

## Transcript Summary

**UAF Oral History Call No:** 95-36

**Date of Recording:** N/A

**Length of Recording:** 1:00:37

**Narrator:** MARTHA M. SWANSON & GLEN A. SWANSON

**Interviewer:** David A. Hales

**Others Present:** N/A

**Recording Location:** Fairfax, VA (Repeatedly hint at actually recording in Alaska)

**Transcriber:** Micki Sievers

**Transcription Date:** (01/27/2024 MS)

**Keywords:**

Native Alaskan, St. Stevens Mission, Episcopalian mission, Native Heritage, Fort Yukon, Virginia

(00:00:00)

The interviewer begins by asking Martha what life is like in Virginia and how long they have been living in Virginia.

(00:00:23)

Martha states they've been in Virginia for 31 years, and they moved down from Minnesota where Glen had been born and raised. They moved to Virginia for a job and both their children went to school and all the children graduated from different Universities in Virginia. After they all graduated and got married, they moved apart from each other. Martha and Glen are now retired, they travel a lot and play sports like golf.

(00:02:45)

The interviewer asks Glen what he did in Washington and what his profession was. Glen corrects him that he grew up in Minnesota, and graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in business administration. Glen says that he was then drafted into the war and didn't want to join the infantry, after testing he was given a position of Yeoman in the Navy. He was transferred to the Great Lakes for training but was sent home because his father was ill. Then later he was sent to Virginia and met Martha who was in Virginia studying to be a nurse at St. Lukes Hospital. At the end of the war, they wed in Norfolk, VA. Glen was working at the Veterans Association in Washington DC and was working with an economic development administration, sponsored by the Department of Commerce. When Glen was 55, he changed to a lobbying position with the independent banker's organization. Glen represented small banks.

(00:06:11)

Martha joins in stating Glen worked with small banks across the country and not just in Washington. Glen states it was very educational for them because they got to travel a lot and attend conventions. While on a trip to Florida, they decided to sell their VA home and moved to Florida for four years.

(00:07:27)

The interviewer states that they decided to go back to Fairfax, Martha jumps in saying she had tired of the retiree Florida golfing life. Glen says one day he came home and Martha was teary-eyed and asked why they couldn't go back to Virginia. Then when they went back to visit their children they decided to move back, which Martha says shows how spur of the moment they are.

(00:08:07)

The interviewer mentions that Martha was born in Fort Yukon, Alaska. She was born in a hospital and raised at St. Stevens Mission approximately around 3 years old, and would periodically see her mother and family.

(00:09:43)

The interviewer asks Martha to tell them about life in the mission. Martha says it was a home for children, many orphaned, and others that missionaries felt the children should get an education. Many parents left their children there, and Martha believed it was a good place. Martha did not like food until her 30s, she didn't want to eat but the mission provided good food, it was her personal choice.

(00:11:03)

The interviewer asks if this was an Episcopalian mission. Martha replies yes and states Mrs. and Dr. Burke raised her until she was 16, and then Dr. Burke died. After he died other missionaries took over and Reverend CP. Shelton came to Fairbanks, Alaska from Norfolk, Virginia, and offered her to leave and continue her education, so she did in 1940.

(00:12:33)

Glen joins in and says Martha always said she had a great time at the mission and the people in charge had very good educational backgrounds and encouraged Martha to get a better education.

(00:13:40)

The interviewer asks what she remembers about the Burke's and what they were like. Martha says they were marvelous people very giving, and she felt she received a lot of great things from them. Glen chimes in encouraging some stories of her performing on stage.

(00:18:22)

Glen encourages Martha to tell a story so they change the topic to a family who needed her help on the trip line [trapline] taking care of their three children and they'd continue giving her educational lessons. The family was Hazel Stapleton [?] and Glen Linxwiler [checked, this is the correct spelling] who were white and practiced trapping. She mentions fearing killing the rabbits, but they didn't make her kill them and gave her \$10 but Martha said money didn't mean anything to her at that time. She then went back to the mission but didn't want to and wanted to be on the trip line.

(00:23:27)

The interviewer asks if it was exciting that she knew she'd be going to the States. The Burkes had always given Martha the idea that she'd be heading to the Lower 48 and was excited for when it might happen. She states only in recent times had she thought of Alaska and didn't have a family to go back to because she didn't keep in good contact with her family and half siblings so she didn't feel familial ties.

(00:24:42)

The interviewer asks so you didn't have any contact with them after you moved to the lower 48. Martha says she'd kept contact with her brother Jim, her mother-in-law wrote a few letters but died pretty soon after she moved, but now none of them write letters.

(00:25:29)

The interviewer asks so are you visiting your family on this trip, are they going to Fort Yukon. Martha says she didn't think she had relatives but every Native has come up to her and say they're her relatives. In the mission she had to ask permission to leave and had specific times to leave the mission, people didn't really see relatives or talk about them.

(00:26:28)

Glen adds that Martha's mother Emma John [?] was known for taking in people and giving them homes. Several people they've come across in Alaska had been raised by Martha's mother and praised her for helping many people. Martha joined in praising how her mother helped people.

(00:27:10)

Glen tells Martha to tell them about Henry and Bill. When Martha went to the mission, her mother decided to move, and most of Martha's brothers all moved to Sitka for different reasons. Martha's brother Henry died at a young age because a ferry capsized and her brother kept swimming to help people but the last child panicked and pulled an exhausted Henry down and he drowned. Her brother William was a basketball player and was popular, but then joined the military, then later went AWOL and decided he didn't want to be in the service. The military was willing to keep William, but he didn't want to stay, then he later died during a fishing accident when he slipped on ice on the fishing boat and fell overboard and drowned. Only David remained and went to Oregon for school for water treatment, then got a job in Anchorage. Glen states that David felt resentment from his job because he was Native, so he left that job.

(00:33:05)

The interviewer asks that she went on to become a nurse, did you think about that as a child, that you wanted to be a nurse. Martha states it's the only thing they could afford. She attended an episcopal school for girls in Western North Carolina, called Valley Crucis School, and she finished her high schooling there. The Sheltons [?] were her legal guardians, who did not adopt her, but they changed her name to Martha Shelton [?]. They tried to get her into top colleges but universities thought her Alaska education wasn't good enough. So they sent her to nursing school which was St. Lukes Hospital in Virginia. Martha's graduating class was the last before the war was declared and now it is no longer a school. During the war, they were incredibly busy and her and her friends would go into town to meet soldiers. After training Martha worked in the VA hospital and helped nurse soldiers returning from war back to health. Martha suddenly

received a letter from Glen who she hadn't dated and didn't want to date cause he dated girls she knew. She didn't want to marry but then later decided to give Glen a chance.

(00:41:01)

The interviewer asks if Martha was happy with her profession as a nurse. Martha explains she didn't nurse after they got married cause they began having kids, and in those days women didn't work much. 20 years later they went back to the Washington area and she worked at the Arlington Hospital for a short time and was in charge of a ward. She was able to help buy a car and furniture and things they needed, but when Glen began working with the Bankers Association they were traveling too much so she couldn't continue working. When their children finished school, in 1971 they took a trip to Alaska for the first time since Martha had left.

(00:43:45)

The interviewer asks Martha if she ever felt any racial prejudice while working in nursing. Martha says she never did and felt everyone treated her the same, she feels if a person feels different that other people feel it.

(00:44:22)

The interviewer asks Martha if she ever felt cheated that she never knew more about her Native heritage. Martha explains she never felt cheated and didn't miss the family life. One of the Carter girls also went to North Carolina when she did, but she was very homesick and had close ties to her family, so she didn't complete her education. Martha says perhaps being raised by white people encouraged her goals and she felt no reason to return to Alaska. When she flew over Alaska the other day it was marvelous. Fort Yukon was a lovely town, with a show house that hosted shows every Friday evening followed by a dance. There was a hospital and mission that had registered nurses.

(00:47:00)

Glen asks Martha to tell David about a girl who got attacked by a dog. Martha says when the girl Speatrice Stevens [?] called Beaty, was a toddler she walked into an area with a lot of dogs because at that time every house had a dog team. When the girl wandered into where the dogs were tied, at least one dog scalped her and scratched one eye where the tear duct was torn and a scar across the eye. Dr. Burke was able to cover hair on most of her scalp injury since she couldn't grow hair in a spot properly and Martha found this amazing that he could take care of her like living 8 miles above the Arctic. Glen adds that they visited with the woman's son in Indiana recently and he runs a successful business.

(00:49:36)

The interviewer asks if the girl is still alive. Martha expressed that Beaty died but she isn't sure when and why but her daughter had taken notes. In Washington, Martha and Glen are a part of the "Minnesota Association" and in March they have a salmon dinner event, and the salmon are shipped down. They realized Beaty's son Charles Stevens [?] called Charlie, was the one supplying the salmon to the event.

(00:51:32)

The interviewer asks what it was like being back in Fort Yukon after all these years. Martha says it was marvelous. The interviewer asks if she ever had any regrets about being taken from her community and transplanted, and her life went in another direction. Martha quickly jumps in

saying no, no. Then the interviewer asks if she ever learned the Native language. Martha replies no and says she knows a couple of words like mother. She mentions she met many Natives who also don't know the language and believes many want to learn.

(00:52:39)

Glen mentions when they went last that their daughter Sharon Swanson [?] who is a geologist had worked with the Geological Survey program and visited Alaska for two summers, which is a part of why they're in Alaska. Their daughter has a strong interest in understanding Martha's culture and family history, they had recently learned Martha's grandfather was an important chief. Martha's grandfather she heard was chief of all the Alaskan tribes, described as a powerful and wealthy man who took in a lot of widows and children. Glen mentions to tell David about his burial. Martha mentions the story of people who would row by his grave and blow a whistle if the boat bobbed up and down. Martha believed she could not have made it if she had dwelt on her heritage, she believed she needed to do her best and continued to do her best. Sharon was and is incredibly interested in working with Alaska Natives and doing as much as she can for them. Martha says she'd often be told a sibling's address but then they would generally have already moved before they could see each other.

(00:57:17)

The interviewer mentions that it is interesting that Sharon Swanson [?] is now so interested in finding her roots. Martha agrees and mentions Sharon had a great time with a Native guide who showed her a fish wheel and other things she had heard about but never had seen before.

(00:59:17)

The interviewer mentions they are almost out of tape and asks if there's anything else they'd like to add. Martha mentions she doesn't know but has pictures she believed David would be interested in seeing and if the University wanted them. The interviewer says they will need to document those and write about their information. David says thank you on behalf of the University of Alaska Fairbanks and concludes the interview.