

AV 6: Mary Swithinbank oral history summary

Recorded at home, 7 Holme End, Fulbourn, 14.5.1998.

[01.46.34] [00.00.12] Introduction by William Mills [WM]. [00.02.15] Description of how Mary Swithinbank's [MS] family ended up settling in Juneau, Alaska. Memories of her childhood in Juneau largely uninfluenced by the outside world; being taught to survive in the wild from a young age. [00.07.30] Description of MS father's career including him being the first to survey Death Valley and to lay trails in the Rocky Mountains National park; becoming a mining engineer in Juneau then Inspector of mines for the state, which involved him being away from home a lot. [00.11.20] Memories of meeting the ship in Juneau which docked once a week; using space in industrial freezers to store meat long before they were available domestically. [00.13.40] Memories of her mother who died when she was 10. [00.15.00] Description of her three brothers and their careers. Mention of being in Sitka when Alaska became a state. [00.17.55] Description of the few times MS left Juneau whilst growing up including a visit to Seattle when she was 7; Summer Camp in Washington after her mother died; Musical scholarship at the University of Washington age 17. [00.19.48 interruption]. [00.20.10] Description of living in Juneau during world war II; mention of the Aleutian Islands Campaign at Kiska and Attu Islands. [00.23.07] Description of the development in Alaska that took place during and after the war; construction of the Alaskan highway and runways was well paid; schools encouraged construction jobs and fewer pupils went on to higher education; mining companies collapsed. [00.25.00] Description of how she met her first husband, Robert Fellowes [RF], in 1945 after her degree in English Literature at University of Massachusetts. Mention of their marriage in 1947; RF had plans to start a geology department at Swarthmore College after survey work in Alaska; geologising and living in Mount McKinley Park with their young daughter, Anne, from May 1949. [00.33.20] Stories about grizzly bears and animals in the park; Memories of camping by Mount McKinley; indigenous population not present in the park. [00.38.25] Story about driving on the Alaskan highway in 1950. [00.40.23] Description of the death of her first husband of a heart attack whilst in the field in September 1949; returning to Swarthmore College with her daughter to work in the library. [00.41.30] Description of taking a job at the Stefansson Collection, Dartmouth College; memories of Vilhjalmur Stefansson [VS] and Dartmouth's Arctic program; mention of Trevor Lloyd, David Nutt and John Teal who was involved with musk oxen domestication. [00.44.48] Description of her job in the Stefansson Collection in the 1950s; memories of recording VS conversations with visitors; memories of working with a collection of letters written by VS to his close friend Mary Brennan Clapp. [00.49.55] Memories of VS and various polar people including mention of the Karluk; stories about Hubert Wilkins [HW] interest in the Urantia religion and him being mistaken for a vagrant whilst testing polar gear; VS interest in Inuit art. [00.55.20] Description of VS interest in developing the North, flying over and travelling under the arctic ocean. Story about an ancestor of HW, Bishop Wilkins, predicting polar submarine travel in 1648. [00.57.20] Description of how she met her second husband Charles Swithinbank [CS] whilst he was working at the Stefansson Collection; they married in 1960 and moved to Michigan before returning to UK and the Scott Polar Research Institute [SPRI] in 1963. [01.01.20] Story about VS's wedding gifts of a vellum bound Shackleton volume for MS and the choice of VS's duplicate book collection for CS. [01.03.10] Description of settling in Fulbourn and the cultural differences and difficulties she experienced. CS was in the Antarctic with the Russians for 18 months leaving MS with her older daughter and two very young children; CS was often away until his retirement when they began to spend more time together and MS travelled with him to Antarctica and the North Pole. [01.08.18] Description of the challenges faced by polar explorers and their families; MS thinks it would have been helpful if the British Antarctic Survey had

provided a counselling service; good humoured anecdote about Antarctica being CS wife and MS being his mistress. [01.11.15] Description and display of various objects from Alaska including part of a Mastodon tusk and earrings made from the tusk; Cribbage board and map of Noam coastal area carved on a walrus tusk; two necklaces carved and turned from Walrus tusk and Whale baleen; Whale baleen Wainwright basket with ivory plugs; two finely woven waterproof Aluet baskets one with rattle in lid. Comments on the creativity and ingenuity of the indigenous Alaskan peoples. [01.16.43] Description and display of fake South-East Alaskan totem pole models. Memories of the Indian town on the beach of Juneau and tensions between the children who were segregated in to different schools. Comments on indigenous children being separated from families to attend school in Sitka. [01.19.45 break in recording] [01.20.00] Further memories of growing up in Juneau, 1922-27, including the dark winters; sledging; skating at the base of the Mendenhall glacier; skiing and breaking her leg. Mention of her 50-year high school reunion; the Douglas Juneau picnics that now take place in Seattle and act as a reunion for Alaskans. [01.26.06 End of interview and break to silent shots of WM and MS]. [01.31.50] WM introduction to camera. Silent shot of books. [01.33.10] Blue screen. [01.46.34] END.