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Narrator: UAF Alumni Gathering in San Diego, California, recording by William Cashen

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Series: William Cashen Collection

They are at Gordon Picotte's house in San Diego. Bill Cashen and an unidentified lady are going around at a party in order to find out everybody's names.

George Dickey went to school [presumably he is talking about the College of Agriculture and the School of Mines, later UAF] in 1933-1942 and hasn't been back since. He has been at his current job since 1947. He left Alaska in 1942 and joined the Navy as a flight instructor. Then he came to California. George and his brother, Al, lived across the hall from Harry Lundell. . Lundell is working at the Fort Wainwright as an engineer. George's brother is a teacher. [George turns the recorder off.]

Cashen mentions that the party moved from Gordon Picotte's house to Francis "Frenchy" O'Neill's house.

Francis has been to [the University?] in 1937-1942, just when Bill went to Anchorage. Francis has been to California since 1957. He was an engineering officer and Bill [who?O'Neill?] was in the Navy. [Inaudible.] Then Francis was in the Force Engineers, and now he is an accountant for a local supermarket chain in La Mesa, CA. Francis is a host of the party.

George Dickey is talked to again, but since Cashen already caught him on tape, Dick Anderson steps in.

Dick Anderson was in Alaska in 1925 and 1926, at the time of all the Loftus] brothers, as Bill notes. [Someone is humming a tune.] Wild birds. Bill doesn't know if he is going to see the Loftuses or not.

Warren Clark introduces himself. He was there [At the University] in 1926 and 1927 and also in 1928 and 1929. He took a trip to Cal Tech and they didn't quite agree [He performed poorly academically for some reason?]. He went back to Alaska, and raised his grades up and went to Stanford. He has been working in Aerospace ever since 1935 and has lived in Balboa, CA now and previously in Glendale, AK.

In 04:20 [Inaudible, Wally Langdon?] says that he was there in 1938 to 1941 and according to Cashen he was famous for something. Wally says he doesn't know why, perhaps it was general famousness. Wally

used to do a lot of acting. Now he is in Federal Aviation Administration in Los Angeles –area, Palo Verdes, CA. He went back to Alaska after the war for a couple of years, then he went to UCLA, and then back to Alaska again.

Dr. Harold [Culver] [Inaudible conversation.] Harold is a spokesman for or is at least one of the officials whom reporters call when doing stories on the San Diego school district. [?]. Graduated from the Anchorage High in 1935. He got a scholarship to go to the College where he graduated from mining engineering program in 1939. He worked in mining until he started working in Whittier for a year [not clear what he was doing]. Then he started with the Navy SeaBees (Navy Construction Battalion) and was in that for 3-4 years. After the war, his dad and some other fellows went mining on a place called Medfra on Nixon Fork, possibly a gold mine [?]. They worked until they got “inflated out of business”. [?]. Shortly before they pulled out from the mine and abandoned it, they got a questionable honor—they got a magazine ad that said that since they were the second largest lode producer, they should subscribe to the magazine. Now his new job title is the Director of Land and Facilities Planning. It was a Director of School Planning and the name changes every time they have an organizational change. [Talking about his title.] He got his doctorate from the UCLA when he got off the Navy and he met Judy while he was in Navy. After a year they got married and went back up to [Medfra, Medford?] and a couple of years later she got pregnant and had to go home to mother to have the baby.

About someone [unidentified] who is teaching in a high school in Encinitas, CA, 30 minutes out of San Diego. He went to UA in 1938 to 1939 and then he went outside. He studied anthropology and is teaching it now. [Unclear discussion. Froelich Rainey was at the university at the time.]

Clarence S. “Holly” Hollingsworth is a postmaster who just had a 20th anniversary from the class of 1950. Cashen tells about his brother, Harry, who was becoming a grandfather during the time of that party so they didn’t know if he could attend to the Alumni meeting or rush to the hospital.

[Unclear, multiple people are talking at once]

Arnie [Arnold] Hoehner was one of the people who lived in the valley below with Creamer’s bunch, McClarities with Kenny McClarity [sp?]. [Unclear cross talking.] They built “the big one” and others lived in little sod huts. They built their yurt out of logs and then they put one foot of sod all around it.

According to Arnie, yurt is Genghis Khan [Mongolian, I’m guessing]. They spelled it differently, yertch, which meant Siberian sod houses. Interviewer: Eskimos use name barabara [Aleut semi-subterranean houses]. [Inaudible talking about Dustav [sp? Verdumstov? Verdumstaf? Verdumstof?].] He was a big Native Russian who was a White Russian [Probably meaning that he was Czar’s supporter during the Bolshevik revolution] who escaped the Russian Revolution and claimed to have coming across the Siberian [probably Bering] Strait across the ice. Cashen asks if he had a first name or if he was just called Dustav. Dustav had a yurt down in the flats, over where the station was, but further south towards Nenana. He had a little one-man yurt.

13:12 McClarities had one and Loyds [Lloyd Spiece?] had one [yertch]. [Inaudible.] The speaker never associated with Dustav, but they learned building yertchs by looking at what others had done.

McClarities had a smaller yertch and that was smart because smaller constructions are more heat conserving. Arnie's bunch built a big place, 15x30 and it was called the City Hall. They had a "whole gang" over on Sundays with phonograph and other stuff.

They heated the place with a big oil drum to which they built a door and a smokestack. They heated with wood. Tamarack [*Larix laricina*] will burn green and they were burning green tamarack for a long time until they bought a cord of wood from an wood-cutter.

They had a lousy flood in 1935. They were studying one night at the yurt when water started trickling down under the door. [Hank Joslin? Josling? Unclear talking about a professor who lived in the flats as well.] The speaker filled the crack with a rug which held a few seconds until the flood really came in. They stayed at the house but needed an alert in case the water got too high and they needed to be woken up during the night. They rigged a system where a float with a pulley arrangement rang a bell which was a warning for them to get out. Next morning the water was two inches below their beds but they were still dry. Stove was above the water so they made hot cakes for breakfast, sitting on the backs of their chairs with their feet on the seat part. And they stayed dry. Walking to college that morning was like walking at a muskeg where you can't tell where the bottom is. They walked feeling their way step by step but every now and then they would step into a pothole. "That stinking ice water was cold".

Arnie tells a story about McCombe-brothers which he heard from somebody else. One of these boys had been to College for a while and he went home to Canada. Ontario, says the interviewer. He was a dog-driver. The brothers' names were Bobby and Jim or something like that. This boy had a dog team and he was coming back home so he brought his whole team with him and they wouldn't let him ride anywhere except in a box-car [on a train]. Everybody was out to welcome him home and his parents were quite prominent people. Arnie says he is not telling the story right. They were waiting at the passenger cars to see the boy come home but nothing happens, so they look back. And there comes this kid with his old siwash clothes and a dog team and a sled, coming out of a box-car. The father says: "My son," and the mother says, "Oh my God." These guys were quite the characters, according to stories Arnie has heard.

Doctor Bunnell was against we people being down in "Yertchville." They were total strangers [perhaps the speaker and Dr. Bunnell] and didn't know what the situation was, "but," Arnie says, "I fought like hell to make one year of college, and I was in town as a painter or doing anything I could do to make enough to get to college."

They went out there one day and met the entirety [unclear, Cashen is asking who was with him that day] Erwin Clahassey who is an eye specialist and is now living in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was a goalie, Gordie [nickname for Gordon Picotte?] was a right wing, Arnie himself played center and Pat Thompson was left wing.

What most people don't know that they started with a bad relationship with Dr. Bunnell because he didn't want them there and thought they were some kind of a "contamination group." They were the hippies of their day, suggests Cashen.

20:30 As things progressed, Bunnell became one of Arnie's best friends because when he found out that they were good at hockey and their grades were good, he started to "perk up his ears". Doc [Bunnell] told Joe Flakne to hire them because they were living in bare subsistence at that time. Joe Flakne gave them a week's worth of work. They were [unclear, thrashing?] grain in about 30 above zero on the farm, and it was a good thing for them to do. A little by little Ice Carnival [Probably refers to UAF Winter Carnival in 1935/1936] time developed and they beat Dawson in a hockey game. Time magazine wrote in an article that it took only one year for the Dawson group to teach Americans some hockey and they beat them the second year.

Dr. Bunnell had been to Washington D.C. to gather some money for the University. Read the Time magazine article and he came down to Yertchville to look Arnie up and shake his hand asking if they could be friends.

Arnie was asked to go to the University office one day and McLaherty [Herb McClarity?] had tipped him off, saying that they are going to hand him a letter saying that they needed to get out of the property where they were staying. A judge had taken over the land down below from the fellow who owned it. The fellow was wanted for bigamy and had fled to Canada. At the time, the land really belonged to nobody.

They all were living there in sub-zero weather and it was -32F when they were ordered out of the property. Arnie happened to be a good friend of Judge [Harry] Pratt to whom he had worked for all summer. Judge Pratt called Dr. Bunnell and asked him not to throw the hard-working kids who just wanted to go to college out of their houses.

They [Arnie and Bunnell] had a fight at his [Bunnell's?] office. Both were cussing at each other and the whole school was outside the door waiting what would happen. He [Bunnell?] pre-judged them, and Arnie tells that they got good grades and that his friend [Erwin] Clahassey was a genius whom they used to call "Walking Encyclopedia". Clahassey developed some formulas for the chemistry professor, Dr. Bastress, didn't even know about.

Doc. Rainie [probably Froelich Rainey] was going for an expedition and Arnie thinks that if they hadn't lived at Yertchville, they would have got to go but instead he took Tim [Twitchell?].

They experienced lots of things at Yertchville: many earthquakes, moose that make such a racket that the earth shakes, and the flood. Arnie says he wouldn't have gone to school anywhere else, but when people hear what they did, they wish their kids could have the same experiences. "But it's a different time."

[Recording of a phone call where Bill Cashen talks to someone named Al, evidently another alumni who couldn't be there, end of the recording.]