

ORAL HISTORY 2019-01-01

Mike Dalton with Libby Dalton present

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Karen Brewster, interviewer

Series: Kathleen "Mike" Dalton Life History Recordings

Mike Dalton talked about her personal background. She was born September 10, 1925 near Flagstaff, Arizona. She lived on an Indian Reservation agency named Lupe. It has been abandoned. Her father worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and worked on maintenance and construction. She remembers the students saluting the flag and saying the Lord's Prayer before they could eat lunch. She had one brother and two sisters. After they left Lupe they moved to Tuba City. Her first ten years were on Navajo reservations. Tuba City is now considered part of the Navajo nation. She did not attend school on the reservation. The policy then was to segregate because of communicative diseases the Navajo might catch. She got polio there. At Tuba City they lived in Red Stone Canyon. They used sheep trails for travel where the Navajo herded their sheep. In 1936 her father quit working for the government and they moved to Tucson. She was home schooled in her early years. At Tuba City there were enough white children so they opened a school. She started third grade there. She graduated from high school in 1943. She then attended the University of Arizona and attended Arizona State in Flagstaff and graduated in 1949. She studied English and Spanish. She also took engineering courses.

She wanted to come up to Alaska because she wanted to. One of her friends had moved to Alaska when the Army moved her friend's husband to Fairbanks. During WWII Dalton's father came up to Alaska. Her father was in WWI in France. In WWII he was a civilian worker at Shemya. Dalton went out to Shemya when she was working for Senator Stevens. Dalton came up to Alaska in 1949. Her friend, Rosemary Losonsky, invited Dalton to come up to Fairbanks. Rosemary was a dog musher. Dalton wanted to get away from Arizona and find a job. She took the steamship to Seward and then the train to Fairbanks. She went to the Nordale Hotel and slept on Eva McGowan's couch. She heard Arctic Contractors [AC] was hiring. They were the civilian contractor for the Naval Petroleum Reserve. AC had started exploring for oil in the Reserve in 1945. Her husband was an engineer and graduated with Early Beistline in 1937 (from UAF). He had graduated in agriculture and mining. His focus was on mining. She could type and AC hired her immediately. She had also taken engineering courses so she fit right in. The chief engineer was Ted Matthews. He went back and forth between the oil fields and Fairbanks. The second engineer was Drux Spaulding. The next in line was Ben Atkinson. She was typing up engineering reports. She said she was very good at grammar so she made corrections to the reports. She talked about why she was thrown out of Catholic school. Her parents went down to the school and got her back into the school. She skipped school for a while and was then put into public school.

She talked about her work with reports at AC. She would go through chapters and condensed it down. She understood the work. They designed the rigs and roads themselves.

Her maiden name was Fitzpatrick.

Her husband was working for AC as an engineer. His degree was in mining. At that time they all took the same engineering courses. It was all pretty much civilian engineering. She remembers meeting her husband. He was spending his time in Barrow. They were married in 1950 at Barrow. Her husband was the assistant superintendent for AC. He was based at a lab. It was the only base that scientists could use at that time. She was down in Umiat in 1951-52. It was started about the same time as the base camp. It was 160 miles from Barrow to Umiat. They used large Quonset huts. AC hauled in the Quonset huts from Navy ships. It WWII surplus. The ship came in once a year and brought food, supplies and equipment. The runway was first WWII metal matting (Marston matting). Dalton said they had to have something stable to land on. When Dalton got there the Navy Seabee's were already gone. Her husband joined the Seabees in 1943. Her husband went to school in the winter and worked in mining or construction in the summer. He had experience in structural engineering, land engineering, and permafrost engineering. Jim Dalton and some of the other locals decided to join the Seabees. He was sent to Dutch Harbor in 1943. It had been bombed in June of 1942. They rebuilt the runway, facilities and troop quarters. Jim was in the service for three years and then returned to Fairbanks and started working for Arctic Contractors. While he was in the Seabees he also went to Pearl Harbor for rebuilding the facilities there. In 1946 he went up to Barrow with Arctic Contractors. The men who worked for the Seabees in Alaska were very qualified to work in the Arctic. Arctic Contractor took over the camp in Barrow from the Seabees. Jim Dalton became the assistant superintendent in 1959. She talked about what it was like to be in Barrow. They flew in a contracted C-46. They landed on the runway near the ocean. There was a little shack at the runway. She worked on the inventory when the Navy moved out. She typed up the inventory. When her husband was made assistant superintendent she was allowed to live in Barrow. Dalton talked about Ned Nusinginya. He was allowed to drive a weasel tracked vehicle. She explained how a weasel worked. There were a few other woman there at the same time she was there. Marcella Larson, Lyla May King, Gladys Frabel, and Mrs. Cunningham also lived up in Barrow at that time. She talked about the women and what their husbands did in camp.

Dalton talked about Ned Nusinginya who worked as an interpreter for Jim Dalton. A lot of the Eskimos did not speak English. Nusinginya had worked as a mail carrier and could read and write and became a deacon in Kaktovik.

Dalton said there were women scientists up in Barrow. Some of them were U.S.G.S. There were two couples from the California Academy of Sciences. She said Florence Weber was up in Barrow. Dalton said the Navy commander was allowed to have his wife with him. She talked about social activities. She started knitting when she was there. She would walk to the village of Barrow. She talked about some of the artifacts she has.

Dalton talked about her husband hiring the local people. They learned skills when they worked for Arctic Contractors. Three years after AC left the DEW Line started. Jim was recruited by the Defense Department to go up there. They were in a big hurry to organize.

The union was upset about hiring local people because they didn't belong to a union. The union wanted her husband to fire all of the people. Her husband forced the issue. Her husband knew he could depend on his local people. Most all of the supervisors were non-Native. Arctic Contractors left in 1953. Dalton said the Natives were still living off the land then.

Dalton said she lived in one of the Quonset huts. Children weren't allowed to live in Barrow by the Alaska Contractors. They talked about some of the Navy men going into town and starting relationships

with the Inupiat women. They were allowed to have beer in camp. If someone broke a rule then they were on the next plane out of Barrow.