

KENNECOTT KIDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH
DEBORAH VICKERY HOUSE
AND
JANE VICKERY WILSON
JUNE 16, 1990 KENNECOTT, ALASKA

Interview conducted by
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(tape 1, side 1)

This is side one of the tape of the interview with Deborah Vickery House and Jane Vickery Wilson, June 16, 1990 at Kennecott, Alaska. These two women grew up in Kennecott when the mill and mines were in operation. They are presently in Kennecott once again for the Kennecott Kids Reunion hosted by the Kennicott Glacier Lodge. The interview is being conducted by Ann Kain of the National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office.

Kain: This is Jane Vickery Wilson. What was your age when you were in Kennecott and the years you were here?

Wilson: I came to Kennecott in 1918, I was three, and we lived here until 1931 when I was 16.

Kain: Where were you born?

Wilson: I was born in Juneau. I came directly from Juneau to Kennecott.

Kain: And what brought you here?

Wilson: My father decided when we lived in Juneau that he wasn't content with his work there and he applied for a position in Kennecott and within a short time he came to Kennecott to work as a cost accountant in the office in Kennecott in the town. He took care of - well, cost accounting how much [per ton] it cost to mine the ore.

Kain: And you haven't been back here since you left?

Wilson: No.

Kain: This is your first time back here?

Wilson: This is our first time and we are thrilled to pieces.

Kain: Your family came up here so your dad could work at the mine?

Wilson: He came first and we came shortly after.

Kain: How long was he here by himself?

Wilson: I don't know. I doubt that it was more than a month or two.

Kain: Where did you live when you were here?

Wilson: We first lived down like across from the power plant. There were four or five houses up there and I think we

lived there, oh, not more than three years, because my mother wanted to get up higher, have more view, you know. I think she thought it would be better for us as small children to be away from the railroad tracks and up on the hill. So we were able to get a house up there. I can remember my mother walking up to see it and I was with her and I thought we'd never get there. That was the longest walk. It wasn't very far, but it seemed like it to me.

Kain: When you left here where did you go?

Wilson: When we left Kennecott?

Kain: When you left Kennecott.

Wilson: We went to Seattle. My grandmother lived there and I had to finish high school and then on to college.

Kain: You have remained there since?

Wilson: Yes. Well, two years after I finished at the university I went back to Juneau and I was able to get employment there through a friend of mine, Jim [Dennis], who had worked in Kennecott for years. He was the one that did a lot of the planning of the mill when it was built, he was very knowledgeable about that. He knew somebody that needed a girl in the office and [he took me down to this man's office] and I got a job in Juneau. So I stayed in Alaska.

Kain: How long were you there?

Wilson: For about two and a half years. And I married during that time and then we both came outside. I hadn't met my husband's family and he hadn't met anybody but my sister who came up for the wedding and he hadn't met my parents so we came out. Four days after we got there the war started so we just stayed.

Kain: And your sister, Debby Vickery House.

Wilson: (inaudible)

House: And on the phone they get us mixed up sometimes. Our voices sound more alike on the telephone.

Kain: That is what I was wondering on this tape, if you were going to come out sounding pretty much alike. What was your age when you came to Kennecott?

House: I was a year, a little over a year.

Kain: How long were you here?

House: Until 1931 and I was 15 when we left.

Kain: You all went together when you left?

House: Yes. Right.

Kain: Did you attend high school and college elsewhere?

House: I finished high school in Seattle. I found it extremely difficult to make the transition from here, the small Kennecott, to a large high school in the city. We had some friends. We lived quite a ways from the school and we would have to [take the bus]. After we came to the school for a year and were going back for the second year, this girl that we'd met said, "well I met you last year but you looked so unhappy I thought it would be the kindest thing to leave you alone". She didn't talk to us all that first year but the second year though she spoke.

Kain: That's interesting.

House: Yes. [It was hard.] Just going from one room to another. Would you get there in time before the bell rang?

Kain: That was something you didn't have to contend with here.

House: No, no. We did not. [I asked] a boy in the hall one day where the history room was. He said "you asked me that yesterday", and I said "yes, but I can't remember". It was so difficult [answering] roll call. And my name being Deborah, my mother had insisted that [I correct] them and that made it even worse. Not only did I have to answer "here" to roll call but also [correct the pronunciation]. It was almost impossible.

Kain: Almost terrifying.

House: Yes, it was. It was just terrifying.

Kain: Did your father continue in mining when he left here?

House: Well, when he left here he retired. He did off and on work for some people in Seattle, but he was retired. But he didn't come out when we did. He stayed in Kennecott. He stayed there until it closed. And then he stayed on as watchman for a while, so that he was one of the very last people to move out. And when he

flew out, he...(inaudible) No, he flew from McCarthy to someplace because he said...

Wilson: Oh, I didn't know that.

House: [He said] that the pilot hit the wind and he said I thought we were going down and he said I was busy looking cause I was trying to find the place where he was trying to land and all he was calling out is that there was a bear down there.

Kain: You went on to college?

House: Yes. I went up to Western Washington University and then taught school. So then I taught school for thirty years.

Kain: For thirty years - in Washington?

House: Yes. And I think that this [experience] that I've had [helped] when a child would come in the room and would be so shy and could hardly answer roll call. There was no one that understood it better than I.

Kain: You were an elementary teacher?

House: Yes.

Kain: What grade?

House: First and second.

Kain: First and second?

House: Yes.

Kain: Did you travel much around the area?

Wilson: Well, we didn't have a car in those days.

Kain: A few people have spoken about camping trips, going to Long Lake and...

Wilson: Oh, we went to Long Lake.

House: Oh, when we were here.

Kain: Yes, that's what I meant.

House: Yes, we went to Long Lake and lived in a little cabin and fished in the [creek]. [George Flowers] cooked

fish like no one else. He put it all in the frying pan and cooked it and then turned it all over like it was one big fish cake. It was marvelous, you could eat the whole thing.

Wilson: He cleaned them of course and the bones were [still in the fish], it was beautiful.

Kain: Did you go any where else other than Long Lake or was that your main vacation?

House: That was our main...

Kain: ...vacation spot.

Wilson: Yes, yes. That was the only place we would go to stay overnight and we had to take every bit of food that we were going to eat except for the fish that we caught.

Kain: How did you get there?

House: On the train.

Kain: On the train?

Wilson: And then stop right in front of the house where we were gonna stay, this log cabin, and the train engineer knew where to stop the train, you know, and he would give us time to get off and get our luggage and all the groceries Mother had packed. Bless her heart, she went to a lot of work to get ready to go.

Kain: I can understand that. So the railroad was, aside from supplying the community, [provided transportation] as well.

Wilson: Yes.

Kain: Was a big deal - I know a lot of times the bridges went out, so you didn't have the train for a while. Did supplies run short?

Wilson: Well, yes they could run short on some things, but there was always plenty to eat. I think butter one time went down sort of low but I don't think we were ever without anything. Maybe eggs or something like that.

House: We talk about having frozen food, you know, and that it's modern. Of course here, the meat was brought in frozen, the turkeys came in frozen and [kept in the

butcher shop freezer]. So there were always lots of provisions.

Kain: Was there excitement when the bridge was repaired and the train came in?

Wilson: Oh, yes. Everybody went down to see the train.

Kain: Everybody was at the depot?

House: Yes, downtown.

Wilson: Once I think we were six weeks without a train and my mother went six weeks without hearing from her mother, you know, and that's a long time when you're used to a letter every week.

Kain: The train also brought in all the mail?

House: All the mail, you see.

Kain: The total link with the outside world was the train?

Wilson: Yes, they had telegraph but that was the only communication. We could have gotten a message to her if it was life and death. Of course we used the Sears and Roebuck catalog a lot. We either ordered from Sears and Roebuck or Mother wrote to [Fredrick and Nelson] in Seattle. It was [one] or the other. And there was a Montgomery Ward in Portland. But if something came in - the main reason that those were the ones we dealt with was because they would exchange if a mistake was made. If the shoes didn't fit, they took them back. It was just heart rendering if your new shoes came and they were too small.

And had to go back, because it took a week for the order to go in, a week for them to set the order up, a week for them to come back. Well, then they weren't right so [it meant another three weeks.]

Kain: So most of your things, a lot of your clothing implements and cooking things that you'd buy, was most of it mail order from Sears or Montgomery Ward or did you buy it here at the store?

House: They didn't have everything.

Wilson: We bought [shoe pacs-felt shoes-and canvas shoes for summer here.] And bib overalls that we wore all summer and we had to have long pants because of the mosquitos. Our mother sewed so she made a lot of our clothes and I

think we were some of the best dressed because for each season it was different.

Kain: How did she buy the material? Was that available at the store or did she order that as well?

Wilson: Some material, cottons were available.

House: But somebody had an old coat.

Wilson: An overcoat they weren't going to use and I can remember they gave it to my mother and she made me and Debbie some ski pants. Well, it was wonderful. We never had real ski pants before. And that was [super].

House: She ripped the sleeves and sponged them off and brushed them and turned them so that the inside was out so there was no fading. It was beautifully done. My coat was brown and Jane's was a sort of green.

Wilson: They were beautiful. And then she always made us our jackets you know, our outside jackets for winter, plenty warm. And we always sent out and had good mittens to wear, two or three pairs, inside mittens and heavy ones on the outside. I never got cold outside. I could go skiing at 36 below and I wasn't cold. That's below zero. Not below freezing, below zero.

Kain: We were talking about buying things and your life here. You lived in two different houses then?

Wilson: A short time in that first one. You know, one of the houses we were in three years in a row (inaudible).

House: I was about 11 when we moved from the little house at the [end of the three up on the hill.]

Wilson: And then I remember the day we moved - and remember we found the chocolate. (inaudible) my father liked chocolates and he would buy them at the store (inaudible) and they put them in a little sack and he came home and put them in the back cupboards because they weren't for us. And the day we moved we were looking through the cupboards and way back in the corner was this sack, and we brought it out and there were all these nice [chocolates]. Well I thought that they would be rotten, which shows you a lot about (?). So we ate them. I think there was one left when we decided that maybe we ought to put it back. Then I told Mother, I said (inaudible). That's not why I ate it though, he wouldn't have put them there if he'd known we were going to find them because he used to put

them out on the back step and he'd say well,
(inaudible) wonderful memories.

Kain: Now these houses up here. The first one you lived in was smaller than the second one?

Wilson: Yes.

Kain: But they both had two bedrooms, or three?

Wilson: Well, in the first one [the upstairs] was just all one great big room and that was an attic. And my mother and dad had some kind of a screen that they could put across, you know.

House: They put the bed backwards so the high head of the bed made a partition.

Wilson: Well, because we'd go to bed first and we be sound asleep until it was time to get up in the morning.

House: My bed was next to the window at the end of the building. And it was a window that opened out and in the winter the snow would blow and fall in. [It would come in and fall on the floor. And it never melted.]

Kain: It would stay right there.

House: It was cold enough because my bed was right there and I would see snow coming in and I would think it was lovely and it was a long time before I realized that the snow should have melted.

Kain: So the heating upstairs...

Wilson: Well, there wasn't any.

Kain: There was no heat. It was just ...

Wilson: The heat radiated up from downstairs.

Kain: Through the stairwell. There was no way to shut off the stairwell though, right?

Wilson: [There was a door] downstairs. But maybe it would be shut and maybe it wouldn't because they didn't want the downstairs to get that cold. We had plenty of blankets and just kept warm.

Kain: At night did you leave the stairwell door open so heat could come up?

Wilson: I don't know. I don't remember that. Of course they wouldn't keep a roaring fire going all night, you know, they wouldn't want to have [our house catch fire.]

House: They would bank it.

Wilson: Bank it, you know, but it would die down.

Kain: You were heating with wood?

Wilson: With wood.

Kain: In these other houses did you heat with steam?

Wilson: Steam heat from the power house.

Kain: So the second house you lived in was heated with steam.

Wilson: Yes. It was warm.

Kain: Was it warm upstairs as well?

House: Yes.

Wilson: Well, we had a bathroom up there and it was warm it seems like, but our door was closed and we could open the window and it was cool.

Kain: For some reason I just always thought that those houses up there were...

Wilson: Somebody said the Silk Stocking row or something.

Kain: Yes. Well that's what they call it. That's how they...

Wilson: (?)

Kain: Were those there for upper management people?

Wilson: Well, they were all office people.

Kain: They were all office people that were up there?

Wilson: Yes. [McGavocks lived there, Mr. McGavock] was head of the power house, I mean you know, key personnel. (inaudible) There were several families, of course, that lived in their own house.

House: But somebody had always lived in our house.

Wilson and House: (inaudible)

Kain: And then they'd be next in line - you'd been here so long you were eligible-was it dependent on how many children you had?

House: I think it was dependent a lot upon the need and Jane and I were growing up and they thought we would need a room and the bathroom would be nice.

Kain: So dependent on need more so than - I don't know if you want to call it social status or whatever.

Wilson: No, I don't think so.

Kain: A family was a family, it didn't make any difference.

Wilson: No. We'd been there a long time, you know.

Kain: If you needed the space, you got the first available house?

Wilson: (inaudible) The company was very good to all the families all the time and they gave turkeys at Christmas time to every family.

House: To every family.

Wilson: Every family had a turkey at no cost.

Kain: What about power? Did you have electricity?

Wilson and House: [We had electricity as did all the families.]

Kain: It was all up to the (?).

Wilson: (inaudible) there were light posts and we had one out by the point. I remember looking out the back window out towards the [point] and there was a light out there and it was just beautiful seeing that snow and the light on it and the moon shining on it [the snow].

House: The very fact that this was in the '20s made electric lights unusual.

Kain: In a place like this.

House: We lived way back beyond the beyond. It's just remarkable to think about.

Kain: I've noticed that the second house you lived in - there is a walkway immediately behind, probably enclosed, which led to the shed.

Wilson: No, not really. (inaudible)

Kain: It wasn't? Well, it's close enough they could.

Wilson: Yes.

Kain: Were those just wood storage areas?

Wilson: Well, we had a wood shed but then we also had a passage like but we had a cache. It was attached to the house.

Kain: So you went out the door into this other building?

Wilson: [You went] two or three steps up to part of the outhouse.

Kain: So you used that as well as indoor plumbing?

Wilson: No [that house had no out of the house facility, just the bathroom upstairs..]

Kain: The house down here?

Wilson: The one down here. We carried water from the water house I remember, for a long time.

House: Did they ever put water into the kitchen sink?

Wilson: Daddy did.

Kain: In the first house?

Wilson: In the first house. Daddy put that tank there where you came up the stairs...

House: There was an aerial pipe that went across.

Wilson: Yes, and we had a pipe - he and another fellow they attached the pipe down there to the water house we called it and brought it up and came to this big tank that Daddy had gotten [from wherever they were stored.]

Kain: A holding tank?

Wilson: Yes, a holding tank, 50 gallons or something like that. He'd fill it up every week or so, however often it took to fill the tank. So we had running water in the sink. Then my mother would have to heat what she needed on the stove. But that was a lot better than carrying two buckets of water in the morning and then two buckets at night. Then when we washed clothes, it took more water.

Kain: And how did you wash the clothes? In the sink with a scrub board?

Wilson: A scrub board with a tub. He always used to help Mother because he had to get the water and lift it in. It was our job to hang out the clothes before we went to school so you can see they were up at five to get the wash done.

Kain: So what did you..?

Wilson: They did the washing the night before, before they went to bed. Mother used to hang them up at first, but then you and I had to help after we grew bigger. And the clothes would freeze dry (inaudible).

Kain: Knocked the ice off of them and..?

Wilson: [We'd] maybe have a line or two and hang them in the kitchen and they'd dry.

Kain: The shed behind the first house originally had the pit toilet and the wood [for the] stove in there?

Wilson: Yes.

Kain: Now the shed behind the second group of houses. Was the shed for storage since the houses there had indoor plumbing?

House: It took an hour in the wood stove to get the wood burning. To get the...

Kain: The stove working.

House: Yes, the stove right, and chop the wood, you know, and keep it going in the stove.

(inaudible)

Kain: You bought most of your food, all your food, down at the store. Somewhat earlier today, when we were touring you were saying that when your father got paid, you came down and got a scrip book. You would use a basic scrip book because it was company owned?

Wilson: Yes.

Kain: As you recall, and I realize you two were fairly young then, but do you know if the prices were - were they [reasonable]?

House: A candy bar was five cents. Every Saturday we would go to the store and get it, (?) maybe and go down to the store in the morning and buy a candy bar. Something very special that we liked, take it home and wait until after lunch. Then we'd all get together and eat our candy bars. [Three or four friends would come.]

Kain: So you think that food prices were moderate and not excessive.

Wilson: Forty-five cents a pound for T-bone steak. Way back then. Forty-five cents a pound, so that wasn't bad.

Kain: The rate you were getting what would be comparative prices, although there was no competitors.

House: Yes. I think...Well, wages weren't high and everybody paid rent and so they were very good about the food. I think most of us got the food (?). And the store was well supplied. In the summer time sometimes they would have cherries and sometimes they would have a watermelon. We rode the [wagon] to distribute the merchandise around from the [camp up] to the mill for the mill. They would use a team of horses and wagon and we would ride on the wagon. And we were riding on there one day when they were delivering groceries on the hill. They delivered the groceries once a week. I think they usually ordered sugar and flour and this time in the [McGavock's] box was this huge watermelon and we were wondering what were the [McGavock's] doing with a watermelon. So we got up around the turn, we walked that road...to the woods and Lawn Morgan stopped the horses, took the watermelon out of the [McGavock's] box, took it back in the woods and left it and got back in. We said, "Oh, old Mr. [McGavock] is going to be mad." When we came back - all the kids on the hill rode that day, it was a nice day - he stopped and brought the watermelon out and we all ate it. It wasn't for [McGavocks] after all.

Kain: He just brought it for you kids.

Wilson: Yes.

Kain: Oh, that's great. So you got all your food at the store. But you did mention that you paid rent.

Wilson: Yes.

Kain: That wasn't included with the wage?

Wilson: I don't think it was very much,, twenty dollars, it wasn't more than that, I'm sure. I have that figure in mind, I don't know if that's right.

House: I wouldn't say because I don't know.

Kain: So it was a minimal amount.

Wilson and House: Yes. It was.

Kain: A little more about the housing. Did you improve the house at all when you lived in it?

Wilson: We kept it up.

Kain: You kept it up. You didn't make any improvements as far as adding more cupboards or anything like that?

Wilson: No.

House: Nothing like that.

Wilson: Mother had bookcases made.

House: Well, yes, down at the [carpenter shop].

Kain: But they weren't probably the kind that were built in.

Wilson: No, no. Well, we left them there, of course, when we left.

(tape 1, side 2)

Kain: We were talking about food and your purchases and your housing. Most of the other houses had indoor plumbing and most of them were two bedrooms and a living room and a kitchen.

Wilson: Yes, except for the superintendent and the assistant superintendent. I think they might have had three bedrooms, or four maybe even. Cause the Douglasses...

House: They added on.

Wilson: They had a big [family].

House: They had a big family.

Wilson: Yes. And then (?) have been in there too. The rest of them I think were all the same but Yvonne said that there is an extra bedroom for their house because they had a boy and two girls, you see. So they needed the

three bedrooms. The boy was old enough, you know, and the girls where they needed three bedrooms.

Kain: So if they wanted - like in her house if they added a bedroom, did the company pay for that and add it or was that up to them?

Wilson: It would for them, because Mrs. [Konnerup] didn't want to come up until they added a bedroom and they did.

Kain: Another thing I was wondering about was that you talked about getting food at the company store, you ordered most of your clothing through Sears or Montgomery Ward. What about furniture?

Wilson: It passed around.

Kain: Okay. So if somebody left, they didn't take their furniture with them.

Wilson: No, no, it just passed around.

Kain: They just gave it to someone or did you buy it from them?

Wilson: (?) or whatever arrangements could be made.

House: If they had something special that they had shipped in then they could take it with them if they wanted to, you know.

Kain: The furniture - it was here when you got here, so the company owned the furniture.

Wilson: Yes. Our house was [furnished]. I don't know, but I'm sure they must have built the homes and furnished them and then brought in people or the first people that came brought it, I don't know which way it worked, but it all stayed.

House: And it all moved around.

Kain: From house to house.

House: People were good. Somebody uses a table a while and it might stay in that house for a while and somebody else needed it sometime and it might go to someone else.

Wilson: When we left, we just left the piano. We bought one from a family in McCarthy. When they left we bought their piano and it was sent up first to the little house and then when we moved over to the other house.

Kain: That's something I was going to ask, if you bought much of anything in McCarthy or Cordova.

Wilson: No. Well, this of course is secondhand (?).

Kain: But you didn't buy food or clothing in Cordova or in McCarthy either one?

Wilson: No. We didn't get there, you know, to buy it. McCarthy was just far enough away so that it wasn't handy for us to go. It was just too far.

Kain: I've gotten the impression that McCarthy was not a place that (?).

Wilson: (inaudible)

House: No, no.

Wilson: We went on the Fourth of July. Some friends would take us and there would be races for all the kids. And when we were, oh, 13 or 14 we came home with most of the prizes.

Kain: I see.

House: [It was great] because we really, Jane and I, never had any money. But to come home with this money. [Harold Glad, who took us to McCarthy], was so pleased. Jane had a dollar more than I did and we were walking up the hill and he said, "well, we can't have that", so he gave me a dollar [so we would have the same amount].

I remember I was so proud of you and I was pleased to come up with a dollar [to make it even.]

Wilson: We walked in - and seven dollars then was a fortune.

Kain: Yes. So you, for the most part, didn't go to Cordova or McCarthy?

House: No. [Inger Jensen] went to McCarthy because her mother was [Danish and there were Scandinavians in McCarthy.]

Kain: One other thing about the housing. I was talking to you earlier and Jane said something about a staff house which had been torn down. How was that set up? Was it for single employees?

Wilson: For single women like the nurses. There were three nurses for the hospital one at a time. One on duty for eight hours and then the other one and then the other

one. They would stay there, and the secretary to the superintendent, a women secretary. She would live there and the teachers when they were here, the two teachers. So that would make six women and they had the upper floor. And that was for the women and then the first floor was for the - well, the first - where the rooms were, the other floor, was for the men, the lower floor. And that would be men that worked in the office that were - like an engineer, a mining engineer and...

Kain: As opposed to the laborers in the mill that lived in the bunkhouse.

Wilson: Yes. That lived in the bunkhouse. And they lived in the staff house. So that was very nice for them. The lower floor had a sitting room sort of and they could meet there and socialize there.

Kain: Several people have mentioned having met a spouse here or their parents met here or whatever.

House: They did. Yes.

Kain: What happened when two people who had single accommodations, got married and all the houses were full? Where did these people live?

House: There weren't too many. [Sometimes there] was a house available. And there was always the annex above the hospital. There was a sort of apartment arrangement and they used it mostly for, not really travelling salesmen, but visitors that would come in and stay a week. The dentist would come and stay a week and he'd live at the annex or [visiting] engineers, etc.

Kain: I see, and was [the lodge] here also used as a visitor apartment building as well?

House: No, families lived there.

Wilson: Well, just couples, no children. I don't think children ever lived there. Did they?

House: I don't know, unless they were just tiny babies.

Kain: So couples, until they had children that needed space.

Wilson: Everybody kept an eye on the houses and if they wanted one - this was more or less a holding spot-then if some place came up they [took it].

Kain: I see. You were talking about the nurses living upstairs. There were three nurses on the staff. How many doctors?

Wilson: One doctor.

Kain: Just one doctor.

Wilson: And he would every once in a while go up to the mine. Go up in a bucket to them and take care of any little things that might be bothering any of the miners, you see, so they wouldn't have to come down all the time. They could (?) they could keep working and might have questions, you know.

Kain: He did all kinds of surgery as well?

House: Yes, everything.

Kain: So, nobody was shipped out of here for medical treatment for the most part?

Wilson: No, not shipped out. They might go out, like my mother had a goiter operation and she had a cousin in Seattle that was a doctor. You couldn't go to the hospital for ten days in those days, you know. You did everything in your home. We were too little then and my dad had to work and he worked six days [and take] his turn to be in the office [on Sunday morning]. So, we went out so my grandmother could take care of us.

Kain: So, if anyone went out for medical treatment, it was by choice.

Wilson: Yes. If we'd been older we could have stayed in our home.

House: Jane broke her elbow and broke her wrist, being such an active one - they did well by her.

Wilson: They certainly did.

Kain: Another thing I found out today that I was surprised at, that there was a quarantine building.

House: The detention center, yes.

Kain: I wasn't aware of that. And they would quarantine people if they had something and would probably spread it around?

Wilson: During an epidemic, you see.

Kain: I've heard mention of flu, did they do it with chicken pox or small pox or...

House: We never had anything like that.

Wilson: We brought chicken pox in. We didn't even know we were going to have them.

House: Not chicken pox.

Wilson: I had the mumps when we came back from down below, from Seattle, and I had it on one side. I got it on the other side when our son was in kindergarten and I was sick too. Did we have the chicken pox after we came back?

House: I thought we brought the chicken pox back and you got the mumps later.

Wilson: I don't know where I got the mumps, maybe that's right then.

House: The first time we came, Mother brought us and we were tiny, I was a year and we brought whooping cough and then the next time we came back after Mother's goiter operation, we were only out when we were small, we brought the chicken pox because Jane broke out with a spot on her back on the boat and the man, whoever Mother talked to, said just keep her clothes on and don't say anything or you will be put off at the next port. So we made it home. Well, then I got it.

Wilson: Then Mother kept us home and none of the other kids got it.

House: Nobody got it.

Wilson: We didn't spread it. But it shows you that we lived a life where we weren't exposed [to childhood diseases] at any time.

Kain: I'm wondering, if things like your chicken pox and mumps, since they are so much worse to get it when you're older, I would think that some of the parents would want to expose their children.

Wilson: Well, they didn't know it was so much worse when they were older. We got the measles when we were older and I was in college. My last week and, oh, I missed all the tests and Debbie happened to be going that year. I was a sophomore and Debbie was a freshman. She spent one year there and then she went to Western and she had

to go and tell all my teachers why I missed the test, you know. Some of them I didn't need to take but some of them the grade depended a lot on that test and then I took the test [in the fall] and I passed.

House: Well, then I went up to Western Washington and I got the other kind of measles. It was just one of those things, wherever we went if there was anything going - we had it all, but a little late.

Kain: When you did have to go to the hospital, like you were telling me you split your head open, did your parents have to pay for that or was that included in with the job?

Wilson: I don't think they ever had to pay.

Kain: Free medical.

Wilson: Yes.

Kain: What about injuries among the miners, do you remember?

Wilson: They were taken care of.

Kain: Were there a lot of injuries?

House: There was somebody it seems to me in the hospital most of the time.

Wilson: There was always somebody in there.

House: They would come in from McCarthy and people would come in all along the railroad line because the Kennecott hospital furnished help for everyone.

Kain: It was the only one in the area?

House: Yes. And I don't know, they might have paid a token.

Kain: So it served Kennecott and the...

Wilson and House: Yes, yes.

Kain: What about Cordova?

House: No, they had their own.

Wilson: The ministers would get free transportation on the railroad so there were services every three months or so. It was one of the highlights because it was one of the things the train brought in.

Kain: The train again being the focal point of the camp.

Wilson: Yes. It was the lifeline.

Kain: But the only source of medical help was the hospital.

Wilson: Yes. The hospital. They had a very good doctor.

Kain: And it served a large area.

Wilson: Um humm.

Kain: What about a dentist? Was there a dentist?

Wilson: Yes. He would come every three months or something and stay for a week or ten days or something. Maybe for two weeks. And people that had toothaches or something or had a problem - they realized they had a problem, would go to the dentist or if they thought they needed to have a check. Yeh, just a check, you know. And that dentist office is down under the hospital around near where the private mess for the staff people could have their meals in the private mess. And along that line, there was a (?) off room and the dentist had his equipment, the chair and all of (?).

Kain: And you didn't pay for that either, the company brought him in?

Wilson: I don't know. My dad might have had to pay for when they had some work done, but it wasn't that much. I can't remember if Daddy paid.

Kain: So, were there any epidemics? You guys had mentioned the flu.

House: Well, that was at the end of the Second World War they had that.

Wilson: First World War.

House: First World War, yes. They had that terrible flu and that's when they built the detention center.

Wilson: Otherwise, we didn't have anything going around at Kennecott. We never talked about it, you know. [Inger] had gotten real sick with something.

House: She had pneumonia.

Wilson: Is that it?

House: Yes. [She] was there in the hospital for quite a while. And then the doctor advised Mrs. Jensen to take her out in the summer to California or some place where it's warm, so she could get lots of sun.

Wilson: And I think part of the winter she was there too, to keep her away from the cold weather and she did, oh, several months. Six months or so.

House: We were talking - she was coming in on the train and Jane and I were talking about we weren't gonna ask her what it was like. If she [wanted to talk], we just weren't going to ask. We were going to be real quiet. She didn't want to talk about it. We kept asking her.

Wilson: She didn't care a thing about outside, she was back. (inaudible)

Kain: So, you were only out the one time, when your mother went out for surgery, in the whole time you were here, you only left [once]?

House: Yes, and when we were small and [had gone outside] I had got the flu when we were there and mother thought I had lost my hearing. I can remember being very ill. But I survived.

Kain: I'm glad you did.

House: So am I.

Kain: Now, your father - you said he worked sometimes six and a half days a week.

Wilson: Yes, yes.

Kain: The half day he didn't work at the office, what did he do?

House: Well, when he wasn't working, he was working in the garden at home in the summer time. We had our own garden.

Kain: So you had your own vegetable garden.

House: And when we lived in one of the three houses, we had chickens. He and Mr. Jensen, [Inger's] father, built a chicken house over the steam pipe, you know, that kept the cold water from freezing. They built the chicken house over it to give the chickens some heat from the hot water in the pipe and so we had fresh eggs. And that was really nice.

Kain: When he wasn't working there, he spent a lot of time doing things around the house.

Wilson: Around the house and around the yard.

Kain: What about your mother now, was she strictly a homemaker?

Wilson: She had to do everything herself, you know.

Wilson: We didn't have a carpet sweeper. She had to sweep the floor (?) and wash and iron.

Kain: But she held no other job outside the home.

Wilson: No, no. I don't think any of the wives did, no, no. I was talking to (?) and they were wondering if living here for so much of our lives that we missed something, were there things that we didn't have that everybody else had and I can't think of any. And as far as meals and so on, I think - when you talk about what Mother did, she varied the food and she saw to it that we had experience with everything so when we went out some place we would know.

House: Yes, what was expected.

Wilson: And we learned to cook. I used to make Spanish cake and Debbie and Mother made doughnuts and cinnamon rolls and I would wax the floor or wash the windows, the things I liked doing better.

Wilson: So it worked out just fine.

Kain: Do you remember your father coming home with any problems? I know at one point there was a walkout here in the mine. Do you remember any labor problems or complaints?

Wilson: I don't remember any.

House: Mother and Daddy never discussed the job...

Kain: In front of you.

Wilson: No, no.

House: And Jane and I didn't know.

Kain: About the workings of the mine and camp?

House: Not the problems.

Wilson: Not the problems. The good things we heard, if something good happened.

House: We visited the mines before we left.

Kain: Oh, you did?

House: We walked up and went through the tunnels and down the [incline on the car to Jumbo, Bonanza, and Erie].

Kain: You got over to [Erie] too?

House: Yes, we got to [Erie] too.

Kain: Just the two of you or was there a whole group of people?

Wilson: We went with another couple. A couple [that were our neighbors], took us as his wife wanted to see the mines. And we were [old enough and good hikers] then so they took us.

[Navarre Konnerup] was going to leave that fall so they took her too. We didn't leave till the next year. So, [Navarre went too].

House: Our greatest disappointment was that we didn't ride the bucket.

Kain: You had to walk up there.

House: Yes. But it really came round in a circle though when we could [cross the river on the tram]. [A tram is currently used to cross the Kennecott River to get to McCarthy]

Kain: Yes, after all these years you finally got to ride the tram, the next best thing to the bucket.

Wilson: Sure.

Kain: You've both been in school here. One room schoolhouse?

Wilson: Yes.

Kain: Did you have a number of teachers over time, or was it just one?

Wilson: Often it would be a new teacher every year. They'd go out and stay for [the summer], they'd come and stay for

a year and then leave. But Miss [Clark] stayed what, two years?

House: Did she? I didn't think she stayed.

Wilson: She stayed over one summer and didn't go out because...

House: I'd forgotten that.

Wilson: And Ruth Danielson, she stayed.

House: (inaudible)

Wilson: Yes, she was one that stayed, yes. But often they would just come and go.

Kain: My grandmother could only teach when she was single. Was that true here?

Wilson: Yes, that was true.

Kain: When a teacher married then she didn't teach.

Wilson: She didn't teach. But one - we needed another teacher the second half of the year when I was in the seventh grade - we were all in one room. Well, it got to be too much. They had so many children that moved in and it just made too many for her. So we needed another teacher the last part of the year and Mrs. [Olson], took over. So we had her for half a year and her husband worked here. But that was an emergency. It would be hard to get a teacher in the middle of the year and so she took over.

House: Our mother taught us, so that we could stay an extra year. She taught you...

Wilson: ...geometry in my second year.

House: And when I was in my first year of high school here, she taught me Latin and [algebra].

Wilson: (inaudible)

House: Yes.

Wilson: But we were fortunate, otherwise, we would have had to leave a year early or even two years.

Kain: Did the school go up to the eighth grade or...

Wilson: Yes. And for a while you could get two years of high school and that's what we stuck with.

Kain: Two years of high school, meaning ninth and tenth?

Wilson: Yes.

Kain: So you didn't have to leave, most of the time, until after tenth grade?

Wilson: I think families were urged to, because it was hard to get teachers that would teach that high. But they were willing, the ones...

House: Especially when Mother could help us.

Wilson: And Mother helped us at home.

Kain: Was the teacher employed by Kennecott?

Wilson: Yes. On the stairway [at Kennicott Glacier Lodge] there is a notice about hiring teachers.

Kain: When you did leave, were you well prepared? You were worried about being to class on time. You had a good enough background to...

Wilson: We fit in academically with no problem. (?) just fine.

Kain: You had all the variety that you needed.

Wilson: Yes, yes.

Kain: Was it any better than the other kids?

House: Well, it took me - the adjustment, socially, took me until I was a senior. And then when I was a senior, I got all As. So I made it. But it took me until then.

Kain: Mainly for the social adjustment though.

House: I had trouble with it because I wouldn't ask them.

Kain: But you, as far as preparatory...

House: Yes.

Kain: You don't know if you were better prepared than the kids that had attended there prior?

House: Better than some and...

Wilson: But we fit right in. As far as English and things like that we could do [the work].

Kain: Now, were you required to go to school then?

House: Yes, everybody had to go.

Kain: Everybody had to go to school. Were there any little boys that didn't go to school or skipped school or - it would be real hard to skip school here, wouldn't it?

Wilson: Everybody liked it.

House: Oh, yes. Kids got along just fine

Kain: It was part of the social thing, to go to school?

House: Yes. I was talking to [Frank] Morris today, and he was in lower grades when we were bigger kids, you know, and he said he was afraid of these older girls cause he was afraid we might put him down or tease him or something, so he (?).

Wilson: Have you talked to [Frank]?

Kain: He was here last night and, yes, he had a lot to say last night.

Wilson: He's real sweet, very well educated.

Kain: I think Logan is going to interview him.

Wilson: Yes, yes.

Kain: What about adult education? Were there any...

Wilson: The teachers taught the English language and science. Men would come and they'd have night classes. The teachers enjoyed it. The men worked so hard and were so appreciative and they learned so quickly and then they became American citizens while they were here.

Kain: Would there have been a group of aliens or...

House: I think there would be three or four, maybe. And the next winter it would be just during school time and I don't know how many weeks the course was but maybe as long as they needed, or whatever. And I'm sure the teachers got paid for it but I doubt if (?) was offered to the men.

Kain: Did the teacher ever go to the mines and do that same thing?

House: No. They weren't allowed to ride the buckets.

(inaudible)

Kain: So adult education, the English language, was that the only one?

Wilson: I think so (inaudible). Mostly they wanted the English language so they could become citizens.

Kain: Foreign people that wanted to become citizens. So, basically that was only really offered to those working in the mill, those living here.

Wilson: Well, the men from the mine would come down, I think.

Kain: They'd come down at night?

Wilson: If the class was offered two nights a week...

Kain: They could do that?

Wilson: And then I think they'd come down sometimes for the movies.

House: Didn't they have movies up at the mine?

Wilson: Yes, but I think they could come down whenever they wanted to.

Kain: If they were off their shift, they could...

Wilson: They could come down. I think they'd come down to the store. All they had to do was get on the buckets and go back. But I think it broke their time off.

Kain: So they had the opportunity to take the adult education class?

Wilson: Yes, and that was a long time ago, so that was good.

Kain: We've covered some of these topics in other questions. You mentioned having your own chores to do, everybody pitched in around the house?

House: Yes, we had. When we got older.

Kain: You helped with the laundry?

House: Yes. (inaudible).

Kain: And the shopping?

Wilson: Yes, we could. And we learned to make our own beds and, you know, things like that.

House: I think all the children helped.

Kain: In a place like this I think...

Wilson: And then we cooked and [of course had] to do the dishes and things like that.

House: When we could handle the hot water. My dad was very safety conscious. When you're little you don't mess around with hot water.

Kain: Or fire and stove.

Wilson: Absolutely.

Kain: He regularly took care of them.

House: Uh huh.

Kain: From a lot of things that I talked to you about earlier, you liked it here.

Wilson: You are right. We loved it. I knew at the time, I loved it.

House: You say we knew it was [good] but we also knew that there would be a day when we would leave. So we knew we had to enjoy it.

Kain: Were you sad to leave?

Wilson: Oh, yes. It wasn't easy.

House: Oh, it was a terrible time to leave Daddy. He went with us to Cordova though. He saw us off on the boat and I can remember how Mother had tears in her eyes. I'd never seen my mother cry, you know, until she waved goodbye to Daddy. She was just that sad.

Wilson: It was sad for Daddy too.

(end of interview)

Deborah Vickery House gave the following additional information which she felt would be of interest:

In talking about our mother, Besse Blanchard Vickery, we didn't mention that she started the library in Kennecott. They would hold a meeting, open to all, where new books would be discussed and ordered. She prepared well for those meetings. A week or two beforehand she would order a New York Sunday Times and a Seattle Sunday Times; from them she would take the Book Review section. As a result Kennecott Library had all of the most recent books. Men who worked in the mill as well as those who worked around camp used the library. It was a going concern. To finance the library a fee was asked from those who wanted to borrow books. It worked very well.

When visitors came to Kennecott my father often invited them to dinner. I learned early to watch their faces as they entered our small red and white company house. Their faces always reflected surprise as they stepped into our living room. They didn't expect to see a piano or walls lined with bookcases. On entering the dining room their amazement was complete when they saw a table set with a damask table cloth, sterling silver, and Haviland china. Such beauty as this was unusual in remote spots like Kennecott.