Dan Earle

Transcript of an Oral History
Conducted by
Anjuli Grantham
at
Bird Rock, Uyak Bay, Kodiak, Alaska
On August 1, 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 interview subject then had the opportunity to add or retract information. The following transcript is the resulting document. 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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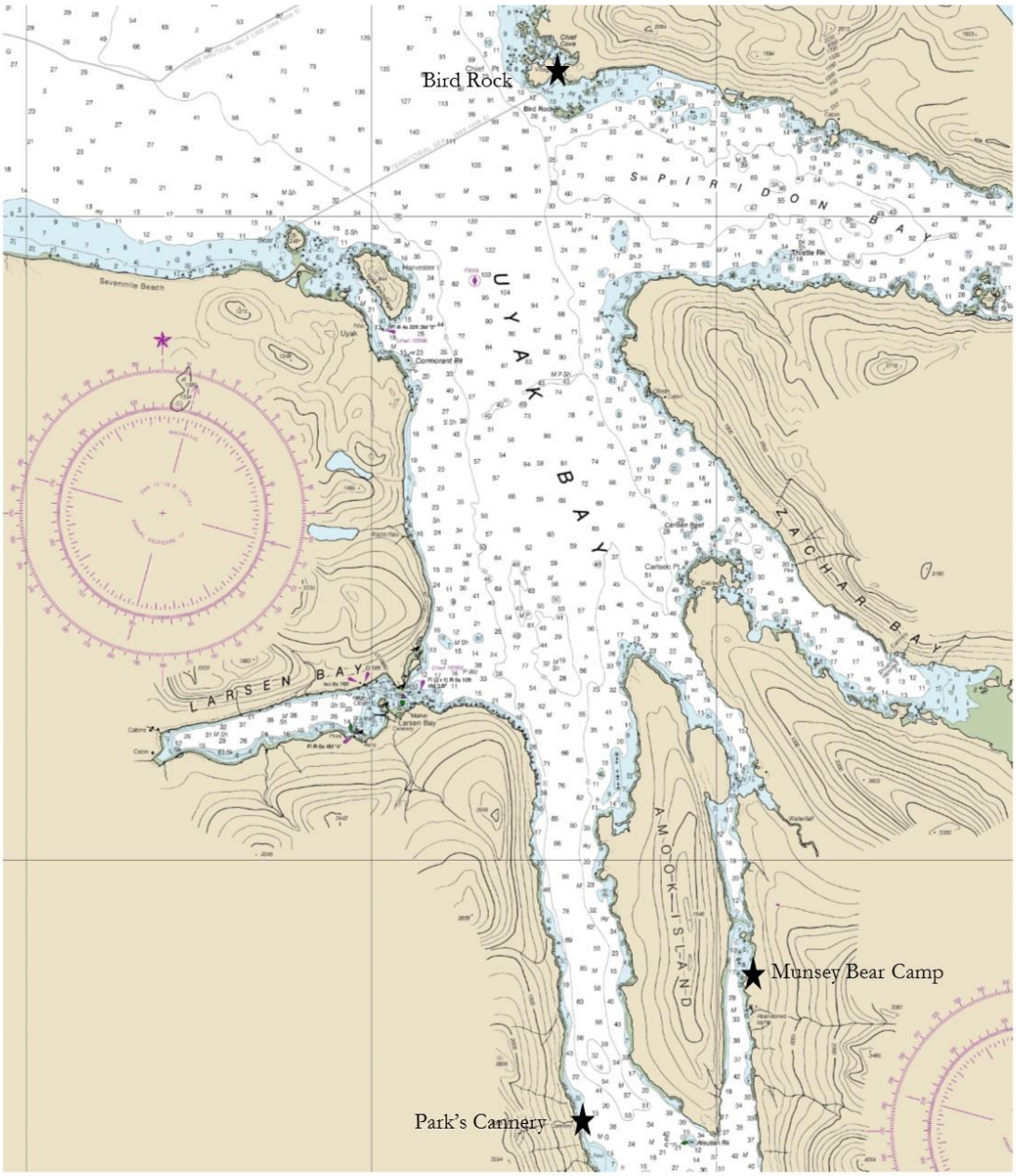
Key Words: Uyak Bay, setnetting, commercial fishing, Uganik Bay, canneries, Larsen Bay

Cover photo: Dan Earle in 1974. P-1012-5.



Select locations within Uyak Bay mentioned in the oral history.

Oral History of Dan Earle

Reeve Aleutian flight in Sand Point, 1969. P-1012-4.

AG: It is August 1, 2015, and I'm here with Dan Earle at Bird Rock within Uyak Bay. This recording is being made as part of the West Side Stories Project. Thank you, Dan, for your time. To begin with, we always start at the same place. Could you tell me when and where you were born and what it was that brought you to Alaska?

DE: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1946. […]. And there was a[n Alaskan] connection because Sandy's sister lived in Anchorage. We both chucked everything and came up here, or we didn't really have anything to chuck. We were determined to get the first jobs that we could get in the bush, so we worked. I worked at a cannery at Sand Point, and Sandy was hired by the Munseys to be a tutor for their kids. They were being home-schooled, though they didn't call it home-schooling in those days. It was a program that originated, actually, in Baltimore. I think it was called the Calvert School. She stayed there, and then when the Munseys left after the bear hunting, they asked us to watch their camp. So we met people in Larsen Bay through the winter. Dora [Aga], she leased her setnet site at that time, so we made arrangements to do that [the following summer.] That's how we got started. We fished in Larsen Bay for three years. Two years for Dora and then one year we leased a site from Pete Peterson […] Clarence Peterson. […] We bought this place in '75.

AG: When was it that you came here or came to Alaska?

DE: 1969.

AG: It was that same year that Sandy then got the job working for the Munseys?

DE: Yes, that fall.

AG: Coming from Baltimore, why did you want to get a job in the bush? What was the allure?

DE: Growing up and looking at *National Geographic* magazines, and always interested in camping and wilderness, and wanted to go someplace that was unspoiled.

AG: Were you influenced by the kind of back-to-the-land movement or kind of the hippy ideology of the period, as well?

DE: Yeah, I would say so. Definitely.

AG: In what ways?

DE: Dropping out. Kind of fed up with the politics, really disgusted. Those were terrible years, the late '60s. All the assassinations and protests and pollution and struggles. That had a big impact.

AG: Which cannery is it that you worked at?

Dora Aga. P-1012-9.

DE: I worked at two canneries at Sand Point. I worked at New England Fish Company and Wakefields.

AG: What was the work like?

DE: (*Laughing*) Repetitious, loud. They had a soundtrack that they played, and it was almost the same music every day, so it was [mentally] punishing with no ear protection. But I met some really fascinating people. I really want to go back to Sand Point someday. It's an interesting place and it's a real energetic community. There's a lot of really successful fishermen there, and there's a mix of Native and Scandinavian. It was just a great experience. I loved being there. Really a nice mix of people. I didn't like Wakefield Fisheries because it was almost like a penal colony. We got jobs [a friend and I] across the way on the spit over at New England Fish Company and that was a completely different experience. We were working outside, we were unloading [boats], it was a loose group of people and it was really nice. [We had a lot of independence.]

AG: Was it segregated quarters?

DE: Yes. Filipino bunk house and then we were in another bunkhouse. Absolutely.

AG: How did you feel about that at the time? I think it was typical, so a lot of people say that it wasn't something that really drew their attention. What did you notice about that?

DE: I remember feeling like there was something wrong with it. Yeah, it didn't seem right. In fact, I never set foot in the Filipino bunkhouse. We would hear stories about, "Oh, you know, you got to be careful of the Filipinos. They all carry knives." We even heard this from a Fish and Game person. I took that sort of thing with a grain of salt, but there really wasn't a lot of mixing at all. I have a neighbor in Seattle who worked in Bristol Bay and it was the same sort of situation there with the Italians. The Italians had their own bunkhouse and they would invite him to eat there, and he loved it because they would bring a lot of food up with them, pasta and stuff. It was interesting fare, more interesting than the cannery fare. Yeah, that was odd. [Anyone who grew up in Baltimore in the '50's was familiar with segregation, so I wasn't shocked by the practice in Alaska. It was the established arrangement and none of us questioned it.]

AG: Was it the same in Larsen Bay when you arrived here?

Johnny Aga at Park's Cannery, 1974. P-1012-15.

DE: I don't know because I didn't work at the cannery. Of course, they had a huge Filipino work force. I think it worked the same way it did in the old days where they had one boss and he would hire the crew. The cannery would pay him and then he would pay the crew whatever, who knows what that was. I don't know how long that system endured, do you?

AG: Through the '80s.

DE: I know when we were at NEFCO, in Uganik, I think, that's when the lawsuit occurred, sometime in the mid-'70s, so that put an end to that. That put an end to the fish company, too, didn't it?

AG: Were you aware of the lawsuit when it was taking place?

DE: Just afterwards, I think. […]

AG: So describe Larsen Bay when you first arrived.

DE: Very, very welcoming. People with a great sense of humor. […] Everybody was interested in and trusting anybody who came in from the Outside, especially if you had any kind of initiative, then they would do whatever they could [to guide you] […]. [There were no roads, no airstrip,] just paths through the village. No TV. Everybody had their individual generator. It was completely different. Of course, Dora and Johnny [Aga] were the greatest. So many people were just really kind and fun to be around, supportive in a real comfortable way. It just came naturally to them. We learned so much about the history and the families. Everybody was very kind. If there were any bad apples there you just avoided them like everybody else did. Dora was an amazing person, [very strong-willed and competent, could do everything — ran her own seiner, delivered babies, stitched up wounds — the ultimate feminist!] When they got TV there, I remember visiting her once. She was

Munsey Bear Camp, 1969. P-1012-20.

always doing something, sitting at the table knitting, preparing fish, making something, or her chainsaw was on the table and she had taken it apart to try to get it to work again. Always working, always working. Always gracious. You would go in there and there was always coffee on. She was knitting or something and she was watching television. And this was a soap opera series, Dallas, one of the first evening soap opera series, and she says, "I love this show. These people are just like Larsen Bay people." (*laughing*). But anyway, it was just we liked it there.

AG: Tell me about your winter as a watchman at the Munsey Bear Camp.

DE: Again, it was like a dream come true. To come to Alaska in the summer and that fall be able to spend a winter in the wilderness, be on our own, it was terrific. We would go to Larsen Bay to get supplies when we needed them. Nobody was around. Occasionally, we'd go to Park's Cannery for the mail plane, once a week or whenever they could make it in, so we met the people over there. There were no other cabins in Amook Pass at the time, so we learned a lot about living like that. The Munseys just left us alone. Occasionally, they'd call us on the radio and ask us something, or if they needed something, or some information about something, but we were there on our own, [and they trusted us.] […]

AG: What were some key lessons that you learned that first winter?

DE: Well, I had boating experience, so that wasn't a big thing. I remember, of course, lessons about the weather, especially the winter weather. I had a really scary trip one time coming from Larsen Bay in a southwest, and so I learned to be more cautious than I would be in Chesapeake Bay. I can't remember any specific lessons. It was just nice knowing how to work the equipment that was there, how to keep the stoves going, how to keep the generators going, which is not a big deal. We had lots and lots of time to read and travel, go beachcombing, whatever we wanted to do. There wasn't really any maintenance there.

AG: And then it was the next summer that you started setnetting?

DE: I think so. Yeah, I think so.

AG: Tell me about this first season of setnetting.

DE: Oh my gosh. Well, Dora and Johnny were feuding […], so she was in a vile mood when we got there. We didn't know anything about fishing, about setnetting, and so I'd say, "Dora, […] when are you going to show us what we need to know and what we need? Where's the equipment?" or whatever. And she would just say, "Aww, we'll talk about dat later." She was a little [intimidating], too. Finally, well she didn't want us to use her anchors because we might lose them, so she told me to make these anchors, and they call them kellicks. You take a 55-gallon drum and you cut holes in it

Eddie Paakkanen. P-1012-18.

and fill it up with rocks and stick a long piece of wood through it, so it acts as an immensely heavy anchor. You have to float it off of the beach. You put your skiff over top of it, [tie it off], and you wait for the tide to come up and you lift it up off the beach. The tide lifts it up off the beach. You tow it very carefully to where you want to set it and you, cut a line and it [drops to the bottom]. I made these anchors using a cold chisel and a hammer. […] So you're, banging, banging, banging with this cold chisel. Anyway, we got those done and we wanted to set the anchors, "Aww, I don't have time for dat now." Finally I say, "Look Dora, we're here to go fishing. We got here, we need to go fishing." So she took us out and showed us how to set the anchors. The first time we set the net she took us out. […] She was in one skiff. We were in another [skiff] setting the net and she was giving us instructions. "Don't get the leads over the corks! Don't get the leads over the corks!" We set the net and she said, "Now I divorce you," so we were on our own. […] Her brother Eddie [Paakkanen] was the next site down. […] Everybody knew Eddie. He […] would come and see us and ask how we were doing and laugh and, "Oh yeah, she's crazy. Don't pay no attention to her," or something like that, and she'd say the same thing about him (laughing). But we […] didn't know what the hell we were doing, so we just made all kinds of mistakes. We didn't have a running line, and Dora's beach was really shallow so the skiff would be dry in the morning. We'd have to wait to get out to the net, which was just across the way. We didn't really know anything. One time a boat ran over the net. We went out there, "What do we do now?" I really wanted to learn (talking to someone else in the room) how to mend, of course, because the nets were a mess. She could mend but she couldn't really transmit that information to me, so I had no idea when she was finished [explaining] how to mend. The key to mending is [properly] cutting out the hole and starting the mend. I didn't have any idea. I'd just cut out a big square hole and try to mend something together that way, so it was a harsh learning experience. […] Some people would say things and we would take it with a grain of salt because of the source, "Aww, you don't have to worry about those holes. The fish like holes." It was a great experience though. We were enjoying ourselves. We lived right on

Inside Jake Laktonen's shop. P-1012-11.

New Laktonen skiff, 1978. P-1012-8.

Laktonen skiff. P-1012-6.

the beach at her place in this little shack, just down from her place, and there was always something going on, people coming and going all the time, […] and, of course, we knew some people in the village. There were people in the cannery at that time. There was all college kids working at the cannery, so there were a lot interesting people there. Alaska Packers owned it at the time. You'd see […] the tenders coming and going, and they had the boat ways- [were still operating at the cannery at that time.] The beach gang actually launched the boats and hauled the boats out at the end of the season. It was all this activity. It was fascinating.

AG: What sort of, beyond these, what did you call it, the anchors?

DE: Kellick.

AG: What other materials and gear was it that you were working with?

Picking fish in 1978. P-1012-16.

DE: [All of the gear belonged to Dora.] We had a wooden skiff, one of the Jake Laktonen skiffs, an old one, and we had an 18-horse Evinrude outboard that didn't have a [properly] working lower unit. [...] The pull cord was gone, so you'd have to take the cover off, wrap a cord around the flywheel and start it. And it was in forward all the time. It was always in forward, so you had to get the thing aimed, get the throttle just right, start it, and take off. So there was that. It was dependable though. It would start. What else did we have? [A set of oars.] I don't even remember racking the net. We must have racked the net. Yeah, we did.

AG: What's that?

DE: Taking the net out of the skiff during the closure and putting it on a rack and mending it. We must have done that but I don't remember. […] I think we had just one net, and the anchor lines were really small stuff. The setlines, the main setline, the running line was made out of halibut ground line, really small stuff.

AG: Could you describe a Jake Laktonen skiff?

DE: Sure. Everybody had one. They were flat-bottomed with a nice rocker, a nice rise in the bow, [and flared sides]. You could get [them built in plywood or planked in fir.] The material was really nice. I don't know if it was old-growth, but it was tight-grained [fir] if he wasn't using plywood. […] When we bought this place there were two Laktonen skiffs, and then we had him build one, and we were so proud of that skiff. It was so beautiful. […] We painted a nice blue paint job. Anyway, they were just really handy skiffs and you felt safe in them. […] Out here, southwest [winds] could get really nasty, so you could get in some big water in those. Could be scary at times. Anyway, they were great skiffs.

AG: He was a local guy?

DE: Yeah. You've never heard of him?

AG: I have. I'm curious, did he work for the cannery or it was his own boat?

DE: Both. The skiffs that he made, that was his own business, but he worked as a shipwright at the cannery on their [APA] fleet because they had many wooden boats at the time that they leased to their fishermen. He could do all that stuff. [He had all the skills of a shipwright — spiling, planking, framing, caulking.]

(*Brief interruption to move to a quieter location).*

AG: Tell me about your relationship to the cannery in the early days.

DE: We weren't fishing for APA. We were fishing for Park's Cannery. Just like any relationship with the cannery, if you're a setnet site, your contact is the tenders so that's the only person you really have [daily] contact with. […] I think the first year our tender was the *Voyager*, Bill Torsen from Kodiak. A beautiful Hansen- built boat. You got picked up once a day, no icing, pretty simple.

AG: Would they deliver food at that point or any supplies?

DE: Yeah, they would, although I think we bought most of our supplies from the store in Larsen Bay. I don't really remember getting a whole lot of stuff from the tender like we do now. Sandy might remember that.

AG: Do you know why was it you sold your fish to Park's instead of APA?

DE: It was because of Dora that was her market. We were fishing her site, so we weren't really independent. We couldn't say. Well, we might have been able to say that, but we just went along with that program.

AG: How was the fishing?

DE: Oh, it was terrible. It was really slow in the early '70s. Really slow. The first year I think we made [$2,000. The share arrangement was a traditional 60/40 split.] We didn't have a whole lot of needs so it seemed like a lot. Then we fished the following year [at Dora's] and then went to Pete's site, which was just out a ways from Larsen Bay. I think we did that because— we still had great relations with Dora, I think it was because we thought it was a better opportunity and we would catch more fish, but it was a terrible year again. I think […] one of those years, '73 or '74, we only had 18 total days of fishing.

AG: What was the relationship back in the '70s that west side fishermen, or you, had with management, with biologists and Fish and Game?

DE: It used to drive me crazy because I came here from Chesapeake Bay and I saw what could happen to the fisheries. I […] could see the impact that sport fishing had on commercial fishing. So when we came here, most people said, "Oh, they should just leave it open. In the old days they just left it open and there were plenty of fish. They should just leave it open." They hated Fish and Game. From what I could see, Fish and Game was managing one of the best managed fisheries in the world, I thought. […] Maybe you'd get a little frustrated when they would close it, but I don't remember ever thinking that these people were idiots and didn't know what they were doing. The attitude was then, "Leave it open. It's the Wild West. Just let us do whatever we want to do."

AG: Tell me, what was Dora's site called? Did she have a name for it where you fished?

DE: She didn't, no.

AG: The next site that you fished at, did it have a name or does it correspond to a place today?

DE: Well, it didn't have a name either, but usually people would just name a site because they needed a handle for their, in those days, it was a CB's. We didn't even have a CB until we came out here, so neither of those sites had names. The tender just knew you were there and they'd come by and pick fish up. When you were coming out of Larsen Bay today, you would see on your left side as you left Larsen Bay, you'd see a little red cabin that's on a really steep hill, or on the beach with a really steep hill behind it. That was Pete's site. No, it didn't have a name.

AG: What was it that made you decide that commercial fishing is what you would end up doing in the summer? Just after these first couple of years, how did you decide to buy in and invest and become a fisherman?

DE: Because we loved the independent lifestyle and we loved the area and we loved the fish. When you catch your first salmon, every year it's like a miracle, this perfect, silvery-blue red salmon. We liked working with our hands. It was just the simplicity of it and the fact that we're working outside. It wasn't really a decision; it was just something we kept doing. […] We more or less fell into it [by

inclination] and liked it a lot. […] My grandfather [was a Chesapeake Bay waterman]. […] My father [was a Merchant Mariner before and during WW ll], and I always just loved working on the water or liked being on the water.

AG: What year was it that you came out here to Bird Rock?

DE: '75. We bought the place in '74 and we didn't fish. I worked on the tender that summer because we knew it was going to be a terrible season. '75 was the first year we fished it.

AG: What brought you to decide you were going to buy into the fishery? Just the lifestyle, or what was the—?

DE: We didn't have any better ideas (*laughing*), but yeah, the lifestyle and the opportunity to have our own place. Also, people were getting out of the fishery at that time so the prices were really low, and we had extremely generous terms from the people we bought the site from, the Axelsons, really nice people. We knew the family. We knew the [sons, Clifford and John], because they fished and they worked at the Park's Cannery in the spring like we did, so we met them, Clifford and John. Their dad, [Wayne, had been a superintendent at Metlakatla and Alitak, and their grandfather had been in Yakutat for many years as a missionary, so they had deep roots in Alaska].

AG: What did you do in the cannery in the spring?

DE: […] Well, we winter watched. We ended up winter watching at Park's. […] When the crew showed up, […] Sandy worked in the mess hall for a while, and then I worked unloading tenders. When the tenders would first come up and get unloaded, I remember running a forklift, just general kind of dock work. […] Then we would go to Larsen Bay and work on our gear or come out here and work on our gear and go fishing.

AG: What do you know about the history of Chief Point and this area before you and Sandy purchased it?

DE: […] [The Naumoff's were the first family here] We knew Gary and Virginia [Abston] were here, of course, they'd been here for several years. I think they started fishing in the mid '60s […]. They bought the site from a guy named [Lloyd] Swan, so we knew they were here. We knew […] the names of the people who lived here before, we just didn't know anything about them. We bought it from Axelsons. The Axelsons bought it from the Halls, in town. The Halls just had it for a short time. [Before that], a couple named Slayton that worked here. He was a bootlegger. Then the Corbetts. The only thing we knew about them was because we found things in the attic here, magazines that they had subscribed to, [dating from 1929]. We heard that she had been a school teacher in Seldovia and didn't really know anything about him. I found out later that he had fished in Bristol Bay, and when they fished here they stayed here year round. Slaytons may have stayed here year round, too.

AG: So as far as you know, how long have people been setnetting or commercial fishing from this spot?

DE: I would just have to guess. […] [PAF owned a trap here that was active from the '30's until statehood, and based on the dates of newspapers and magazines we've found, I'd have to assume that the Corbetts were fishing here in the '30's.]

AG: So this whole time when you started fishing here, were you continuing to sell your fish to Park's? When did that transition, your market?

Park's Cannery, 1973. P-1012-3.

Winter house at Park's Cannery, 1973. P-1012-26

DE: We sold to Park's for quite a while, and then Park's went out of business and Larsen Bay went through several transitions. We sold to APS out of Kodiak for a couple of years, and then we sold to […] [the several separate owners of] the Larsen Bay […] [cannery, currently Icicle Seafoods.]

AG: Have you sensed any kind change in the relationship between fishermen and Uyak and the cannery or the market?

DE: Well, that's a pretty broad question, so it's difficult for me answer. […] There's price and service. If the price is good, you can complain about the service if it's not good. And if the service is great and the price is lousy, you complain about the price. So it's one or the other. The service is generally good, generally, depending on which setnet run you're on. Of course, the price this year is terribly, terribly depressing. You have to catch twice as many fish to make the same amount of money you made last year. It's very discouraging.

AG: So it sounds like you would fish in the summer and then find winter watching opportunities in the winter. Was that your—

DE: In the early days.

AG: Could you describe what it was like to be a winter watchman at the Park's Cannery?

DE: Sure. Again it was like the Munsey's Bear Camp, isolated. You just had to stay in touch with the people in town. You listen to the radio schedule [on 2450], single sideband. Every morning and evening there'd be a radio schedule, so they'd call you, more or less just check in, listen to the other people around the island checking into their people in town. We'd hear Bill Pinell, who was always entertaining. [Peggy Dyson had her schedule with the boats on 2450 and Henry Zabski was the RCA operator at that time. We kept] the place maintained, [serviced the generator, couldn't get away too often since we had to keep a close eye on the place.] We built a banya one year there, that was fun, at Park's. The mail plane would come once a week. Boats would tie up at the dock so we'd get visits from people who were mostly draggers in those days [who] were shrimping in the bay. Sometimes duck hunters would come from town and stay at the cannery. That was kind of a pain in the neck because they'd shoot all these ducks and they wouldn't […] want to mess with them and so they'd say, "Oh, you want some ducks?" (*laughing*) […] Then people from Larsen Bay would come up sometimes. The cannery kept a store there, so we would sell things when people showed up. The weather could get really wild, of course, and there was an oil stove. The line wasn't insulated so when it got really cold the oil would get syrupy and the stove would go out. [The water line from the reservoir would freeze up most

winters, so we'd pack water from a creek near the cannery.] But generally, it was a pretty comfortable place. Our closest neighbors were [Dick and Sue Rohrer, and their infant son, Dan] who were watching [Munsey's Camp at that time. Dick was running a trapline that winter.]

AG: How many years did you do that?

DE: We did two, and then skipped one and did another one.

AG: When was that?

DE: It would have been the mid '70s. I think the last place we stayed at was Uganik and that was '75. So it was '72 through '75, something like that.

AG: Could you describe some of the characters in the bay in the '70s, in Uyak? Beyond those that were in the village?

DE: There weren't really many people in the bay other than in the village. There was Lars Larsen, who lived on Amook Island. He was definitely a character. Eddie [Paakkanen] wasn't really in the village. He was at Deadman's Point, but he would come to the village and was close to the village. Eddie was an amazing person, hard to describe. Never met anybody like him, [full of energy] and never expect to meet anybody like him. […] Eddie had a famous laugh [and he'd laugh at anything, even his own misfortune]. I'm sure you've heard of that. He was a good friend, a really good friend. But boy, if you crossed him he would never forget it. (*laughing*) He had these great expressions. The one I really loved was when somebody died, he wasn't very sentimental. In fact, a lot of people in Larsen Bay aren't sentimental about death because, you know, it occurs. But he would say, "Yep, he quit fishing all togedder." And then, if he was unhappy with somebody he'd say, "I don't wish 'em any harm but I hope they lose everyting they got." But Lars Larsen was this old Norwegian guy. He was from Stavanger, in Norway. Real thick accent. Lived by himself. He had four dogs, I think, and he setnetted over there [at Amook]. I don't know how long he'd been around, but […] Dora was friendly to him. He would stop by Dora's so we would see him. He always wore Carharrt coveralls, [hip boots], and a baseball cap, the insulated type coveralls. Even in the summertime I think he had those on. So he would come over in his skiff and visit Dora. One time his skiff started to go dry when he was getting ready to leave, so I went down and helped him, or I was trying to help him, push it down. Apparently, I did something wrong. You know, Norwegians have their way of doing things and that's the way you do things. Apparently, I did something wrong and he said, "Arrr, you're a goddamned Montana sheep farmer." (*laughing*) […] [He kept a batch going], so he would get frisky and […] show up at the cannery [and try to get one of the girls there] to come over to his place, help him fish and stay with him. [He would still have his coveralls on but you] knew when he was courting because he'd have a colorful scarf around his neck, like a woman's scarf, pink. So that was his dress-up outfit. […] He lived in this tiny, tiny low cabin, probably maybe twenty feet by ten feet. Tough old guy. […]

AG: How did limited entry impact the situation in Uyak, or maybe impact you and Sandy?

DE: Well, it impacted us in a good way because we had fished long enough that we qualified for permits. It's a completely different situation today. If somebody young wants to get into it they have to have a lot of cash.

AG: Did you see any long term impacts?

DE: You mean in setnetting or in salmon fishing?

AG: Um-huh. Or in Uyak and Larsen Bay?

Port O'Brien, Uganik, 1975. P-1012-12.

DE: I'm trying to think. Since we've been here, it's been practically the same people. So, I think the only thing it encouraged is for families to keep their permits and stay in the fishery. I'm sure it created a lot of stability. As a management tool, people argue differently, but it was a good management tool to limit the number of people who can be in the fishery. It's certainly advantageous for those of us who are already in it.

AG: What was it that brought you to Uganik?

DE: Again, we were footloose and it was a winter watching job, and we […] weren't fed up with winter watching yet, and so again it was an adventure to go to some place different. […]

AG: What did you uncover in Uganik?

[…]

DE: [There's no village, so there wasn't the sense of community. It was an area of separate cabins with a variety of contrasting residents. Our nearest neighbors were Annie and Andy Anderson, who stayed at the old herring plant a half mile down the beach. Everyone called Andy "Pagook," Alutiq for someone who forages or scrounges. I saw a definition recently that it's "to borrow with no intention of returning." They shared their house with Al Truitt. He was a bachelor, very tidy, quiet and self-contained - - a careful listener. He did fancy knot work and made me a knife sheath out of seine twine. The old herring plant buildings were powered by a Pelton wheel that was driven by a waterfall at the site. Fred Sullivan lived across from Sally Island. He was proud of the "self-flushing" outhouse that he'd built over a creek there. He was originally from Sanak, which he referred to as the "Island of Love." I never asked for details. He'd been the watchman at Uganik. Then there were Nan and Daniel Boone Reed, at Village Islands. If Alaskan reality TV had existed in those days, they would have been stars. They kept a huge garden and root cellar and ate lots of wild food, re-cycled everything. He wore a pair of mittens that he'd made from the fur of a beloved dog that had died. Al Owen and his family had a place on the other side of the Bay. He was a former State legislator, a very genteel kind of guy. I think they had operated a hand pack cannery at one time over there. They were in and out, not full-time residents.] And who else? Andy Pelto. […] He lived over on Uganik Island, and his skiff had gotten smashed up in a storm. He salvaged what he could from it, and then he beachcombed some other stuff and he repaired the sides. So it was a few of the original frames that he replaced with some 2x4's and a little bit of plywood that he repaired the sides. He showed up at the cannery in the wintertime, of course, all the way from Uganik Island, which was a long haul in the wintertime. And the skiff had, I swear, the sides of it were probably no more than fourteen inches high, if that. And you just wondered, "What is he doing?" He came and bought some stuff at the store and I noticed he had this fresh scar on his

Bird Rock in 1995. P-1012-22.

nose, and I asked him what happened. He said, "Oh, I was out running my trap line and climbing up this slate bank and I slipped and cut my nose. I just got home and I sewed it up with some dental floss and it was alright." And I thought, "What is he doing with dental floss?" I don't think he had a tooth in his head. He was kind of primitive. One of those loners. Like a Lars Larson guy. Later, of course, we heard about the murder and who knows. I can see where Fred Sullivan may have provoked somebody, but who knows. They were boozing, I guess.

AG: So you sensed a difference definitely between Uyak and Uganik?

DE: Oh yeah.

AG: Do you have any theories as to why the bays are different?

DE: (*Laughing*) No, I wish I did. […]

AG: Were there any similar stories for Uyak? You think of the Wild West side, people usually think of Uganik.

DE: […][If an outsider came here and spent much time, I'm sure they'd come away with an earful of wild tales about Uyak Bay.]

AG: Okay. So you had spent the one [winter] as the winter watchman at Uganik. Was there any sort of difference that you could sense between the Park's operation and the Uganik operation as far as the canneries go?

DE: Well, Uganik was vast. It was a bigger operation, but we didn't really have anything to do with the management at all. We were just watching the place. […]

AG: How did things change when the Park's Cannery closed down?

DE: Well, people just found other markets. It closed down, but there was always somebody staying there, of course. It changed hands. I know there was a Korean outfit that owned it. I don't really know what their plans were but it never happened. […] Fishermen are flexible. As long as there's a market they're gonna find it. But I think people would talk about the superintendent. They were very fond of different people who had been at Park's, so there was that sense of loyalty. We'd just hear these names. We didn't know the people. [Frank McConaghy was a favorite. He may have been at Zachar Bay, not Park's.]

AG: Did you participate in any of the strikes that have taken place over the years?

DE: No. […] [There is a feeling locally that seiners can go to another area to fish and possibly make up for any time lost during a strike, while setnetters aren't mobile if this area is shut down after a strike is settled. Also, seiners can catch a lot more fish in a lot less time.]

AG: Do you think that fishing in any way has impacted your politics or your involvement in management or anything along those lines?

DE: No, I'm not involved. [I read the journals and try to stay informed.] We live in Seattle, so we're not in Kodiak in the wintertime and we're not involved in any of the fish politics, although I've been a UFA [United Fishermen's Association] member for years. I'm really disappointed that more people aren't joining UFA. Fishermen are really independent and not organized, so I definitely believe in fishermen's organizations. I believe in supporting them. UFA is the biggest and it's an umbrella group for a whole bunch of smaller organizations, so I think more fishermen should join. There's only 400 and some people statewide who are UFA members and it's a great organization. They were the first to have a lobbyist in Washington, DC. Some people have a beef with UFA, and I'm not really sure what it is. I think it's because of the leadership or some peripheral issue, some specific issue, but generally they're there for the fishermen.

AG: Have you seen the number of setnet operations in Uyak grow or shrink or remain stable over the years from when you first started, and do you have any speculation as to any changes, why they might have taken place?

DE: No. Stability is the word. It's the same families for years and years. We were newcomers back when we started fishing, and now we've been doing it for forty years. I think the most recent, the Bassetts, have been here for at least [ten] years. So yeah, very stable. Same people fishing when we first started. The Franciscos, the Fields, of course, Trish [Cox], her family, like I say, have been here since the '60s.

AG: Why is that?

DE: It's a good life. […] Even the people who aren't fishing anymore, they have their kids, their grandkids there fishing. They still want to be there. The Franciscos are here (*indecipherable*). The Haugheys. [Danelskis.] So it's fabulous that it goes back to tradition. It's a great life. Well, look at Weston [Fields]. Weston travels all over the place and he still comes back here every year. Duncan and Wallace [Fields] still come back here every year. It's part of […] who they are. We feel the same way. I feel like my dream retirement would be to be able to come here, have somebody else fish this site, and just do other things. Build things and visit and, beachcomb and fish.

AG: What do you do in the winter?

Exxon Valdez beach cleanup, 1989. P-1012-9.

DE: I do marine carpentry.

AG: Does that mean boat building?

DE: Not building, mostly repair. There aren't many wooden boats being built anymore. Mostly repair, restoration, that sort of thing. And not exclusively. I do also some finish work, too, just regular carpentry finish work.

AG: How did you start in that line of work?

DE: They have a great [boat building] program at Seattle Central Community College […], part of their wood construction program that also offers courses in cabinet making and house construction […]. [Like most fishermen, I was handy with tools, so this program refined a lot of those skills].

AG: So really your summertime is in boats and your wintertime is mending boats?

DE: Yes, thank goodness for rich people who have classic wooden boats.

AG: Yeah. Could you tell me about your experience out here, if you were out here, in 1989 with the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill?

DE: I wish I had kept a journal from that year because it was crazy, and I was so naive. I thought that we would fish because we didn't really see that much oil in the water, but they had that zero tolerance policy. [Later, when the oil collected on the beaches, you could see the extent of the damage.] So we just came here and we were preparing to fish. So when it came time to— I can't remember when the decision came that we weren't going to fish, but I decided to build an addition. I built this addition on the house, and the crew worked on beach cleanup and we leased one of our skiffs [to VECO]. So people would come and visit, people who we knew from the village who were working at the various places cleaning up, and they would tell us what they were doing. I remember [a local seiner who] stopped by one time and they [VECO] had leased his boat, too. I wasn't really sure what he was doing and he wasn't sure either, but he said, "You know, I'm gonna have to go into therapy after this. I have so much guilt about this, what's going on here, [how much they're paying me]." (*laughing*) I mean he was saying it in a lighthearted way. [It was an unreal, unfamiliar situation.] Helicopters flying over all the time. Crews on the beaches. I felt like if I had been shrewd, we would have maximized every possibility to milk it for what it was worth, but I just kind of stayed here and worked on [my house project] and fiddled around. The crew worked, like I say, on the cleanup. But it was not a pleasant summer. And I can remember they held a meeting, the people who managed VECO showed up, and they held this meeting in Larsen Bay. This was towards the end of the summer and people were still doing clean up, although there wasn't a whole lot to clean up. It was pretty much over. They brought everybody together and they said, "It looks like things are pretty much cleaned up here, and we decided that we're going to suspend operations here in a couple of weeks." And everybody just flipped, there was an uproar, "Oh no, you can't do that. There's oil out here everywhere!" […] People were making good money and they didn't want that thing to end. So then the VECO people said, "Okay, I guess what I'm hearing is that you think you

need more time to clean up. Well, we'll make it three weeks." […] [So that was their strategy, to make everyone feel that they were generously giving them an extra week of work.]

AG: Beyond Exxon and limited entry, what are some other events or shifts that have been noticeable or can kind of be used as marking points as your time out here?

DE: Well, I think just a recent thing is that I'm concerned about the local pink runs. I don't know what's going on with the pinks. We haven't had a decent pink year for several years, and this year is looking like last year when it was just a smattering of pinks. There would be a little shot and then nothing, and then a little shot and nothing. Mostly nothing. Our numbers were just horrendous. When we first started fishing, pinks were the bread and butter fish, and people were happy to pick lots of pinks. We were getting thirty-some cents a pound back in the '70s and '80s. You could put in a good season with those prices, and now the prices are half that. Last year they were okay. So I don't know what's going on with the pinks. On the positive side, it seems like that fall sockeye Karluk run is doing really well. That's what saved our butts last year, and it looks like it's strong this year, too. So, I don't know. You see, in Prince William Sound they're having a huge pink run, and those are hatchery fish. I don't know what's going on with Kitoi, but Southeast, also hatcheries, they are predicting a really strong run there, so I always wonder about what's going on with competition out in the ocean with the pinks. If the hatchery fish are making it and the natural runs aren't, I don't know. I don't know. I was talking to a seiner earlier and he said they were getting a lot of really small pinks gilling in their seines. So I feel a little bit of trepidation about global warming, things that we don't have any control over. [We've been seeing lots of jumpers, but not enough of them ending up in our nets, so that's an indication of smaller fish slipping through. Everyone's thinking about going back to smaller gear next summer, but if the pink price stays low, it may not be worth it.]

AG: What about changes within Larsen Bay?

DE: You mean in the village, or—

AG: Um-huh.

DE: […] We're not in touch with the village […] [because our earlier contacts were with the older generation, and there are not as many of them around now.] When we go to the cannery we're always in a hurry to go and get done what we need to get done and then get back out here and get to work, whereas in the old days it seemed like it was more leisurely. We didn't have all the equipment that we have now to maintain, so it's much more complicated. [We were given fewer fishing days. No complaints about that change.] You always feel like there's a job to do. If you get behind you'll never catch up. I remember Johnny Aga used to call me "Rushin' Dan" because I was always in a hurry to get back.

Sandy and Dan Earle at Bird Rock, August 2015. P-1000-7-395.

AG: What else do you think is important to know about the west side or Uyak or setnetting and your experience out here?

DE: I guess I can't really think of anything other than what I've already said. It's a great place and we have wonderful friends here. We look forward to being here every year[…] You have this bond with all these people because you share work with them, and it's not the kind of work that you're complaining about. Well, you complain about certain aspects of it, but you have so much in common right away. You can see these people and they are fishing friends and long-time fishing friends. So it's a wonderful relationship. And you can talk about— everybody knows what you're talking about (laughing). You share the same frustrations and you share the same joys, so it's wonderful. It's great with these families and to see their kids growing up and they're getting into fishing and they're really neat kids. They have great work ethics. It's really fun to be around the Haugheys because those kids, they listen to everything that the adults say. They're fascinated by the stories, I think. They're taking it all in. You can just see them just taking it in. Most kids don't give a damn about what adults have to say (laughing), so it's really refreshing. That's a rare kind of relationship. […]

AG: You know, I just had this thought that why the children listen. Maybe it's the fact that it makes sense to them how they fit in. When I think, now in the world, there's so many influences, so many overlapping communities, maybe it's not as clear how what someone is saying impacts them or how they fit into it, but they have a sense of legacy or ownership because they know their place.

DE: That's a great point. I think that's true. That's a really healthy thing to grow up with.

AG: Um-hum. Well, thank you very much, Dan, for this interview.

DE: You're welcome. Good job.

Bird Rock, August 2015. P-1000-7-308.

Bird Rock, August 2015. P-1000-7-307.