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## Alaska, Part 1

For several years, Paul had been teaching short courses in statistical applications for Atlantic Richfield Oil Company supervisors, with ARCO scientist Ed Capen. The discovery of oil on the North Slope in Alaska had resulted in the location of a large number of men in that state, all of whom needed the tools of statistics in order to do their jobs of bidding on leases, making decisions of all kinds such as investing in new equipment, estimating reserves of oil underground, etc., all under uncertainties in "measuring" unseen things, estimating costs and market prices, etc. Statistics, of course, is the science of allowing for such uncertainties and placing probabilities on results, Paul tells me. The men wanted Paul and Ed to come to them rather than have a few of them at a time come to Dallas. One day in 1970, Paul came home with the news that ARCO had asked him to teach the course in Anchorage; the offer included transportation and living expenses for his family. We were both excited about the prospect of an extended visit to Alaska, but the rest of the family -- George, seventeen, and Roland, fourteen -- had no desire to leave Dallas, their friends, and their summer activities. We persuaded them to change their minds, with the understanding that George could take his guitar, and Roland could take his golf clubs. The plan was for Paul to precede us by a week to get his course under way, with the boys and me following. The guitar and the golf bag would be solely their responsibilities during the flights to and from Dallas.

Since we had to change planes in Seattle, where my brother Tom Hickman lived, the boys and I scheduled a layover of several days with Tom, Pat, three-year-old Stacy and eighteen-month-old Kim. We all planned the clothes to take based on the temperature record of Seattle and Anchorage in August, as well as the packing procedures for the boys' excess baggage. All of us, even the boys, were looking forward to the adventure of the new environment and especially to fleeing the August weather doldrums of Texas.

We heard from Paul about the friendly reception he had in Anchorage and about possible trips in and around Anchorage. He rented a car for our use, but, sadly, George was not quite old enough to be allowed to drive a rental car. Finally, we set out on Roland's first airplane flight, and George's too in a way, since he had no memory of his plane travel when he was two years old. The weather on the non-stop flight from Dallas to the Seattle/Tacoma airport was flawless. I was pleased to get a glimpse of Mount Hood which I had grown so fond of during the time Paul and I had lived in Portland. And then we saw Mount St. Helens in its ice-cream-cone shape; this, of course, was several years before its well publicized eruption changed its appearance forever. As we approached Seattle, the weather was so beautifully clear that the pilot got special permission to circle Mount Rainier. The three of us were on the side nearer the mountain and were treated to a breath-taking, slow transit completely around the snow-capped mountain before we straightened out and headed for the airport. What a lucky break that was, for the next day Seattle's famous weather closed in and we had only one more brief, distant glimpse of that lovely mountain.



Mount St. Helens



Mount Rainier from afar

We had a happy reunion with Tom at the airport. We had not seen him since the boys were quite small, but they had many happy memories of him and his wife Pat. We had a wonderful time filling in the blanks as Tom gave us a brief tour of Seattle on the way to meet the rest of the family. The house my architect brother and his wife had chosen was a turn-of-the-century house nestled into a steep slope on the western shore of Lake Washington. The view from the living room and the upstairs bedrooms was spectacular, including on that first day our last glimpse of Mount Rainier in the distance. The house was charming even as it was undergoing Tom's remodeling of the kitchen to bring the inaccessible ceiling-high cabinets into the 1970's. Tom had always intrigued me with his decided views of how people should be accommodated within their shelter, a refreshing blend of the philosophy of Frank Lloyd Wright and his own strong concept of organic design. He had redesigned the cabinets so that even the highest could be reached comfortably without stretching, leaving a space of about three feet between the cabinets and ceiling to be used for flowers or decorative objects.





He and Pat had bought the house some time before they had children. Now the little girls were brimming with healthy energy, and they clearly needed an environment without the drawbacks of a location on a picturesque hill with no front yard and minimal back yard. Beautiful as the house and location were, I could not imagine the anguish of trying to corral two active youngsters on that steep slope. I'm glad that we were able to spend a few days and nights in a typical old Seattle home. Tom and his family have moved many times since then, to Columbus, Ohio, back to the southern part of Washington state, and in various locations from Los Angeles to San Francisco and environs. His love affair with Victorian architecture, begun in Seattle, survives today, with his daughters adult and gone from home. He combines that love with his artistic bent, producing yearly calendars illustrated with his pen and ink sketches of Victoriana wherever he is living.



A perennial favorite on the home tour. The owners have furnished their 1909 home in exquisite examples of the Victorian period.

Tom soon got the boys indoctrinated into the mysteries of sailing his little two-man sailboat. They had a great time in the next few days without adult supervision trying to catch the elusive lake winds in the little boat. One evening Tom and Pat took us for a sail on the forty-foot sailboat he had

built. The girls donned their life jackets and showed us around the cabin for sleeping the family of four while Tom maneuvered the *Varuna* about the lake, pointing out places of interest along the shore. The *Varuna* was ocean-worthy, and Tom and Pat had sailed her as far as San Francisco before the addition of children had made shorter trips desirable for a while. I would gladly have spent the remainder of our visit on the water, enjoying the quiet sailing that is most unlike any quiet I've found anywhere else.



One day George said that he needed to buy some guitar strings. Rather than take him, Tom offered to let him drive the black 1932 Mercedes Benz "Hitler" car, the joy of his life. George had never driven a standard shift car, but that didn't seem to bother either him or Tom. After a brief bit of instruction in the use of the clutch and the location and function of the various gears on the car, Tom gave George a sketchy map of the route to the music store. The garage where the Mercedes was located was on a terrace behind the house and on a level considerably higher than the roof of the house itself. Not only that, Seattle has as many and as steep hills as San Francisco. Tom knew his sister as well as George knew his own mother, so they planned this whole adventure without my knowledge. George was well on his way before I knew that he was alone in a strange car in a strange city. He returned safely after what seemed to me to be a very long time, clearly pleased with himself and in possession of the guitar strings that had been his goal. I asked him how he had fared. All went well, it seems, until the first time he had to stop at a traffic light on a steep upgrade. Inevitably, the motor stalled. What did he do? With all his seventeen-year-old dignity, he replied, "I set the emergency brake, got out, raised the hood, and waited for all the cars to leave the intersection. Then I started the car and remembered to downshift the next time I had to stop for a red light." So much for motherly apprehensions. I understand that Tom put his Mercedes up on blocks a year or two later to let it age and appreciate without deteriorating.





Paul and I had visited Seattle briefly while we were stationed in Portland, but the post-war years had resulted in much growth, and many changes had transformed the city. On our next to last day, Tom took us on a long drive about Seattle seeing such landmarks as the Battelle Research Center, the tremendous Boeing aircraft plant, and the site for the upcoming Seattle World's Fair, as well as many beautiful residential areas. The more we traveled up and down the steep hills of Seattle and saw the breath-taking vistas over Lake Washington and Puget Sound the happier I was that George had returned safely from his Mercedes initiation.

The next day, Tom took us to the Seattle/Tacoma Airport for the flight to Anchorage.

## Part 2

If we hadn't been so eager to get on to Alaska, we would have found it harder to leave Tom, Pat, and children. Seattle had been a wonderful stopover. Tom took us back to the Seattle/Tacoma airport, where we boarded our late afternoon flight for Anchorage, where Paul was doing statistical analysis consulting for Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO). We had crossed two time zones and one parallel of latitude to get to Seattle. We had had no trouble adjusting to the earlier time or to the increased daylight. No doubt the cloudy Seattle weather had helped the transition to longer daylight. But now we were about to cross two more time zones and two more latitudes. We had learned in school about the longer summer days in Alaska, and Paul had told us about the extended daylight hours. We knew there would be some darkness.

Almost every person boarding the plane had carry-on luggage that appeared to be unique to Alaska. Roland's was the only golf bag, but there were a surprising number of acoustic guitars to go with George's electric Les Paul. Fishing gear and guns, many of which looked powerful enough for big game, predominated. There were even a couple of people with skis. And the clothes the boarding passengers wore foreshadowed a rougher terrain and greater emphasis on hiking and camping.

The before-takeoff instructions were no different from the standard ones I had heard every time I'd flown but they quickly took on a more intense meaning. The difference came because of the family seated behind us. The young couple had three children, one occupying a seat, the other two in the parents' laps. There are oxygen masks for only four persons in each set of three seats. A flight attendant asked me to take the youngest child, a baby around a year old, in the event of an emergency. I was to take care of my own oxygen supply first, assist George and Roland, if necessary, and then take the baby, using our remaining oxygen mask for the baby. It certainly sounded easy, but, after we took off, I remembered how wary of strangers *my* babies had been at that age and wondered how cooperative that infant would be if he had a strange woman apply an even stranger plastic bag to his face. I really doubt that I would have much help from the child. I could only hope that any emergency would be just as non-existent as all the emergencies I had been prepared for in past flights.

The flight to Anchorage was as uneventful and smooth as any I've ever taken, and the fear of having a tussle with a reluctant infant and oxygen equipment soon disappeared with the pleasure of new scenery from our airplane window. Instead of the three isolated snow-capped mountains we had seen on the way to Seattle, we began to see many snowy peaks among the dense green foliage of the forests of Canada. We did not have a pilot who kept us apprised of the geography over which we were flying, but the scenery unfolding outside the plane window was spectacular. Occasionally we could make out small habitations along the water's edge. We speculated that there must have been other houses farther inland, but they would have been hidden by the dense trees we saw between mountains. Mostly there was water, dotted with small, apparently uninhabited islands. I had hoped to glimpse Victoria or Vancouver, British Columbia, and perhaps Juneau a bit later, but I didn't see anything that could have been a town, much less a city. We were fascinated to see that the shadows cast by trees or even mountains didn't seem to be lengthening as the afternoon wore on into late evening. It was almost as though we were keeping pace with the setting sun as we flew west across four longitude lines.



The meal we were served seemed to be more exotic than the usual plane fare although the only difference I remember was a serving of cucumbers in sour cream that gave the whole meal an aura of gourmet dining. Then, after dinner, two flight attendants pulling the drink trolley featuring an impressive copper samovar, adding the choice of hot cider to the usual menu of beverages evoked the early Russian influence on Alaska.

After more than six hours in the air, we started descending to land in Anchorage about eleven thirty at night, with the sun still well above the horizon. Paul met us and ushered us through the airport, which had a pioneer appearance with displays of fur hats and coats and the booted gun- and fishing rod-equipped people hurrying through the building. We got into our rented car for the short drive to our apartment building, a twelve-story brick building, one of the tallest in the city. We were intrigued by the sight of electrical outlets on three-foot high posts at all the places in the parking lot. Then we noticed that all cars had short extension cords sticking out of their radiators. It was something that we were to see all over Anchorage. In the winter people plugged in a small heater covering their automobile engines to protect the lubrication from the extreme cold and make starting easier. Paul remarked as he turned off the car lights that he had left them on one evening. He was embarrassed about his oversight, but the man who came to give him a jump start said that newcomers were generally misled by the lingering twilight and forgot to turn off their headlights. Perhaps that phenomenon was responsible for the development of the convenient headlight shut-off that cars in the nineties have.

ARCO had provided us with a comfortable furnished apartment on the twelfth floor looking north and west over the city of Anchorage. We could see part of Cook Inlet and, in the distance, Mount McKinley (now known as Denali, the original Aleut name) just turning pink in the sunset.





Some of the effects of the disastrous 1964 Good Friday earthquake were still visible in a long stretch of unoccupied land at the edge of the business district, although we had seen no evidence of quake damage on our trip from the airport.



Although we soon tumbled into bed, carefully closing the blinds and drapes against the early dawn, I resolved to wake early to see the mountain at dawn, which, Paul told me, came at about two o'clock. Most mornings I did get up briefly to see that gorgeous sight, returning to bed for a more civilized rising time, one that better suited the rest of the family. Paul had stocked the kitchen with supplies for breakfast. We let George and Roland sleep while we had breakfast and I drove him downtown to the ARCO building where he worked. His building was in easy walking distance, but I wanted to get a feeling for the town before I started my real exploring. One morning we had the dubious thrill of feeling a small tremor, which actually rattled the dishes in the kitchen cabinets.



The event was not significant enough to be newsworthy and was the only reminder we had of Anchorage's past experiences. The bookstores had a number of books written by citizens recalling their experiences during the quake. The most interesting one was written by Lowell Thomas' daughter-in-law, chronicling her experience with her two young children when the housing development her family occupied was swallowed by the earth. The remarkable thing was how few deaths and injuries there were. Needless to say, we also heard many first-hand accounts of people's experiences during the *big* quake. In fact, a teenaged boy George had met at a party displayed considerable nervousness when he visited us in our apartment. He left quickly and told George that our apartment had been dubbed "Epoxy Towers" because of the large, long split in the north wall, actually involving one wall of our bedroom that had been patched up afterward. He couldn't rest easily until he left our building.



We spent very little time in our apartment because there were so many things we wanted to do and see in and around Anchorage. However, we did enjoy a wonderful dinner built around a fresh whole salmon which I baked, the first fresh salmon I'd seen since our early days in Portland. We found groceries expensive because of the short growing season and the fact that most food had to be imported from the lower forty-eight states. But the short growing season produced magnificent vegetables, which we thoroughly enjoyed. Looking back at the prices we paid for food and for gasoline, I realize that what was expensive to us in 1970 looks very reasonable today in 1995. Large, fresh lettuce grown nearby was much less than we've been paying for decidedly inferior lettuce since the disastrous California floods this spring. The seventy-five cents we paid for a gallon of gasoline contrasted poorly with the twenty-seven cents a gallon for Texas gas but looks good compared to current gas prices in Richmond. We also appreciated our apartment because of the convenience of a laundry room in the building. The friendliness of my fellows in the laundry room was a bonus, too. I heard of wonderful places to go and things to do from women who had lived in Anchorage for several years. With those ideas and the information Paul got from the men in his classes, we had more than enough things to do and see for our two weeks in Alaska.

### Part 3

We had expected cool weather and long days in Alaska in August, and we got them. Light jackets felt good in the mornings and evenings, and bare arms usually were comfortable in the midday hours. We didn't get tired of the long days reaching from dawn, around two a.m., and extending to dusk at about eleven thirty p.m. The only hazard to the long daylight was getting enough sleep; mostly, good window blinds took care of the sleeping hours, although I found the sight of sunrise over Mount McKinley was tempting enough to get me up for a short time every morning. We had only one overcast morning to spoil my date with McKinley. The most evident result of the long days was the profusion of blooming plants in every available space in yards and grass beside sidewalks. Many houses were painted bright pastel pinks, yellows, blues, and greens, a reaction I'm sure to the many hours of darkness in the wintertime and definitely a summertime bonus of a colorful panorama anywhere you looked in the residential areas of Anchorage. The local population turned into sun lovers in the summer months. Residents told us of flood-lighted ski runs for after-work recreation in wintertime, when daylight was somewhere between ten a.m. and two p.m.

One wintertime ski run became the only municipal golf course in the summer months. Roland and George went there early in our stay and discovered that they had to be accompanied by an adult in order to use the course. This rule managed to insult both boys: at seventeen, George considered himself responsible; Roland was accustomed to playing golf alone or with his peers in Dallas without adult accompaniment. But Anchorage had other ways of annoying our teenagers. The primary one was the ten p.m. curfew for all youth, rigidly enforced. There were a number of recreational opportunities for adolescents, but all of them ended abruptly in time for the participants to be home by the deadline, despite the fact that the sun had not set. Obviously, the Alaskans were trying to protect their youth in ways that we in the lower forty-eight didn't use until a couple of decades later. I suppose the long, tedious darkness of winter helped account for the Anchorage regulations.



The golf course proved to be interesting in other ways. Because of the brief growing season, the fairways had little or no grass; the greens were Astroturf. Keeping the Astroturf in good condition was made difficult by the moose. In early winter, the moose, foraging in town for food, would see

the greens and naturally expect them to be edible. The Astroturf frustrated them into stomping rampages which destroyed the artificial grass. (The moose proved an additional menace in the winter, knocking over garbage cans while looking for food, and staring down occasional automobiles on downtown streets. There wasn't enough traffic for this to result in jams, however.) Another aspect of playing golf on a ski slope was the constant up and down nature of the fairways and the minute greens. Because of the requirement of adult accompaniment, Roland didn't play much golf, but what golf he did play he found very challenging. But it was certainly one factor that made our return to Dallas desirable in his eyes.

Roland's daughter Kelly volunteered her father to give her third grade class a lesson on Alaska because she had heard him talk about being there. He consulted us about details which he had forgotten and enjoyed renewing his own memories of his visit. One of our first excursions was to the Portage Glacier, a small one not far from Anchorage. Along the way, we found many vistas of Cook Inlet, with enticing beaches, all totally deserted. The reason was easy to understand. The Alaska tides are among the highest in the world, competing with the tides of the Bay of Fundy and some Scandinavian fjords. The incoming fifteen-foot tides rose so fast that a person could not outrun them on foot. Swimming and small sail-boating therefore were activities that took place on inland lakes and pools rather than the Inlet beaches. When we reached Portage, we were enchanted by the small bay at the terminus of the glacier and by the small chunks of ice which "calved" to become little icebergs.



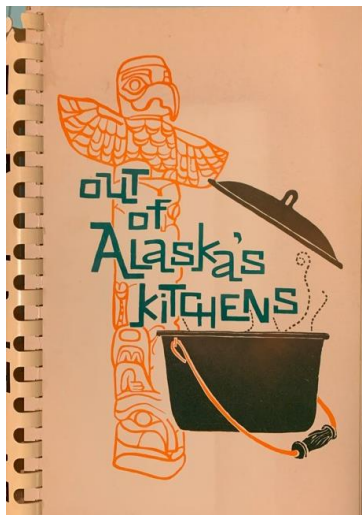
One Saturday we drove to Alyeska, a nearby popular ski resort. We rode the ski lift to the top of the slope, where we saw some hardy skiers start hiking to the glacier we could just see up the mountain beyond the lift. There were a number of people skiing down the slope and then trudging back up the glacier to ski down again. Our stay on the platform was enlivened by a group of pretty girls, the current Miss Alaska contestants who were gathered there for a photo-op.





Coming up the lift, we had been intrigued by mattresses strapped half-way up each of the poles supporting the lift. Going down, we realized that those mattresses were there to protect skiers. We were awed by the height of the mattresses, which indicated how deep the snow must be in the winter, deeper than we had ever imagined snow could get. Even in the summer the resort was a popular place, probably mostly for tourists like us.

We found downtown Anchorage endlessly fascinating. Paul and I were particularly impressed by the number of bookstores, and why shouldn't there be? What better way to spend the many dark hours of late fall, early spring, and winter than in reading? One of our prize purchases was a charming little Eskimo cook book, prepared by students of the Sihishmaref Day School and published by the Easter Seal Society for Alaska Crippled Children and Adults. We were tempted by the many books about Alaska, including a number of books detailing people's experiences during the terrible Good Friday earthquake. There was still so much evidence of the destructive force of that earthquake that the books were good sellers. In the several years since the quake, all of the debris had been cleared, but one could still see areas that were completely bare: blocks and blocks of city center which had been devastated and a long stretch of former residential lots next to Cook Inlet which will probably never be developed again.



One evening, Paul and I had dinner with some ARCO people in the only high-rise hotel in Anchorage at the time. The dinner conversation centered on the reactions of the people who were enjoying the cocktail hour when the quake began. The dining room where we were on the top floor of the hotel had a 360-degree panoramic view of the area, served by large tinted windows installed at a 45-degree angle to the outside walls, eliminating any reflection while giving an unrestricted view of the area. There had been scaffolding all the way up to the dining room at the time of the earthquake. Some of the people trapped in that violently swaying building had used chairs to try to break the windows so that they could return to ground level by means of the scaffolding. The glass proved too tough. The only exit was the fire stairs down twelve vibrating stories.

Another story had to do with a beauty salon and how an operator had solved the dilemma of what to do with a woman's hair. She had reached the point in the wave where the operator needed water to stop the action of the chemicals. But the water mains had sustained the first damage. Without water, the hair would be over-processed and probably would break off at the scalp. The resourceful operator dipped water from the toilet tank to neutralize the chemical and save the woman's hair. Then they could all concentrate on saving their lives.

One book we read was about a young mother who was sitting in the middle of her bed while she read to her two young children when the tremors began. Their home was in the then highly desirable residential area along Cook Inlet, later declared too hazardous for future building. She hastily started to leave the house for safer ground with her children but her six-year-old son burst into hysterical tears at the prospect of not putting on galoshes and gloves because he had been taught well about the danger of frostbitten fingers and toes in Anchorage winter weather. This time, getting away from the area that was swallowing houses was more important than frostbite. They did get out safely.



One of our interesting side trips was to the nearby farming community of Palmer, many of whose residents commuted to Anchorage for work. A number of small lakes in Anchorage were crowded

with the small single-engine pontoon-equipped planes of the many commuters and others who kept them for weekend hunting and fishing trips. We wanted to see the countryside at ground level, so we chose to drive rather than accept the invitation of the cousin of our Dallas dentist who had offered to fly us around the area in his Cessna with which he commuted from Palmer. We had hardly left the town limits when we were rewarded by a confrontation with a large moose who felt that the road belonged to him.

We were impressed with his size and his considerable ugliness and enjoyed the wait as he decided which side of the road he wanted to visit. We also were delighted with the patches of bright red flame plants and many other wild flowers we were not able to identify. We glimpsed one lake which figured in a spring-time recreation of many Anchorage residents. The outlet from the lake was blocked every winter by a late-thawing ice dam which formed at the end of a retreating glacier. As the level of the lake rose with the thawing of ice above the dam, the excitement in Anchorage revolved around bets placed on the date of the "dumping" of the lake, when the dam broke and released the excess water. The spring before our August visit, the bets had climbed extraordinarily high because of the unprecedentedly late dumping of the lake water.



Not "our" moose. There's a great slide of him somewhere unknown

The Palmer truck gardens were spectacular, with large, delicious vegetables such as the big, sweet carrots we had seen in the grocery stores in Anchorage (Carrots that same size in the lower forty-eight would have been tough and inedible). There was a yearly contest to see who could produce the largest cabbage. Because of the long growing days, *all* cabbages were so enormous, and incidentally so sweet, that I couldn't imagine the size of the winning cabbage. There were some beautiful homes in Palmer, all of them extremely compact to make for good wintertime comfort. This portion of Alaska was relatively dry and warm, but it still had more snow and lower temperatures than we Texans could imagine.



## Part 4

After two weeks in Anchorage, I felt at home and hated to think of leaving some of my favorite spots such as the colorful residential gardens, the downtown bookstores, even the parking decks with the electrical plug-ins for wintertime parking. Toward the end of our stay, Paul brought home some genuine Eskimo-smoked salmon. It was a great contrast with the lox we had become acquainted with in the lower forty-eight states. The taste was strong and lingering - in fact, much too strong and lingering for much indulgence, but it was nice to experience its wild taste.



We made arrangements to take our longest excursion following Paul's last day at work. With lightly packed overnight bags, we drove to Portage, the first glacier we had seen in Alaska, where we were to take a train through the mountain to Whittier. There we could board a ferry to Valdez. I had mixed feelings about the long tunnel. There had been a train in that tunnel at the time of the 1964 earthquake, but neither the train nor the tunnel had sustained any damage. Just the idea of being in such a place at such a time made me uneasy. After we emerged safely from the tunnel, we found the vistas from the train to be typical of those we'd been seeing on our various car trips, scenic without being spectacular.

When we arrived in Whittier, however, the setting was nearly overpowering. The almost deserted town was accessible only by ship, helicopter, or train, no roads. It had been an important post during World War II because of its protected position. The mountains came almost to the edge of the water. The military installation was a long, high rectangle of concrete built into the side of the mountain. It had accommodated virtually all the military operations as well as the housing for the personnel, said to have been a small city of ten thousand or so people. At the top of the mountain was the wide terminus of a glacier. As we sat on a flat rail car on the siding while we awaited our ferry, I found it difficult to take my eyes off the brooding scene of the glacier hovering menacingly over the huge building. I could imagine the winter scene with the white building blending into the snowy landscape, becoming one with the mountain and the glacier. I could only hope that the military personnel stationed there were frequently rotated out in order to avoid cabin fever. We could not discover whether the building was still used for military or any other purpose. Certainly, it appeared deserted, and the town of Whittier showed little if any activity.



We greeted the arrival of our large ferry with expectations of more varied scenes as we made our way across Prince William Sound to Valdez, our destination. The boys enjoyed watching the docking of the vessel, the opening of its large bay for unloading the automobiles, each already occupied by its passengers. The entire bow section of the ship swung up, opening a whale-like mouth. The automobiles would shortly be loaded onto flat cars for the trip back to Anchorage. Meanwhile, a dozen or so passengers walked down the gangplank to get on the train.



Finally, we were able to board the ferry. I don't recall watching any of the automobiles being loaded; all of us were too eager to inspect our ferry home for the day. It was the first water journey for George and Roland. The ferry was obviously designed for short service such as the day-long trip from Whittier to Valdez. There were a few staterooms, but most passengers congregated in a large enclosed upper deck room with easy access to the surrounding observation deck. There were ample seats for everyone; even the center seats had a splendid view through the large windows. The dining facilities were adequate but far from luxurious, better described, perhaps, as a snack bar.

We had time for a brief inspection tour before most of the passengers pressed to the observation rails to listen to instructions about life jackets and life boats in case of emergency. Then we watched the ferry move away from the dock and into the Sound. The captain kept us aware of

points of interest as well as pointing out some of the wild life that appeared on the mountain sides and in the water as we passed. He promised the possibility of whales but was able to point out an occasional Dahl sheep, some moose, even a bear or two, and a great many terns and kittiwakes in the air, but no whales. The highlight of the voyage came after lunch when we entered the bay leading to the Columbia Glacier. We slowed to a standstill. The glacier was over a mile away but looked enormous, stretching more than two miles across the bay and over three hundred feet above the water at its front edge. The sides of the ice showed the scouring effect of the huge river of ice as it flowed down to the water, mixing dirty brown earth and rocks with the ice. Away from the edges, the ice was mostly a clean white, with large patches of cold blue. The air in the bay was noticeably cooler than it had been in the Sound. We watched as several fairly large chunks of ice plunged from the glacier into the water. The captain assured us that the pieces of ice were much larger below the surface of the water than they were above it, but even so none of them looked big enough to sink the Titanic. However, they could have damaged smaller vessels, such as ours. Paul was using the movie camera hoping to catch an actual "calving" of an iceberg. The action was difficult to anticipate until the captain said that he would sound the ship's horn to try to cause substantial flaking of the ice. Then we learned that the booming sound would travel to the ice surface, and just before the echo returned to us, we could see the rising ice dust of a large piece of the glacier plunging into the water. The captain also pointed out to us a number of seals sunning on some flat ice not far from the base of the glacier. He said that smaller, faster boats could get closer to the glacier, but the size and lack of speed of the ferry dictated our cautious distance. We lingered for a long time and did not tire of watching the glacier flake off into the water, adding to the great clusters of ice in the bay. With the present slight warming of the atmosphere in the summer, the glacier was said to be retreating a few inches a year, although of course we couldn't see it. Finally, we left the bay, looking forward to seeing it on our return.





The weather closed in almost immediately after we left the glacier. A light rain was accompanied by enough wind to let us feel a slight roll of the ferry as we entered the most open part of the trip. We have a short strip of film focused on the rail of the ship and the rising and falling is enough to make anyone queasy. It was Dramamine time for part of our family. Fortunately, there was little to see in the rain. By the time the Dramamine was working well and everyone was happy moving around, we emerged into sunlight and could once again enjoy the numerous fjords giving views of mountains descending to the water's edge. Once or twice we saw inlets with small beaches, sometimes with a small boat pulled up onto the land. We speculated that there might be a cabin or tent not too far away on the side of the heavily wooded hill, but we saw no other signs of life.



Finally, at dusk we began our approach to Valdez, destined in a few years to be the end of the Alaskan pipeline. The importance of the port was that it was the farthest north port which furnished access to year-round open water so that tankers could load the oil piped from the North Slope and carry it to ports on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. The clear waters gave no hint of the catastrophic oil spill which was to occur two decades in the future, but at the time of the Exxon spill, near Valdez, we couldn't help remembering the beautiful scenery which was being spoiled.

The port of Valdez was not very large at that time, more like a crude frontier village. We were able to leave our ferry by walking onto the wooden dock where we were tied up. We walked to the small



hotel where we had reservations, left our bags, and started on foot to explore the quiet town. We had fish and chips at a small shop where a visiting Englishman exclaimed about the high quality of the fish we were served. It certainly tasted good to me, but I lacked the developed taste buds of our new companion who could compare it with British fish. However, he did prefer the English chips to the fries we were served. We retired to our welcome beds with the prospect of some daylight hours the next morning so that we could further explore Valdez before our return to Anchorage. We saw a small church with an onion dome, something we hadn't seen in Anchorage. This church couldn't have dated back to Russian days; the settlement was too young. A more memorable sight was the huge stockpile of pipes for the future installation of the pipeline, still in dispute at that time. We found that we could walk two abreast through one of the sections without stooping or crowding. Our exploration was ended by the hooting of our ferry, calling us to board.



The return trip was just as pleasant as the one the day before, but without any rain this time. The ferry did not linger long at the Columbia Glacier. There was another ship present, causing the ice falls, so we were able to enjoy more of them. Our captain was a bird lover and pointed out more birds, mainly those nesting in the surrounding cliffs. He was especially enthusiastic about the kittiwakes which inhabited an entire large cliff as we reentered the Whittier docking area. He disturbed the peace of their nesting with the signals he honked in order to dock. But we did get to see how many thousands were nesting in that steep cliff.



We were a bit early because of the time we had not spent at Columbia Glacier, so our return train was not waiting for us. Again, we sat on the edges of the flat car on the siding. This time waiting for our train proved to be a less pleasant adventure than we had bargained for. We had heard many jokes about the size of Alaskan mosquitoes but as Texans we were inclined to scoff at any attempt to appear larger and grander than anyone else. The stories were not exaggerations: the mosquitoes were a real plague. Among the waiting passengers, only one person was equipped with an effective repellent. Fortunately, he was very generous and shared his supply with many very grateful travelers. The mosquitoes were indeed enormous, and we were thankful to be relieved of their bombardment. Just before dark, the train finally came. We trooped back on for the return trip through the tunnel. Strangely, no thoughts of earthquakes bothered me as we went through this time. We were happy to get back to Anchorage even though we knew we were leaving Alaska the next day.



## Part 5

We packed up George's guitar, Roland's golf bag, and our suitcases, somewhat more crowded than when we had arrived, told Anchorage a reluctant goodbye, turned in our rental car, and took off for Seattle. The airplane pilot pointed out different landmarks from the ones we had seen two weeks before on our flight to Anchorage. The Mendenhall Glacier was the most spectacular sight - much larger than the Columbia Glacier we had seen at water level. The bay was littered with a great number of really large icebergs, and there were several cruise vessels lingering for the sights which we recalled so vividly from our ferry trip in Prince Edward Sound. We were able to see several clouds of ice spray, indicating ice falls from the glacier. High above the inland waterway, the captain pointed out a couple of pods of whales clearly visible from the air. We also were able to see a number of majestic Dahl sheep posing on craggy mountains. We glimpsed Sitka far below us and soon landed at Juneau, a much larger community nestled into the heavily treed islands and foothills. We could not leave the plane, but we had a definite feeling for the bustling activity in Alaska's capital, as well as for the much warmer air there as compared with Anchorage.

As we neared Seattle, our flight attendant told the four of us that we were late enough that our brief layover would be even shorter. As soon as the plane touched down, she had us gather our on-board belongings and stand at the door so that we could deplane first and make a mad dash to the opposite end of the terminal to board our connecting flight to Portland. As we stood there in the aisle, I began to understand why passengers are urged to stay belted in their seats during the taxiing to the terminal. Brother Tom, wife Pat, and the little girls were a nice surprise waiting for us and shared our sprint to the waiting plane, but the visit was chaotic. Toddler Kim had to be carried, and Stacy's three-year-old legs could barely keep up with us. We spared enough breath to outline our Anchorage stay and promise to fill in the details in letters before hastily boarding the plane being held for us.

Our regrets about leaving Alaska soon were coupled with disappointment that, as we left Seattle, we were on the wrong side of the plane to see much of Mount Rainier or later much of Mount Hood as we approached Portland, although we did see some of the lesser Cascade peaks along the way. What we could see of the city as the plane circled to land enabled us to do little more than identify the Willamette and Columbia Rivers and be impressed with how much larger Portland, Oregon, was after our absence of twenty some-odd years. We were able to spot our favorite Washington Park with its hill top rose gardens, tennis courts, and zoo. The stay in Portland was frustrating as it stretched to over half an hour delay, for we couldn't leave the plane. The delay made us regret that we could not have used that time for a better visit with Tom and family.

The rest of the journey was routine, mostly after dark, depriving us of some of the spectacular sights over the Rockies. But we arrived back in Dallas happy if a bit jet lagged from the loss of some six hours of time zones.

