

Richland and working at the Atomic Plant at Hanford. He had told me there were jobs available if I ever wanted to move there.

Chapter 4 Richland, Washington: 1947-49

Mary and I spent our first night in Richland, Washington, sleeping on the couch where Don and Kenneth Hutton lived. The next day we rented a room in a house nearby from Mr. and Mrs. Barnette. We applied for work at the Hanford Atomic Plant and were hired pending F.B.I. clearance. The Hanford Plant was run by General Electric for the United States Government. The work was classified high security. Employees were not permitted to talk about their work to anyone even their husband or wife. Mary and I could not go to work at Hanford until the F.B.I. completed a security clearance check on us which took six weeks. In the meantime we found waitress work at the Penny Wise Drug Store. The first restaurant, where we applied for work, would not hire us as we were not experienced waitresses. So when we applied at the Penny Wise Drug Store we told the manager we had done waitressing work in Kansas City, and we were hired. Working at the Penny Wise Drug Store Food Counter was quite a fun experience. There were lots of young single men working in the area and eating their meals in restaurants. We did not date any of them but we sure flirted and kidded with them. The main joke on me concerned pies. Each pie was marked with the letter A, B, AP or PA. It was easy to see A = apple pie and B = berry pie. I could not tell the difference between AP and PA pies so the guys would just yell to me to bring them a cup of coffee and a piece of AP or PA pie. I found out later that AP = apricots pie and PA = pineapple pie.

Mary and I were not in Richland long until guess who showed up? Wayne and Ozzie. We went out with them one night and we all drank beer. Ozzie was driving, he and Mary got to fighting and Ozzie wrecked the car. No one was hurt, not even the car, but we ended up in the Police Station. Fortunately Don was on the Police Force and they called him to come in. I was sick and throwing up in the sink in the bathroom. Mary didn't want the police to know I was sick so she was using her hands to carry what I threw up from the sink to the toilet! By the time we came out of the bathroom Wayne and Ozzie were gone. Don took Mary and I to our rooms. He did not say a word to me about what happened. I never saw or heard from Wayne again.

Ozzie stayed in Richland and found a job doing construction work. He and Mary rented a place in west Richland. According to Mary, things had not

changed between them. Ozzie still drank too much and they fought constantly. Mary did not stay with Ozzie long and he returned to Kansas City. Mary moved in with me in the dorm.

As soon as Mary and I were officially hired at the Hanford Atomic Plant I moved into the women's dormitory, W-20, located near downtown Richland. All employees rode the bus to work. We rode one bus to the main gate. There we transferred to a bus going to a particular area. Each area was about 30 miles from the other. The Hanford area was shaped like a base ball field. To enter each area everyone had to check in. We would receive a badge that was worn for a month and two instruments shaped like fountain pens. These pens were to be kept in your shirt pocket like pens. Our job was to "read these pens" daily. We sat at a machine and put the pencils, one at a time, into a place much like a large pencil sharpener. The machine had a scale attached which we read that would show if it had been in contact with radiation. We were checking to find out if any employee had come in contact with radiation while working in the Atomic Plant at Hanford. Mary and I didn't work in the same area but we worked the same shift. Women worked the day shift, 7:a.m. to 3:p.m. or swing shift 3:p.m. to 11:p.m. Women did not work the graveyard shift. After working seven days we were off work for 3 days; at the end of ten evenings we had five days off.

One evening after work while riding home on the bus a young man sat down next to me. He introduced himself as Tom Moffette. Tom was working at Hanford for the summer. He went to college during the Fall and Winter. We began dating. One weekend he took me home to meet his parents in Portland, Oregon. A family friend had a small airplane and they took me up for my first airplane ride. That was quite an experience for me and I loved it.

Tom taught me to drive his car. Sometimes on our days off, we would go for rides out in the countryside, around Richland, and he would let me drive. Learning to drive came in handy some years later when I bought my own car.

Mary and I went on several sight seeing trips when we had five days off. We took one trip while Ozzie was still in Richland. In July 1948, Mary, Ozzie, Tom Moffette and I went to Lake Pend Orville. We went fishing on the lake and to a dinner/dance that evening. Ozzie got drunk and made a scene. He didn't want to share a room with Tom but that was the arrangement. He ruined the whole weekend.

Another trip we went on was to Tacoma and Seattle, Washington. From Seattle we went on a cruise ship to Victoria, British Columbia. The people spoke French there. We toured the city and saw the beautiful sculptured Butchart

Gardens. This was my first trip out of the United States. My first time to hear a foreign language spoken and to use foreign money.

One day some of us took a picnic and drove to Mount Rainier. It was a pretty day for a ride--until we drove around to the other side of the mountain and hit a snow storm. One minute the sun was shining bright and the next minute we were in a snow storm. I didn't think we would get down off that mountain in one piece.

Kathleen graduated from Blythedale High School in May 1948. That summer she came out to Richland with Mr. and Mrs. Noel Hutton. Kathleen started working at the Hanford Plant. She "read" the badges employees wore for a month, checking for employees that had come in contact with radiation.

For Christmas, Don, Kathleen and Tom gave me a set of red and gray Samsonite luggage. I still have the set of luggage but seldom use it when I travel now. I still have the table model radio/phonograph I bought in Richland.

Don dated the secretary where he worked, Wenona Yvonne Henning. They fell in love and were married on February 26, 1949. "Nona" said later that she told her parents, when she first met Don, that he was the man she was going to marry.

Mary and I met two young men going to Alaska. They lived and worked in Alaska but were in Richland on vacation visiting relatives. I don't remember their last names but we called them Grant and Pierre. Grant was driving a new red Buick convertible. They asked us to ride back to Alaska with them. Mary and I decided to take our vacation and go with them. We told our bosses we were going to Alaska on our vacation but we would be to work at Hanford if we did not change our minds. They were agreeable to this so we took off for Alaska! There was no romance involved. Grant had a girlfriend in Alaska and Pierre was the the Casanova type. The four of us just had a good time being together.

Chapter 5 Fairbanks, Alaska: 1949

ALASKA HERE WE COME! Grant, Pierre, Mary and I left Richland the middle of March, 1949, in a red Buick convertible. We drove north across Washington and Canada headed for the Alaska Highway. The Alcan Highway, as it is called, runs from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, to Fairbanks, Alaska. Grant did all the driving as it was his car. He would drive very fast for hours; then he would stop so we could rest and sight see. We did not average very many miles per hour. The highway in Canada was gravel for miles and miles. There were banks

of snow all along the road and huge pot holes. On one hill the car hit a rock in the middle of the road and knocked a hole in the oil pan. When the roads got rough Mary would get car sick, we would just get her some snow to suck on and keep on going. We all thought it was funny, including Mary.

There were not many hotels in Canada and a couple of times we had to all four share a room. We just thought this was funny too. It didn't really present a problem. We were just four young people having a new adventure in life. We were slap happy and care free.

In 1949, there was no bridge crossing one river in Canada. During the summer there was a ferry but in the winter cars drove across on the ice. Grant kept saying he hoped we would get there before the ice started to thaw; if not we would need to wait a few days until the ferry could start to run again. We crossed the river driving on the ice without a problem.

After we reached the Alaska Highway it was smooth driving the rest of the way to Alaska. I have a picture of me taken on March 26, 1949, with the sign that states, "Entering ALASKA Leaving Yukon Territory". It is about 3,000 miles from Seattle to Fairbanks and I remember it as taking us about one week to make the drive. (Mary's father had worked on the Alaska Highway when it was constructed.)

As soon as we arrived in Fairbanks, Mary and I checked into a hotel and paid our rent for one week. We thought this way we would have a place to stay while we looked for work and if we had not found a job in that week we would fly back to Richland, Washington. Since I had worked for the government in Kansas City, we decided to go to Ladd Air Force Base just outside of town and apply for jobs. We were hired immediately, pending typing tests and physicals. We passed the typing tests but Mary did not pass the urine test and asked it be taken again. This time I "peed" into a small jar. Mary took this into the bathroom and poured it into the test bottle. This time she passed the urine test.

A sergeant was processing our applications. He asked where we were staying and when we told him we were staying at a hotel in Fairbanks. He wanted to know which hotel and we told him. I don't remember the name of the hotel now. He said that he would take us down to the hotel to check out and we could move into temporary quarters there on the airbase. We told him we had already paid for our room for the week and we would wait until our permanent quarters became available. He insisted that we must move right then. He told us we were staying in the Red Light District of Fairbanks. He moved us that day.

Grant and Pierre came out to our temporary quarters to tell us goodbye as they were going back to the States. Grant found out his girlfriend had married

someone else while he was gone on vacation. We all joined in his disappointment by drinking beer. As usual I got sick and went to sleep. Grant and Pierre left when the sergeant came to tell us that we could move into our permanent quarters. Mary moved us as I was in no shape to help. She even moved the empty beer cans, in my red and grey luggage. There are still stains in the lining of my luggage. Mary said she didn't want the sergeant to know we had been drinking beer in our room.

Chena Court was a women's dormitory on the base. There was a House Mother but we had only a few rules. The Air Police patrolled the area and the airmen. They had very strict rules. A lady that worked for the U.S.O. lived at Chena Court. She planned many activities for the women and the airmen stationed there. At Chena Court there was a Social Hall and kitchen we could use. Our room was L shaped. We put the twin beds in one part and used the other part as a sitting room. Mary's mother sent us pretty new plaid bedspreads and curtains. I still have my bedspread.

In 1949, Alaska was a Territory of the United States. Government employees received an additional 25% overseas pay. (Alaska became the 49th state in 1958.)

Fairbanks was a small western town with mud streets and few sidewalks. It seemed every other business was a bar. When I received my Income Tax refund on my birthday, March 30, Mary and I decided to celebrate by having a drink in each bar in Fairbanks. We did not make it to all the bars. I got sick, as usual, and we had to go back to our room. To explain: I didn't like the taste of liquor so I would smoke a cigarette to kill the taste of the liquor, then I would take a drink of liquor to kill the taste of the cigarette. This would become a vicious circle. I would then get sick, throw up, and finally sleep it off. I eventually learned that if I was going to party and drink I should stop at one mixed drink and then switch to only water. I never did get so I could drink more than one mixed drink, nor learn to smoke. Guess I was lucky after all.

Mary and I did not work in the same offices at Ladd Air Force Base. I worked in the Quartermaster Department as I had worked for the Quartermaster Depot in Kansas City. Here at Ladd Air Force Base we ordered supplies, all kinds of supplies used there at the Air Base. Mary worked in the Legal Aid Department as she had worked for a lawyer in Kansas City.

During the summer it was nice and warm. On occasions some of the airmen would take a jeep out into the countryside exploring. Mary and I went along on one such trip. We found a vacant cabin in some remote area, just like you can

see in some western movies. The tundra (moss) would so thick we could hardly walk through it.

Sometimes, after work, we would walk to Fairbanks. Walking home after dark we could see the aurora borealis, "northern lights". They were so pretty, we would feel like we could reach out and touch them. We had two favorite hangouts in Fairbanks. One was "Hill's Bar". The other was a dance hall but I don't remember the name of it. It was in a building like a barn and it had saw dust on the floors. It had a dance floor and a band played there every night. Mary became acquainted with the band members and they would play her favorite song whenever we walked in. I can't remember the name of the song, and I should as I heard it often enough, but then that was 47 years ago.

The U.S.O. and the Air Force occasionally flew some of the girls, working at the Ladd Air Force Base, to some of the remote air bases in Alaska. There we ate dinner and attended dances. I have a picture of Mary and I, in our parachutes, just before taking off for Big Delta, Alaska, Memorial Day weekend, June 1949. I danced with a pilot, Lieutenant Don Long. He flew to Ladd Air Force Base a few times after that and we dated until he was shipped to another air base.

One of the most interesting trips Mary and I went on was to Barter Island which is located at the northern most part of Alaska. Below is an excerpt from an article I wrote my parents in July 1949, that was published in the Bethany Republican-Clipper, Harrison County Missouri:

MY TRIP TO BARTER ISLAND

Written by Mildred Fowler

July 24, 1949, Ladd Air Force Base, Fairbanks, Alaska, flew an eight-piece band and some young ladies, that worked and lived on the base, to Barter Island, Alaska, to entertain the airmen stationed there. Mary Harker and I, Mildred Fowler, were two of those ladies.

Mary and I arrived, that morning, at the air strip at 8:45 a.m. It was misty and cloudy so we didn't know if we would take off or not. We were told they would wait a while to see if the weather would clear. We were issued flight jackets and boots as we would be flying at 13,000 feet and it would be cold up there. Finally at 9:30 a.m. the decision was made to leave. Mary Harker, myself, and three other ladies, flew with the band, in one plane. The other eleven ladies flew in another plane. The planes were cargo planes and only had benches along the sides to sit.

This was only my second time to fly and it was very exciting. It was so pretty flying at 13,000 feet. Below us we could see the sun shining, bright blue sky and beautiful white clouds. We flew over Fort Yukon, the Yukon River, the Arctic Circle and over the Brooks Mountain Range. The mountains still had quite a bit of snow on them. We could see several glaciers in the valleys around the mountains.

When we got to Barter Island the plane circled out over the Arctic Ocean and we could see several icebergs. The ice had just broken up two days before. We landed at noon. We were picked up at the air strip by government vehicles called Weasels and taken to the Mess Hall for dinner. We were served fried chicken, ham, mashed potatoes, lima beans, salad, cake, ice cream, and coffee or tea. It sure tasted good as we did not have time to eat breakfast before we left Fairbanks.

After dinner, they took us to see the Eskimo Village. The Eskimos lived in shacks, not igloos. It was very interesting. We were allowed to take pictures of the village, the Eskimos and the furs they were working on. I have a picture of me putting my hand in the Arctic Ocean. Boy was the water cold! They say a person can only survive in the Arctic Ocean five minutes.

At 2:30 p.m. we went to Sunday School, which was held in the home of the Eskimo Chief. The men were all dressed up and had ties on. The women wore their parkas. The Chief spoke in English and then Eskimo. During Sunday School, one little baby about three years old started crying. The mother fed him at her breast but he continued to cry. She then put him up under her dress and he went to sleep. It was the funniest thing. All of us could hardly keep a straight face while that was going on.

After Sunday School we had to dash to the B.O.Q. to get dressed for the dance. All the girls danced every dance, with different airmen. We danced from 3:45 to 6:00 p.m. They served beer and cokes to drink. Several of the airmen had not seen a white girl for seven or eight months. When they are sent to Barter Island they are to stay up there one year before going back to the States. Some times they can get a pass to fly down to Fairbanks but most of them don't.

At 6:00 p.m. we had a light supper: Chicken, cold cuts, etc. While we were eating we talked to the Captain and he told us about Barter Island and the Eskimos:

Eskimos have been in the area for a long time. Their diet consists of raw seal and meat from wild game. They wear mostly clothing made from animal skins. The past two years Eskimos just discovered the mail order catalogs, Sears and Wards, and are now ordering items. Couples must go to Point Barrow to get

married. As the winters are long, dark and cold they usually wait for spring to make the trip and by then they often already have babies. They do not believe in spanking or slapping their children. When a man visits a couple, it is the courtesy of a married man to leave for a hour or all night to let a visiting man sleep with his wife.

Barter Island is just off the mainland of Alaska. The United States Air Force set up a base at Barter Island about 1940. There were between 40 and 60 men stationed there in 1949. The buildings were Quonset huts. The island is very small, long and narrow. The Captain told us it only had about 18 inches of top soil around the edges and under that and in the center it is solid ice. In other words Barter Island is just an iceberg. The run way is gravel. It was 33 degrees when we were there in July and it seldom gets any warmer. In the winter it can get to 65 degrees below zero.

After supper, we went back and danced with the airmen until 9:45 p.m. They had planned to take us out on a boat to see some seals, polar bears and the icebergs close-up but they were afraid we would nearly freeze as none of us were dressed for that kind of trip. Remember, during the summer, it is daylight night and day that far north. We took off at 10:00 p.m. and arrived at Ladd Air Force Base at 1:00 a.m. We had to circle the field at Ladd for half a hour as there were so many planes in the air wanting to land. Needless to say we were all very tired when we returned home, but it had been an exciting trip and a Great Day!

During the winter it was very cold. An Air Force Bus would pick us up at the door of the barracks and bring us to the door of the office where we worked. Even if you went downtown Fairbanks the bus would let you off right in front of any store, house or building you wanted. It was too cold to walk more then a few feet. In the winter it is dark about 20 hours out of 24. It was a standing joke for someone, around noon, to yell, "The sun is shining" and we would dash outside to see the the daylight and sun shine.

I dated Homer Hare, an airman from San Antonio, Texas for awhile. Then I dated a Bush Pilot Dave Nelson a few times. Mary dated him for awhile and he ended up marrying another girl named Maureen. They were still living in Alaska the last I heard. In September I started dating S/Sgt. Bill Shumate from Middletown, Ohio. Mary met one of the Air Patrolman, Sgt. Jim Corley, and began dating him. We became a foursome and had some great times together. Bill and Jim's duty at Ladd Air Force Base was up in December. Mary and Jim were married on November 4, 1949 and Jim was shipped to an airbase in

California. Bill Shumate returning to the States, with my Blythedale High School class ring, never to be heard from again. I had never let anyone wear my class ring before and the one time I did I never saw the ring again. Bill made me a small table for my radio/phonograph and I still have and use it.

I decided to leave Alaska and return home to Missouri in time for Christmas. The end of my Alaska Story.....