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Richard Estelle

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Leslie asked how the colony felt about people moving into the community. Richard said initially the colonists signed their contract for their land and the ARRC dictated what they could do. If they sold their land then ARRC had to approve that. There was resistance to controls the government had on the colony. By the time Richard's family returned some restrictions were lifted. Things changed over time.

Leslie asked about his school teaching experience. Richard said they showed up in Tanana and the other teachers were having a meeting and they walked in and introduced themselves. They didn't have a place to live. School was starting that same day. He had a seventh and eighth grade homeroom. He taught social studies, reading, history and geography as well as physical education. There was a high school where he taught geography, history, and economics. They stayed on a mattress in the teacher's lounge the first month or so. There were teacher's quarters in the school that the principal and his wife used. He described the three parts of the village. After a month they found a duplex apartment with the FAA. The town had a regional hospital. The FAA compound was staffed around the clock. There were about 400 people in the village. Most of the school was Native, but there were some white students. The FAA staff had children who attended the school. Most of the Native kids had not been out of town. He talked about the challenge of some of the subject matter. He had to tailor the text to be able to relate to his students. He gave practical lessons. Geography and current events had very little resources. They had a radio. He had a subscription to Life magazine that he used in the classroom. He said there were records that Standard Oil produced on history and current events that they used. Richard talked about the three power plants in the town. Their power would fluctuate. He talked about some of the social problems in the town. There weren't a lot of opportunities for employment. Alcohol was the biggest problem in the community. The current Tanana was once Fort Gibbon. The Native village was up the river. The Natives were not allowed to come into Fort Gibbon. Small pox hit the village and wiped out much of the village and the residents of the village eventually moved to Tanana.

Richard said he enjoyed working in Tanana. He only stayed for one year. His wife stayed on for the summer to teach. He was working summers with the soil conservation crew. He said one of the problems in Bush schools is lack of consistency.

Leslie asked about his time at UAF. Richard said he enjoyed his time as a freshman at UAF. When you go there you are a kid and you are in a university situation where grownups talk to you and listen to you. He said there were a lot of activities for the college students. He talked about one of the freshman traditions. They were supposed to steal and hide the corner stone. They put the stone in the trunk of a Hudson car. They weren't sure what they were going to do with it. They dumped it off on the side of the

road. It was eventually recovered and cemented into place. He said it opened up the real world for him. The classes were interesting even though he really struggled. He had a chance to explore different subjects. ROTC was different for him. It was compulsory at that time. All land grant colleges had to have ROTC. They had uniforms, learned to march, take orders and take military history. Don Johns was the flying instructor. He participated in intermural basketball.

His father, Howard, attended UAF when it had a very small population. At that time he students hunted meat and brought it into the dining hall for everyone to eat. All the students were involved in something. His father had been an Eagle Scout and had first aid training and was part of the first aid crew at the college. Howard was the ROTC band major. His father worked with Otto Geist one summer. Richard shared photos of his father as a college student. His father graduated in 1936-37. He had two degrees. His father was active in sports and had set a broad jump record. Richard talked about Len Smith. Richard's father died in 1976. His father always worked when he attended college. There was work on campus for students. Richard talked about moving material out of Hess Hall. Richard reads a letter from Charles Bunnell to Howard Estelle. Richard said the colony students still talk about the skill's that Richard's mother taught them. He talked about activities of the homemaker's club and the different clubs. He talked about how his parents might have met.

Richard said there was a video made several years ago about the Matanuska Colony. The creators of the film came up to Alaska about fifteen years ago and did interviews with the colonists that were still alive and the colony kids. The interviews were put on CDs and sold to raise money for the video project. There was a lot of material written about the project since it was so unique. The film was titled Alaska Far Away.

Leslie asked about the museum. Richard said it is a city visitor center, museum and garden. The log cabin building was built in 1976 as a visitor center. Their organization is Palmer Museum of History and Art. They put on art displays of local artists or art of the local area. The museum is a collection of things that people have donated. They hope to acquire things in the future. They try to illustrate the story about the people in the valley. School groups visit the museum for tours. Richard talked about the general history of the valley and its people. They are lacking room to show their entire collection. He hopes someday that their organization and the historical society will combine. Richard said Salina Ortega Chalarro is their director. He was hired to work at the visitor center. He now works in the museum. He has been organizing the material in the museum and cataloging it.