG: So what did your grandfather and grandmother in Karluk [...] do when they were living there or when they were at Old Uyak? Do you know much about their experiences there?

VA: No, I don't 'cause I was never down there. I don't even know. I can remember Grandpa Oscar in Old Uyak and his wife was not even with him then 'cause she died young and I know my mom stayed with my dad or grandpa. Then I think the other ones were older and gone already. Yeah, and even Grandpa Oscar in Karluk. 'Cause we were in Park's transportation-wise [...] way back when. I think I just... the big thing I remember was when he died. Everybody going down to Old Uyak and yeah that was not a lot of. I know he had a daughter that lived in Uyak, Old Uyak, that got killed. Yeah, and to try to clue you in on that side.



Annie and Tom Johnson with their children, Jimmy and Virginia, at the Park's Cannery. P-991-3.

AG: What do you remember of Old Uyak from when you were a child?

VA: I think we went down to visit. My Aunt Mini was there. We went down to visit her once that I can remember. Just I think it must have been transportation. The old Johnson nine-horse didn't go very fast.

AG: So is that where the boats would go instead of Larsen Bay or was Larsen Bay or Old Uyak more of a hub when you were a child?

VA: Larsen Bay. Yeah yeah. Old Uyak there was a cannery, too, but I don't even know when it was opened.

AG: So when was it that your parents moved to Park's Cannery, and why do you think that they decided to move there?

VA: Winter job. 'Cause they winter-watched from then on. 'Cause I have seen pictures of Jimmy and I, is all. So they must have moved in early 40's up there. 'Cause even we would live in the cannery and I remember hearing, I

don't remember it, but we had to move up in a tent in the summer when they brought the crew in. Quite a ways away. As far as living in the tent, I don't remember much except seeing pictures of Jimmy and I. And then they would go back and winter-watch every year. Go back to the cannery.

AG: So what did winter-watching...what did that mean? What sort of work would they do and what was the kind of the day?

VA: Watch the weather. That's about it. Now dad repaired things. Mom cleaned after the cannery workers left. Yeah. It was not a fast pace job. 'Cause Gary [Abston] and I did it for two years in one stretch and another year cause Trish came along and then finances weren't that good so we winter-watched for two years, saved some money, moved to town and then we went back again when we were having problems financial. It was hard to live. Move to town from a village and we both worked in the canneries, but we made it. Bought a house.

AG: So your parents moved up to Park's Cannery, started winter-watching and what would they do in the summer?



Annie Johnson. P-991-5.

VA: Dad was a carpenter and mom did the laundry for the cannery.

AG: Can you describe what the cannery was like in the summer when you were a child, your [...] memories of being there?

VA: I remember talking to all the people and seemed like we ate every night with the Filipinos 'cause they barbecued every night. Barbecued fish and had rice. Other than that we had our animals and watched my younger brother, Tommy. So I was kind of restricted. It was something you had to do. So you just didn't fight it 'cause Mom had to work, Dad had to work, so we'd come home and do what we could to help out. Jimmy went fishing young and Tommy went fishing young.

AG: Did Park's have its own fleet?

VA: They had their own boats.

AG: What were they called?

VA: Um, *Number Seven. Park's Number Seven?* I just remember the seven 'cause dad bought a boat and Jimmy started running it. *Park's Number Seven.* Yeah.

AG: What was the color of the Park's boats?

VA: It was white. Maybe green some of them. And that is where and how I met Gary. He came up fishing. I had just come home from Washington and my brother introduced us. So, yeah. End of story. We got married (*laughter*).

AG: I don't think that's the end of the story. Sounds like the beginning. (*laughter from both*).



Park's Cannery in August 2015. P-1000-7-571.

VA: Yeah. Mom and I gillnetted up there and I helped her. I helped her wash clothes.

AG: So when you were there in the summers your mom would do the laundry, she'd do the cleaning and you also were gillnetting the whole summer?

VA: No, we didn't do that. We tried it one year, I think, when I got older. We didn't make much money.

AG: How were people fishing when you were a child in the summer in Uyak?

VA: There was seining. There was gillnetting. But we only heard about it because it was like in Bumble Bay. I think it's on the mainland. They'd bring a crew in and they would gear them up and bring them to Bumble Bay. Yeah.

AG: Was anyone beach seining in Uyak and were there fish traps that you remember?

VA: Fish traps, yeah. Not close out at Chief Cove, but I never saw them 'cause we didn't get to go. But I heard about them and I then later we bought a gillnet site out there and we could see where the traps were. So we put our gillnet there. And they were good sites. [...] Gary bought [...] the first site from Lloyd Swan for I think it was ten thousand dollars and everybody told him he was crazy to go that far out and fish 'cause it's on the Shelikof.



Park's Cannery in August of 2015. P-1000-7-574.

AG: Was that Chief Cove?

VA: Uh-hum. But we paid for it in one year. So they didn't say that much anymore and we did good there. Then he eventually bought the *Rosario's Straits*, one of the Straits boats, and it was renamed to the *Little Star*. And then we tendered that in the summer and fished at the sites still. It was good.

AG: So when were you and Gary married?

VA: 1961.

AG: Could you tell me about your first years of marriage and how you decided to purchase Chief Cove and the setnet site out there? What was your inspiration for doing that?

VA: Gary liking fishing and just hearing about it. My brother was already fishing and Gary was kind of already into the fishing thing. Just seemed a way to keep the family together, I guess.

AG: What do you remember about your first seasons out at Chief Cove?

VA: First one was in a tent. I didn't like it. The tent was wood stove. Had to wash diapers, rinse the diapers in the salt water, then wash them. It was, yeah, but at the time you didn't think it was that bad. Only when you think back, I guess. Yeah. There was...it was good. I mean it was. The kids

grew up there every summer and it was family and I kind of incorporated that after having been shipped away. I told him, 'cause he liked winter-watching, and I told him, "Nope. I'm not shipping my kids away." So we just moved to town and then we'd go back every summer.

AG: So you said that you both had a tender and a setnet site?

VA: We had a boat that tendered.

AG: How did that work to do both?

VA: He hired somebody else to tender. It was a fifty-eight limit seiner. So it tendered for Larsen Bay, so it was right around there for the gillnetters. So it worked out good.

AG: And which boat was that?

VA: *Little Star*.

AG: Okay.

VA: Yeah.

AG: Who else was living in Uyak at that time around '61 when you first purchased the setnet site and who was gillnetting out there?

VA: Dora Aga. And Gary had fished with Johnny Aga, her husband. Maybe that's what kind of...cause we stayed with Dora and we stayed in a little cabin of hers one summer. And then one summer he worked at Park's and I stayed in the cabin of hers, too, and he'd have to come down to see me. Dora was probably the main figure. Jake Aga was probably fishing. Eddie Paakkenen. And I think right around the time we bought, Fields bought. It wasn't really that many gillnetters in the beginning. Not like it is now.

AG: So what do you think prompted that change that there would be so many more?

VA: I think overhead. I mean it didn't cost much to go out. I mean we burnt wood for a long time and then he just, well, our first cabin was built out of driftwood and then every year he just added a little bit more to it. And my oldest daughter brought her kids 'cause she took over the site when my body told me I couldn't do it anymore. She took over the site and she did the same thing. She brought her kids out there and they all liked it, but David, the oldest one, doesn't like fishing. He's a welder. Brandon, he's out in college. He's going to come back so he can go back to school again, but he'll get away from fishing eventually. He's going to diesel mechanic school. Mechanic. Mandy, she just graduated. She doesn't know. She's floating. Not sure what she wants to do. Maybe cooking.

AG: What sort of boats and gear did you use back in the sixties when you first started setnetting out there?



Virginia Abston, P-1000-2-1.

VA: We had probably about a sixteen-foot skiff with a nine-horse on it. Pretty slow, but we didn't have to go far and you could pretty much, you knew when not to go out. We didn't have the sea lions we have now. We didn't have the algae we have now. Once in a while we'd get a bunch of bull kelp, but we never even had the bubble kelp a whole lot. It was a lot cleaner. I mean when I quit we had to bring a washer out to wash the nets of algae. Yeah. Different. It's work now, where back then it was more just an enjoyable summer. It's really hard work. You have to fight the sea lions 'cause you can't... back then we could shoot at them. I don't think Gary killed that many but he would shoot at them and now you can't even do that. So you gotta fight them. It's a hard job. We gradually got better equipment and I think my dad even built...no, the fisherman, the guy next to us having a skiff that my dad had built and it's still sitting out there, old wooden skiff. So we just moved to town. Oh, he king crab fished in winter, too, and that was good. He did the winter fishing. I didn't like it, but he did.

AG: What would you do in the winter?

VA: I stayed home with the kids. I was like, I wanted to and then when my son went to kindergarten I went to college. I was like, "I'm going to be bored at home." So and it worked 'cause he started school like eight-thirty, nine in the morning [...] and he was done like noon. So I did my classes through there. It was good and I demanded I'd be home at three o'clock any other job. I was lucky. I got it. Until Trista, the youngest one, graduated, then I had to start working full time.

AG: Did you end up graduating from college.

VA: No.

AG: Where did you work mostly?

VA: At the local tribe here.

AG: For Sun'aq?

VA: Yeah. I've worked for five years for Koniag and then I did a little bit of like a bounce back and forth like a Kelly Girl between KANA-Koniag, KANA-Koniag. Just when somebody needed somebody. And then finally Margaret [Roberts?] asked me to go to work. I've been there ever since.

AG: And what sort of work do you do for them?

VA: It started off the normal, answering the phone. It worked to all the way to finance director. I've even filled in a couple times as the CEO when they were finding a new one, but yeah it was good.

AG: How was it to balance having a normal kind of work in the winter, but then having summers out at Chief Cove? Did you find that your employers were okay with that?

VA: Yeah, they were.

AG: Okay.

VA: Surprisingly, because I think they hired me knowing I'd be going every summer. It was good.

AG: What would you do to prepare for a summer?

VA: Start early. In the beginning we would fly to Anchorage to grocery shop 'cause we could ship a box of groceries for five bucks, I think. So we would do all our grocery shopping in Anchorage and just ship it directly to Larsen Bay. So we didn't have that big thing, but the rest is just packing and getting ready. I don't know. I never thought about what I did, I guess. Just normal, packing to leave for the summer. Buttoning up the house I think was the hard thing to do 'cause your plants and your everything.

AG: When would you try to make it out there by?

VA: Gary would go out in the middle of June-or middle of May- and then I would follow soon as school was out.

AG: And how did you get out there?

VA: By skiff or plane and sometimes would just go fly to Larsen Bay and take skiff from there.

AG: Were there some scary times trying to make it out?

VA: Oh yeah. We had some even 'cause in the beginning we didn't even have a banya and we used to go in once a week to Larsen Bay to have a banya and one time we were going back home and it was dark and so I had to go up in the bow with David to keep the bow from flipping. Yeah, there was some scary, scary rides. So we eventually built a banya. That was nice.

AG: An important improvement.

VA: Yeah it was. Yeah. And then we built a good big warehouse 'cause we use to get a lot of company, town company. And we had an apartment thing [...] just a bed where company could stay. And we had left Park's that year, or were leaving, and we had bought our whole winter supplies of groceries. All the staples. All our clothes. All our pictures. Everything we owned and Gary was lighting the stove and it spread and it burnt the old warehouse down. That was the end of our warehouse. Never rebuilt it. 'Cause I remember we thought it was going to spread to the cabin, too, and he was like, "Well, go in there and take the important things," and I stood in the middle and I was like, "What's important?" So I just, I took David. I just took him down the beach and I was just like trying to protect them so they didn't have to see it and they were packing water from the ocean, but it was low tide and it's not something... Even the neighbors came down and helped. There was one set of fishermen that lived there by us. So after that we put a banya where the warehouse was.

AG: Did the fire spread to the cabin?

VA: Uh-uh. Pretty close though.

AG: Did you lose a lot in the warehouse?

VA: Yeah, a lot. Lot, you know, extra fishing gear. Everything. All the winter supplies, our clothes, everything.

AG: What did you do?

VA: We came to town. Started over. 'Cause we had already resigned from being winter watchmen at Park's.

AG: Were you happy with your decision, regardless, to resign?

VA: Uh-huh. Yeah. 'Cause I was not going to send me my kids away.

AG: What was it like living out there those winters?

VA: It wasn't...I can't say it was boring 'cause I don't remember being bored. I did hand stuff. There was always somebody coming from Larsen Bay to visit and they would go hunting seals 'cause they got three dollars a nose.

AG: Why? Why were they...?

VA: There was so many of them. Then that's all they kept was the nose.

AG: To prove as a bounty?

VA: Uh-huh. Yeah.

AG: And so they wouldn't keep the fur to make anything from it?

VA: No.

AG: Did you eat the seal?

VA: No. Growing up with Dora, she ate seal, but she never... I guess it's 'cause she didn't soak it good [...] people say it was always strong. And I couldn't get past the smell. My brother ate it though. He was younger.

AG: So you'd have people visit from Larsen Bay who were seal hunting and just to stop by.

VA: Uh-hum. Have coffee. Have dinner. Go home. Come back. Yeah. And sometimes they'd overnight.

AG: How did you communicate back before... I don't know if you had CB radios or if it was just if there was a mail boat that came in?

VA: No. Mom had the mail boat, we didn't. After that we had VHF that we could talk to people in Larsen Bay with. Even at Chief Cove we had one. So that was our form of [...] communication besides listening to the radio.

AG:[...] Did you have some sort of annual traditions maybe out at Chief Cove or elsewhere in Uyak?

VA: Just the kids' birthday. It seemed like everybody gathered at our camp. Other than that, no. Other than kissing the first fish and letting it go.

AG: The first one in the net?

VA: Um-huh. Or first one that we picked.

AG: The lucky fish.

VA: Yeah. Yeah. No, no other traditions that I can remember.

AG: How many crew did you usually have?

VA: It was just us. I fished right alongside him. I think the kids grew up in a Blazo box in the bow if they were small. Otherwise, they'd just sit in the bow. Probably is boring for them, but they never complained.

AG: So it was you two and the children and how many nets?



Chief Cove in August of 2015. P-1000-7-337.

VA: Two nets.

AG: Could you maybe describe a day in the life of Chief Cove?

VA: Gary was morning person so he would get up like five in the morning, fix his pot of coffee, drink it, then he would leave. Go pick the net, two nets or one either-or and then he would come back and I would have breakfast ready for him and that usually was like nine o'clock. And then it all depended how fishy. You'd go out maybe one, two o'clock, pick the nets again. We both would, and then in between that pick I'd start dinner. Eat dinner and we'd go out and pick again. Sometimes we were out there from six in the morning till twelve o'clock at night. When [...] it got really fishy he'd just come in and grab a sandwich and go. Just over and over.

AG: I am wondering, how did it get its name, Chief Cove?

VA: Chief Point Pete. I think it was Millmoth was his last name, that lived there and they called him, that's all I know, Chief Point Pete. I'm not sure other than that.

AG: Did he have the site before Lloyd Swan then? Or what do you know of the history of the place.

VA: He lived out there. And Lloyd Swan fished out there every summer and he was old when we met him. He had a son in Seattle. I wish we had done what his son did. His son, or Lloyd Swan,

wrote down the weather, how many fish he caught, every single day and we always said we'd do it and we never did and now I wish we had.

AG: To see the millions of fish that had been caught in your nets, huh?

VA: Yeah, 'cause when I was pregnant with David, Gary came up and fished. Oh, after the tidal wave we both lost our jobs here. I was working in the office at Naughton's Bakery and he was working downstairs and it washed out. So we moved to Seattle and [...] I think that lasted all of four years 'cause we would come up the highway with the kids. The one year when I was pregnant with David he made me go back down there and he fished alone and one day he picked five thousand fish in one day. It was a lot of fish.

AG: That is. Can you tell me about the impact of the '64 earthquake and tsunami on the west side and at your fish camp?

VA: I just know that we built our cabin like twenty feet back from the high water mark and when we went back out that next spring it was right at the front of our cabin. High tides we'd get water underneath. And that's still about the way it is now. [...] as far as purse seining, I know that Tommy Nelson, he had fished and he was the top, top of the island fisherman. He claims out of Chief Cove the fish started running totally opposite, he said, 'cause he would have to set different than he set before so he says the current changed out there.

AG: Did you find that to be true with the gillnets?

VA: We didn't get as many reds, I know. We don't to this day. It's pretty much a humpy site.

AG: Do you know if there were other changes elsewhere on the west side from the tsunami and the earthquake?

VA: Not really. Just the sinking of the land out there for a bit.

AG: What sort of hazards were there living out there in the summer times?

VA: I don't think there were any other than weather when you're fishing like you had to watch. No, there wasn't that many bear. There wasn't that many sea lions. No. Fire, maybe, that would be one. We got that one.

AG: Were you involved in any accidents or wrecks or anything?

VA: We lost Gary's brother and his sister's fiancé out there. They went out to the outside set and it was a calm day, but it had stormed the day before and it was big flat rollers and they went out to check the net and they came back, grabbed the cameras, said they were going to take pictures of a boat. And they never came back. And we searched forever. Coast Guard searched 'cause we found the skiff. The [...] motor was down. Gary started it up with one crank so we know it wasn't the outboard. So we don't know what happened. And they were both excellent swimmers. So we don't know what happened. We searched forever. They both wore hats. We never found a hat. We never found nothing.

AG: When was that?

VA: Oo. It was probably 70's. Yeah. Somewhere in there. I think that would be the only thing that happened bad thing to us.

AG: That must have been very heartbreaking and stressful.

VA: Yeah. (*Footsteps are heard*). That's my youngest granddaughter. She kind of camps out here whenever she can. (*Giggling*) Yeah, it was stressful. I mean we looked for. We'd fish. We still had to fish, but we'd look every morning every night. We'd look, well, whenever we had a break we'd look, but not a thing.

AG: What do you think happened?

VA: Don't know because it wasn't rough. There was rollers. The outboard was down. No idea. I know there was a big Russian ship out there, but other than that... I think they were going to take pictures of that. Don't know.

AG: Some Russian dragger or something probably?

VA: Um-huh.

AG: Okay. That's really sad. So what sort of relationship did you have with the cannery?

VA: Just a fishermen. Fisherman's relationship.

AG: What's that?

VA: They keep you informed when the tender was going to come. If there was a strike they would let you know when it's over. I don't know, just a general, general public you know, to all fishermen. They were good. I mean we'd go in and we'd have to buy groceries and stuff. They'd send it out on tenders. [...]

AG: What are some of the tenders that you remember?

VA: The *Beaver*. Kathy Drabek. She was on that. *Little Star*. They'd have only one or two. We'd have one for one summer usually. And later on they alternated.

AG: How long did your family have a tender out there, the *Little Star*?

VA: Probably a good ten years maybe. And he just kind of. I don't know. Gary got wrapped up in the things he shouldn't and, I mean, he'd go out for two weeks, like he'd make sixty thousand dollars a trip and he got so he couldn't handle money. [...] 'Cause when I met him I told him. 'Cause I'd grown up and I watched alcohol and I told him I will not go out with anybody that drinks and so he was good for a while. And then, but then when he started making big money, he just got wrapped up. One thing led to another and he ended up being on the boat and I would go to the gillnet site. I got to the point where I was trying to keep the boat's insurance, and I reached a point where, "Okay, I'm going to lose the house." So I was like, "Okay, divorce time." So we ended up getting a divorce.

We eventually lost the boat to his, to his habits because I was in the court house. Judge Madsen says, 'cause everybody knew everybody then. He was like, "You know you could have the boat, too, don't you?" I was like, "No. I just want half and half and I'm out." And so that's what we did, but he eventually just lost it.

AG: But you kept the setnet site?

VA: Um-huh.

AG: So he got the boat and you got the setnet site?

VA: Uh-huh. So that was good. 'Cause then the kids and I would go out. 'Cause Trish was old enough to help. And then pretty soon David was. 'Cause I think we'd split in 1984.

AG: Do you remember any sort of large events that took place that impacted the way that you fished, or life out there? I'm thinking limited entry or even Exxon Valdez?

VA: Limited entry didn't really affect us because [...] he was fishing and he got a permit. If I was smart I would have got one, too, but I didn't at the time. But I got one. I think the Exxon Valdez was the worst. We didn't fish that summer. We could have. Danny and Sammy went out and they made a lot of money, but just renting their skiffs out, but I didn't wanna go. I just chose to stay in because I didn't want the kids to have to breathe the fumes of the. 'Cause at my one site was probably the worst in the whole bay. The oil had gathered and they, people from Larsen Bay, came and cleaned. But I just stayed in town the whole summer.

AG: Did you see it at all?

VA: We saw it the next year. We'd go out and you could still see tar balls all over the beach. Yeah. And the fish weren't as plentiful either. Not at all. They're just now building up to where they were before.

AG: [...] Do you have several sites out there then?

VA: We ended up having two.

AG: Which ones?

VA: No, we had three 'cause he just kind of worked around and found different areas 'cause there wasn't anybody out there. And he had one out in Shelikof that did good, but we sold it after David drowned up there. Didn't wanna go out there anymore. And then we had one on Harvester Island and we fished. We'd bring somebody in to fish that one. And the cabin that we bought burnt down so we just kind of sold that to Fields. [...] So we ended up fishing just two.

AG: So you had the Chief Cove, Harvester Island, and then one on Shelikof?

VA: Yeah.

AG: What was the one on Shelikof called?

VA: There wasn't a name.

AG: Okay.

VA: It was just we were in Chief Cove. One site was here and the other site was here (*Sound of something moving across paper*). This is inside the bay and this was out on Shelikof. And now it's gillnets all the way down Shelikof anymore.

AG: And do you remember if there were any sort of other events that took place or any sort of strong memories of things that transpired out there that people were concerned about? In politics or with environment? Some memorable occurrences?

VA: Not really. I don't. I can't think of anything.

AG: Are there some years that stick out in your memory more than others?

VA: As far as fishwise?

AG: Yeah, just in general.

VA: Fishwise, yeah. 'Cause I can remember it was close to my last year of fishing. No, it was right before the oil spill. I mean, we were making two hundred thousand a season and I mean you're gettin'...price of fish wasn't that much back then. But yeah. Price of fish I think is going to go down again this year though.

AG: So can you tell me? You started in 1961, correct?

VA: Uh-huh. I didn't go out there the first year.

AG: Okay.

VA: I worked in Larsen Bay Cannery.

AG: So what did you do with the cannery?

VA: I worked up in the can loft and I was on the line that filled the cans, too, or checked the cans. [...] I was pregnant so I didn't go out to camp that year.

AG: Did you have your children in Kodiak?

VA: Uh-huh. Trish was. They were. No, David was born in Edmonds.

AG: So what did you think of cannery work?

VA: It was, didn't bother me. I mean there was a lot of late hours, twelve o'clock, three o'clock in the morning. Start again. I think the only thing I didn't like is I lived in a village and going across the creek you could run into bears. So you had to be really careful. But it didn't bother me. It was a way

to help out the family to make ends meet. It just amazes me now that our local kids won't work in a cannery.

AG: Do you remember some of the people that you worked with at the Larsen Bay cannery?

VA: No, they were all outsiders. No. Oh I remember Padilla. Would've been Dolores Gallagher. She came in as a waitress and I got to be friends with her, but other than that.

AG: She worked at the mess hall?

VA: Yeah, and I lived in the cannery so I didn't associate with the cannery workers. I worked and went home.

AG: Was it a lot of Asian workers at that point?

VA: Yeah, yeah. A lot of locals.

AG: [...] Do you remember any stories that your parents or grandparents used to tell about the canneries?

VA: Uh-uh. 'Cause we weren't allowed when parents were talking. We had to leave the room so.

AG: The secret stories, huh? (*laughter*)

VA: I guess. (*laughter*)

AG: So, [...] in '62 did you say was when you started at Chief Cove? Does that seem accurate?

VA: Probably.

AG: And what was your last season?

VA: When did I quit fishing? Probably twenty years ago. Yeah.

AG: So maybe '62 to around sometime in the early nineties?

VA: Um-huh. Yeah.

AG: Do you go out still?

VA: I went out to visit a week last year was the first time because there's a difference between Trish and Trista. There's twenty years. So I was in town with Trista. And Trish started taking over, but yeah I finally went out last summer and it was boring 'cause I knew I couldn't go to the net. So I was like sitting in the cabin was no fun.

AG: What sort of changes can you see from today to from when you first started?

VA: Fishing? Your cabins are a lot nicer. You have refrigerators. You have electricity. We have a washing machine. It's a lot nicer. Some of the cabins now are just like a home here. Yeah. Quite a bit of difference.

AG: And so many now have internet as well.

VA: Some have phones, I guess. Trish and them. If they go out in the skiff they can sometimes get through to town, but not always. Yeah.

AG: So maybe last question. What do you think is special about the west side of Kodiak? Why is it a special place and what is important to know about it?

VA: I was born there. And I guess I grew up there. So it's kind of special. My whole family has grown up there. Lived there. It's got better weather than Kodiak. It sunshines over there. They've had sunshine while we've been in the rain. They've always said they should've built Kodiak on that side of the island. Nicer.

AG: Great. Anything else that you want to share about your experiences on the west side or with fishing or your family?

VA: Let me so, oh, I did have another bad to do. My son, David, was lighting the banya and he picked up the wrong can and he threw gas in and he got burnt. So I had to get him into town [...]. What was his name? He had a flight. He was centered out of Larsen Bay, but he was going to go on a charter, but he heard me so he canceled. Came and picked up David and we got to town. Got him in the hospital right way. That's the only other big bad thing that happened. And can happened out there.

AG: Was the banya destroyed?

VA: No.

AG: Was David able to make it back for the rest of the season?

VA: Um-huh. Yeah, he had some healing to do, but he was just losing it about the time we got here from pain. 'Cause he ran straight to the ocean and he would never wear... He strictly wore cotton after that. He wouldn't wear anything, anything else [...] 'cause the stuff melted and that's why.

AG: On his hands?

VA: The shirt melted on him.

AG: That's scary.

VA: Um-huh. Yeah.

AG: Were you in close contact with the Coast Guard if you needed to be?

VA: I think I just got on the...figured I was going to charter a plane to bring him in. I didn't even think of the Coast Guard, I guess. Coast Guard came out and searched when Gary's brother, David, drowned. They searched for quite a while. Days.

AG: What was the name of his wife?

VA: David? He wasn't married. He was Gary's younger brother.

AG: He was out with who when they were lost?

VA: He was out with Gary's sister's fiancé.

AG: Oh.

VA: Yeah. (*Speaking to someone else*) Your mom is probably wondering where you are.

[End of Transcription]