

ORAL HISTORY 2019-01-03

Mike Dalton with Libby Dalton present

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Fairbanks, Alaska

Karen Brewster, interviewer

Series: Kathleen "Mike" Dalton Life History Recordings

Mike Dalton talked about living in Barrow. They lived in a smaller Quonset hut. They had electricity which was generated for the whole camp. Water was pumped from a fresh water lake and then pumped into a 55 gallon holding tank inside the house. The water would come out full of rust. It would drain into gravel beneath the hut. They could send larger items to the camp laundry. She had a small personal cleaner to wash small items and she would dry them on a wooden rack. They had melted ice for drinking water. She would get drifted snow to melt. The water was gravity fed from the holding tank.

Dalton explains how she got the name Mike. Her father wanted a son so he named her Kathleen Michael.

The 55 gallon drums were recycled into potties. The bathroom was added after the Quonset hut was put in and the drum was used in the bathroom.

The people in the village would get ice from the freshwater lake and stack it up near their house.

The barrels from the bathrooms were collected and the whole barrel was dumped on the ice. They could do that until June of every year. In the summer the Navy hauled the barrels away. Utilities were added to Barrow probably in the 1970s. Brewster said early on the camp had more facilities than the people in the villages.

Brewster asked about Jim hiring local people and having to fight the union. Dalton said anybody in the camp who wanted to work learned on the job. Anybody with arctic experience was hired for the DEW Line. Under the DEW Line federal contract the workers had to be union. They were Davis Bacon wages. People from the village didn't meet those standards. Jim refused to fire the local workers when the union confronted him. The people wanted to get rid of them, but they had three to seven years of experience because they had worked for Arctic Contractors before. Jim had a crew of almost all Eskimos. The union had to accept them and he wouldn't back down. Jim said they were qualified and had learned all their skills. Very few of the local people had attended high school at that time. Jim Dalton was well liked by the local people. They look at a photo of Ned Nusunginya and talk about his family. Dalton said Jim was given a seal oil lamp by the elders at Wainwright. It was the first time the people had seen a paycheck. The village store would cash the checks. Eventually the Bank of the North opened branches in Wainwright and other communities.

Brewster asked if she lived at the camp when her husband was working on the DEW Line. Dalton said she lived in another Quonset hut. The hut was remodeled and it had a kitchen area. Her son was just a toddler then. She could send a letter to Lindberg and he would send an order of commercial baby food. She used cloth diapers. Her son was born in Fairbanks. She was pregnant with George when she was living in Barrow. She said it slowed her down a bit. During the DEW line job they were allowed to have

their families with them. There were other women living there, too. Lyla May King and Marcella Lawson came back to Barrow and had been there during Arctic Contractor days.

Dalton talked about the mess hall. Where they ate there was a separate wing off the main hall. They had picnic tables. He talked about Don Buck who was Athabaskan. Women were kept out of the main hall. The women were viewed as a distraction. The Natives and non-Natives were not separated. The Natives would eat lunch in the mess hall.

Dalton said the work on the DEW line was all year long. Her husband was in charge from the Canadian border to Pt. Lay (Cape Lisburne). There were twelve or thirteen sites in this section. Dalton talked about main sites and sub-sites. In the summer the barge would drop supplies at the main sites and then it was distributed to the other smaller sites. Her husband would visit all the sites by airplane. They contracted first with out of state pilots. Dalton worried about her husband flying all the time because it was hazardous. They lost a lot of pilots who were inexperienced flying in northern conditions.

In the winter of 1951-52 Dalton lived in Umiat. It was forty below and stayed that cold through March. There was one other woman living there. Her husband was doing geophysical work. They were advancing the exploratory work out of Umiat. Her husband was sent there because he had a lot of experience. They were drilling oil wells. Most of the wells have gas in them. She has a jar of crude oil from Umiat. There was a rig going a short distance out of Umiat. All of the buildings, vehicles and supplies were WWII vintage. The supplies were hauled there by cat train from Barrow. She flew there in an airplane. She would eat in the mess hall. She had brought a roaster oven with her. She also baked in it. In all the camps the high priority was good food. One of the pilots requested a banana cream pie. It wouldn't thicken up, but she walked and it froze while she was walking. She said it was helpful to get friendly with the cooks. Some of the kitchen workers were local people.

Dalton said everyone liked her husband. He treated everyone the same with respect. She said some of the local workers went on to be cat skimmers.

Dalton said the workers hired for the DEW Line were local people.

Dalton said she did have a dog in Umiat. Her dog died from rabies there. Libby said she remembers Bud Faith talking about working in Umiat as a roughneck. Dalton said he worked on the deck of the rig. Bud's father worked as the doctor in the village and also provided care for Arctic Contractors.

Dalton was in Umiat for three months. She would go to the mess hall and got to know some of the workers. They made their own entertainment. They had some movies they showed in a Quonset hut. They were WWII movies and anything they could get. Brewster said in Barrow one of the huts was a movie theater. Dalton said the other woman at Umiat moved to Fairbanks and died in a hotel fire with her husband in 1952. Ralph Schreiner was the husband. At Barrow they had a PX and every week each resident was allowed a six pack of beer. There was a no alcohol policy for the Natives. During the Arctic Contractors days there was some boot legging going on.

Dalton moved back to Fairbanks after the DEW line finished in 1957. At one time the supply lieutenant in San Diego sent a year supply of yeast, flour and salt to make bread, a year supply of fuel oil and a year's supply of orange marmalade. The PX also sold cigarettes and candy. The jade adze she had was sold for a carton of cigarettes. Her husband made the man give it back and paid money for the adze. Her husband was the first one to have local hire. She said she didn't get out much during the DEW Line days

because she had a toddler. She had to be careful taking her son out because of the cold and wind. The snow would seep in the windows. The Quonset huts were built for the South Pacific and not Barrow.