

Dad arrives

So Dad went up to Seward, Alaska first. Here's another extract from Dad's history. Note that it is sort of contradictory to the fragments I quoted above.

TO ALASKA

Dick Lavon

The Mount McKinley, Alaska Steamship ship, the Lynches
Les Rafter and hopeful pioneers

Mile 20, Seward, Alaska, Alaska railroad. Mountain Goats
Anchorage. Bob Couchers cousin puts me up then I stay
at pig farm to help out. To Mantanuska for pigs.

Going to Panama, at Seward Les Rafter diverts me, I stay
Money sent, Marie comes to Alaska on the SS Alaska.

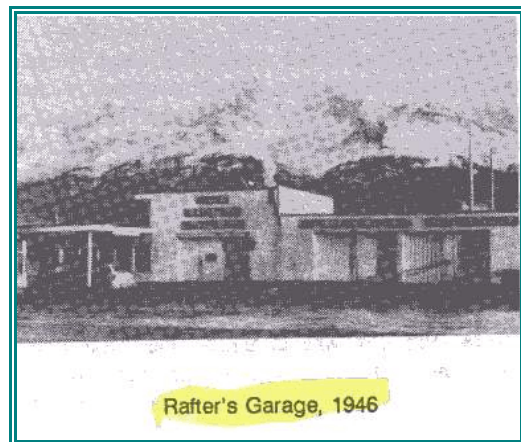
Our wedding, and honeymoon at Lake Kenai Lodge.

Defense industry reaches Seward. I start building home.

Marie expecting, goes to Utah, I remain to finish and sell
house. In Fairbanks for fossil ivory on Dec.7, 1941

One of the most interesting things to me in this fragment is the reference to Panama. I don't recall ever hearing him talk about almost going to Panama, but in his writings late in his life this topic came up several times. He thanks Les Rafter for stopping him from throwing over those plans. Les had this garage when I lived in Seward. The photo is from Mary Barry's book. Sorry about the quality but this Les was a real man.

When I asked mom about this Panama near-miss, her memory had failed such that she couldn't help me. But I think that the fact that he tells the story in great detail means he really did decide to skip the Alaska homestead adventure and go to Panama. The Panama Canal was being built about then so there was good money - and short lives.



Rafter's Garage, 1946

As you know, their plan was that he would go up first and work to save the money for mom's passage. Then when he had enough saved to purchase her ticket, she would follow. This meant that she would take a trip by Greyhound Bus from Vernal to Seattle, the same trip that I took 10 years later with mom, after which she would take a boat through the Inland Passage to Seward. My trip 10 years later was different because I lived in the modern era of commercial airlines, on a DC-3. <grin> We took the same Greyhound bus ride, but instead of taking a 4 day ship trip to Seward from Seattle, I took a 13 hour flight by DC-3 from Seattle to Anchorage, after which we got on a train powered by a steam engine to drive down to Seward. and they would seek their fortune there.

In the year that mom and dad lived there, Lowell Creek still flowed straight out of the canyon through a flume to control it, to a hydroelectric generator on the bay that was later destroyed before I went there in 1951. The remnant of the "river" that I saw when I lived there was a 5-foot diameter wooden flume that we walked along on our way to school each day. The creek was diverted after 1941 by the Army Corps of Engineers -bored with wartime surveillance, I suppose- bored through Little Bear Mountain, the hump of dark mountain standing directly behind the town. The exit is a water fall nearly at the left most edge of then next figure.

See the small bright white spot just to the left of the center of the town in Figure 2 above the "k" in "Alaska"? I don't know what that structure is, but it is almost exactly where our house was on 2nd Avenue. If you follow the mountain line up from the left-side of the narrow canyon along the hard-to-differentiate peak of Little Bear Mountain, you will find the top of Big Bear Mountain. On one mountain-climbing expedition to Big Bear, I agonized over taking a pee up there above timber-line. Because I was afraid



Figure 3 Seward below Little Bear and Mt. Marathon

http://www.inalaska.com/images.html?image_id=338&display=1

that the townspeople would see me.

The narrow canyon on the right half of the image that cuts between Mount Marathon on the right and the Bear Mountains on the left was carved by Lowell Creek. That is the creek that actually deposited the delta over millennia on which the town was built. All of the land you see here under the town that is now covered by trees and buildings was deposited by Lowell Creek. An alluvial fan. There are no flat spots on the fan. Any point in the town has a downward slope.

The story starts here....

Seattle stop (BLAINE)

(This story is created from a brief description from Blaine. Every time Blaine appears, I will do this with his facts. I'll write a half-fiction, half-factual short story based on the basic facts about time and events. I use some good guesses to make an interesting story.)

In 1950 someone came unexpectedly to my house. It was 2:00 in the morning and I was sound asleep. I didn't expect any visitors. I was awakened by knocking on my front door. My wife was now awake and we asked each other who that might be. In those days, there was little crime, even in Seattle, so we didn't think that there was a robbery or something bad happening, but it bothered us a bit. One never knows what's happening when there's a surprise in the middle of the night.

I was elected to go to the door. I got up, pulled on a robe, put some slippers on my feet because it was cold, and left the bedroom. I turned on lights as I made my way to the front door. But before I opened it, I looked through the peephole just to be sure there wasn't trouble on the other side of the door.

It turned out that the guy standing there, looking cold and tired, holding a suitcase in each hand, actually was trouble sometimes. It was my best friend Alvin from Leamington. I had no idea he was in the area so I was glad to let him in. We shook hands, clapped each other on the back and sat down to jaw. My wife came out to say hello but she could see that this was a bull session so she went back to bed. Alvin said that he had taken a cab up to my house to spend a few days because he was waiting for a ship that was going to take him to Seward.

I asked him if he was hungry and, predictably, he was. He could always eat. I made us sandwiches in the kitchen while he started to tell me about what had been going on in his life. I did the same, the two of us trying to talk in the same space. We settled down in a bit, got some things straightened out and decided to go to bed since I had to go to work early. I made a bed for him on the davenport in

the living room with a couple of blankets and a pillow and said goodnight.

We had a good few days until he had to cast off and I didn't see him again for about 2 or 3 more years when I saw him in SLC with his wife and children.

Ye Olde Curiosity Shoppe (ALVIN)

Dick, Lavon and I came together in front of Ye Olde Curiosity Shoppe where they have a desiccated "mermaid" and other rare novelties. Dick had some business with a Frank North whose office was over the Curiosity Shop. Frank wrote for the Alaska Sportsman and was the source of all of Dick's Alaska information. Dick talked about him a lot.¹

I bought a steerage ticket for \$47.00 and we sailed at 10:00 p.m.. Seattle's lights threw patterned reflections across the sound like a watery picket fence and a giant, red neon, Phillips 66 horse continued to flash on and off for an hour as it diminished to a point of red light and the city was gone into the night. I was on my way into an unforgettable adventure in Alaska, with little Marie in it somewhere up there.



Figure 4 Ye Olde Curiosity Shoppe - 2002
Taken with Nathan

¹ I made you kids part of this cycle - on purpose. Here's the same shop (in a new location). I took all of you kids to see it when we visited Seattle in the mid '80's. . I did it because I loved the place when I saw it on my way through Seattle in 1951. I did not know dad, too, had been there 12 years previously.

Steerage is the cheapest fare and the quarters are all the way forward and



below the winch deck. I awoke to the sound of excited winches pounding away. Looking out I saw we were docked at a cannery, loading on canned salmon. We were in a narrow channel between towering rocky walls covered with dark spruce cut in several places by cascading waterfalls. Thin mist hung shoulder high on the mountains like puffs from an aerosol can. And again the enchanting marine smells without even the slightest hint of cows, chickens and pigs. Small Filipino cannery workers were lounging around, on their way to northern canneries. They all looked alike. Steerage passengers messed with the crew just forward of #1 hatch. The food was even different, not at all like Mexican fare. I liked it. That forenoon I got acquainted with fellow steerage passengers.

It was late October after the freeze-up and Anchorage was a madhouse of people needing a place to live. The attorney cousin of Bob Coucher asked me if I had a place to stay, which I didn't, just having arrived in town. He and his wife made some space in their basement, among a lot of sporting equipment, for me to stay. They had a plan for more permanent accommodations.

The cousin and a brother-in-law were just starting a hog farm. The pens were built and a cabin had been erected on the property. They had a contract with Elmendorf Air force base to haul away all meat and bone scraps from their mess halls to feed the pigs. The plan for me was, I would stay at the pig cabin with the brother-in-law and help him collect the bones and do other chores as needed and I would get my room and board free. Wow! I still marvel at how lucky I was.

A few days after I moved to the pig cabin we went to the Mantanuska valley to get the first load of pigs. It was a great trip. I had never been to Palmer before so I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The entire arrangement was a pleasant one but eventually came to an end. After a month construction at the base ended and everyone was laid off. Knowing the end was near the men I worked with had talked a great deal about where to go next for work.

Panama Plan and Les Rafter

Panama seemed to be everyone's favorite; a lot of construction, big wages, and so forth.² I decided to go to Panama and boarded a train for Seward. I found very pleasant weather for early December because Seward is on the ocean.

I got a ticket and went aboard the SS Alaska, then at dock, and stowed my gear in the forward steerage compartment. I put my camera up behind a beam where it would not get thrown around in case of a violent storm across the Gulf of Alaska. It was an hour before sailing time so I decided to go ashore for one last look at Alaska. I happened to come across Les Rafter, a fellow passenger in steerage on the SS Mount McKinley when we were on our way to Alaska.

Meeting him at that time changed the course of my life from what it would have been, had I gone to Panama, to a completely different one which resulted in my marriage--as Marie and I had previously planned. I was about to give that dream up for a very uncertain one in an unknown world. Now, thirteen grandchildren and five great grand children later I am extremely grateful to Les.

He said he was a timekeeper on the dock and said he would see that I got hired all the time, from the group of men waiting to be hired each day to longshore (which he did). While we were talking the "all aboard" whistle blew causing me to erupt in panic.

² This was during the construction of the Panama Canal.

I dashed up the gangplank, ran forward, slid down the handrails to the steerage compartment, grabbed my sleeping bag loped up the stairs to find the gang plank had already been taken in. I threw my sleeping bag over onto the dock and went down the cargo-save net just before they untied it. As the Alaska backed away from the dock I suddenly realized I had forgotten my camera. I guess it is still there behind that beam.

Les told me the Alaska Steamship Co would refund my ticket so to put all my money in the bank the next day, but tonight go the Seward Hotel and tell them I just hired on at the dock; then to the Model Café and get a meal ticket on credit and tomorrow go to Brown and Hawkins, outfitters, and get myself a complete set of foul weather gear—all on my word only. This was before the war when in Alaska



Figure 6 Dad's 1940 photo of Seward 5 months before mom arrived

a man's word was as good as his bond. All that changed when construction of an army base got underway bringing construction workers to Seward. So I saw the end of a wonderful period of human trust and kindness in Alaska.

Dad alone in Seward (Rondo)

Dad was alone in Seward for a period of time that I still haven't figured out. Some evidence suggests he went there almost two years before mom went up but other evidence suggests he went to Seward August 1940. Part of the confusion I have is that his version as stated above is that he and mom had agreed she would return to Naples and finish high school which was at least two grades so I can't reconcile that with one school year as would be the case from August 1940 to May 1941. Whatever happened, mom didn't finish high school, so I am not sure what the delay was or why the money was sent when it was.

In addition to working on the docks with Les Rafter's assistance, dad worked at odd jobs at the Alaska Shop, the only drugstore, soda fountain in town. Rachel Beissner -the one to whom this volume is dedicated- was his boss and you'll hear more about her in Volume 2. She took Alvin in hand and made him give money to save. When Marie arrived in Seward under the chaperonage of Mabel, Rachel put them up at here place and even made the wedding arrangements. The wedding was performed in her front room and a few months later World War II forced them to leave Alaska.

If you look carefully in dad's 1940 photo of Seward you can see our house on Home Brew Alley. Home Brew Alley is the left most alley in the photo, barely visible because the houses on the left side are sitting at the foot of Bear Mountain. Our house is the sixth from the bottom of the picture, on the left side of the alley. We lived there for 2 years. It is hard to pick out but right across the alley is a vacant lot and on the north side of that lot is a longish whitish low building.