

April 6, 1995

This is Irma Kackert writing, I am starting a trip to Alaska when there is snow on the ground there. I have read about the Alaska train, which travels once a week, in winter months, between Anchorage and Fairbanks and gives riders beautiful views of the mountain ranges, completely covered with snow. In summer months, starting in June, it runs daily for tourists, but now leaves Anchorage on Saturday morning, returns from Fairbanks on Sunday morning. It is a 13 hour trip, there are very few passengers.

I am leaving the Los Angeles airport at 8:45 a.m., bound for Anchorage, there will be a stop at Seattle, but no plane change. It is a very mild morning here in California, about 61 F, and hazy. I am flying on Delta Airlines, using a free Frequent Flyer award ticket, have flown all over the world and gained these miles. Yesterday I finished teaching the winter session of Adapted Aquatics classes (exercises in warm water) for the local school district, there are no classes next week because of spring vacation, so I am free to travel. I'll return April 15. At the stop in Seattle, I deplaned, walked up and down a bit in the terminal for exercise, noted it was sprinkling outside, temperature was 55 F. We took off again, the sky was cloudy for the next 1 ½ hours, then it began clearing and the sun was seen. Soon the shoreline of main body of Alaska was seen, from the right side of the plane, a spectacular sight, blue ocean below and snow covered mountain range came right down to the water's edge. The St. Elias mountain range is here, with peaks up to 19,000 feet high, the second highest in Alaska, I took some pictures out of the plane window. Now a huge, bluish glacier is seen, frozen ice flowing right down to the water's edge – much like the glacier I was on top of, when traveling in New Zealand a couple of years ago. The sun is very bright now, luckily the clouds are gone.

We arrived in Anchorage at 3:30 p.m., I obtained a hotel room at the airport terminal and van from there picked me up. The streets were dry, but piled snow was all over in yards and parkways. The temperature was just about at freezing, there was some ice in places where you walked, as it thawed in mid day, but froze again toward evening. There are two mountain ranges around Anchorage, they are completely snow covered and a lovely sight. At the hotel I made a phone call to a niece of Helen Anderson, a lady in my classes, who lives here. Helen asked me to relay a message to her. The lady was surprised to have a stranger calling her, with a message from her aunt, I will deliver some photos to her, while I am here. I studied the map of Anchorage, went out and took a long walk then had a chicken dinner in a restaurant near the hotel. The air was brisk, not terribly cold.

## **FRIDAY APRIL 7**

Didn't sleep well, the room was too warm, and people coming and going to room next door were noisy. In the morning the temperature was 27 F, I took a long walk to the business district, saw the huge performing arts center (a beautiful building), and took the pictures

Helen Anderson sent, to her niece who worked in the Bank of America building. This was a very modern, glass sided, skyscraper, I left them with a receptionist, my errand was done. High piles of dirty snow covered most areas, except the streets and walks, even the park was covered with 3 feet of it, all over, only walks were shoveled. One had to be careful walking, and not slip on ice. It was a bright, crisp day, I wore my big, heavy coat that I keep, and wear when going back to daughter Judy in Kansas – don't need it in California. Anchorage is a city with 250,000 population, it is a very busy city with modern transportation and beautiful business buildings. I went back to the Kobek Motel Inn and my room, did some phone calling, to arrange for the train ride tomorrow to Fairbanks, and return. The train depot is very handy, in the business district, fare is \$70 round trip. I made a reservation. I also reserved a different room, at Day's Inn, for tonight, did not like it here. Next, went out and had brunch, eggs, hash browns, toast, jam and coffee.

At 12:30 p.m. was picked up at Kobek Inn, by a van from North Country Service, had arranged by phone, a trip to areas near Anchorage. Troy, the driver, was a very pleasant young man, had much knowledge to give to me, and the other three passengers. We were headed for the Portage glacier, a lake with glacier flowing into it, now all covered with deep snow. On the way saw spectacular scenes: an arm of the salt water ocean flows inland, and forms fjords rising up from the water. These are the Chugash mountains, luckily the weather was clear, brisk air, blue sky and bright sun. An interesting note from Troy: chunks of ice were in the thawing water, what looked like huge dark grey boulders, were small icebergs, which had rolled around in the tidal flats, picking up the dirt and ground-up rock. Huge tides of 30 feet occur here. These icebergs are thawing slowly and will disappear by mid May, tourists coming in summer do not see the natural events of winter. This was different, and very interesting. The mountains were visible all along our drive, the range is covered with deep snow, many avalanches were seen – in one place it had even covered all the road, as it thundered down, we had to detour around it. Arriving at Portage Lake, we went into the visitor's center, learned this place was named by the Athabaskan Indians, who walked with snowshoes, over the mountain range, through a cut and on the glacier, to get to the Turnagain Arm of the Pacific, and to the Seward and Valdez area. The U.S. Forest Service maintains the center, and showed a film about glaciers and artifacts of the area.

Then I walked out onto the frozen lake to a huge chunk of ice, an iceberg, in the lake, and covered with deep snow. This was quite a thrill, there were also other people out on the ice, taking pictures, I was happy it was a bright, sunny time. The ranges of mountains around here are the Chugash, the Alaska, and the Talkeetna. A glacier is formed by years of snow compacting, and compressing into ice which does not melt in the thawing season. It builds in density, looks bluish from reflection of the sky. Slow, minimal melting from underneath, goes down the mountain and then chunks "calve" or break off, falling into the water below as icebergs. They are made of fresh snowfall water, and you can detect the bluish water in a creek, or stream, as it flows, in contrast to lake outlet water. I learned a lot today, and really enjoyed it. As we were riding away, luckily one of the ladies in the van spotted a moose and a young one, in bushes off the road (the Seward Highway) next to a stream. They were eating. We departed the van, used field glasses I had with me, and watched the animals for 10 minutes, this was a big thrill. There was such deep snow this year in Alaska, the moose have trouble getting around. Friends of mine who have come

here in summer months did not see any animals, the driver said it is because the bushes are so full of leaves, the animals are not visible. Now, deciduous trees are bare, and the pines are thin. There was a huge earthquake, 9.2, here in 1964, it just dropped and cracked this Anchorage area, there was much damage. We saw some small buildings that had been dropped down about 6 feet, were very damaged.

On the return to Anchorage, we stopped at the Aleyeska Ski area, it was lovely! In a craft shop there, viewed jade jewelry being made from Alaska jade. There was a huge piece 3 feet by 3 feet, that was being cut with an automatic saw, a sign nearby said the cutting has been going continuously since February, that is over 2 months. The owner of the shop brings huge pieces of rock with jade in it, out of the north Alaska mountains, by snow cat, then it is taken down to a barge in the ocean, floated down to Valdez area, where it's trucked to Anchorage. Returning to the city, I was taken to Day's Inn on 5th street, downtown area. I had a lovely room, very modern, with TV, phone, microwave, refrigerator, private bath, price was only \$59.60 with a senior discount. I am glad I changed from the Kobuk Inn. I retired, after a soup, sandwich and wine meal in the hotel. I find food is a bit expensive here. I ordered a sandwich, orange and cookie for the train tomorrow, it was \$7.20.

## **SATURDAY APRIL 8**

I left the hotel at 7:45 a.m., by the courtesy van, to the railroad station, and picked up my ticket. The only way I can see the Denali Park area, and Mt. McKinley, the highest peak in North America, is by train. Now it only makes one round trip each week, so I must ride on it today – next Saturday I leave Alaska. I am writing this journal on the train, after leaving Anchorage, have seen a group of moose in a cleared area near the train. There are four passengers in this coach, and I should describe how this train is set up. There are 2 passenger cars and a baggage car. People who bring their big dogs with them, locals, can ride in the baggage car with the dogs, or chain them to the side walls, and come to the passenger car for seats. I walked back to the baggage car, to see some people, with dogs. List of stations on the entire trip, is given to passengers – there is only one regular stop, at Talkeetna. If anyone wants to get off some place else, they pull the cord up above, if anyone wants to get on the train, they stand by the tracks waving a white cloth, or holding up a tall orange colored flag. The train will stop for them. Food service is only provided between May 15 and September 30. The people who get on the train out here in “the boonies” wear heavy outdoor clothing and boots, some carry snowshoes. One lady had a rifle slung across her back! This is a different train trip, sort of a commuter for people who live out here in remote settlements, former gold-mining country. The conductor, a jolly man with stories of the area, knows most of these people, said he has been a conductor since 1959. He just came through this car, looking for the possessions of a lady passenger, to get her name. She got off the train at Talkeetna, the scheduled stop, to make a phone call. The conductor had told her it would be a very brief stop, and to hurry back. We took off after new passengers got on board, and soon after he came through the car looking for her ---- she was left behind! He secured her name from her luggage, which was across the aisle, near my seat. I've ridden on a lot of trains, never on one with all this happening. We are near Hurricane Gulch, the next stop listed on the schedule is Hurricane. Now we've

stopped again, and I see the high pole beside the track, with an orange pennant flag on it, and people waiting to get on the train. These are called "F" stops (for flag) on the schedule.

We have passed frozen lakes, partially thawed small creeks, mountain crests, deep ravines, really beautiful scenery, are now going through snow covered forests. There are slender birch, and other deciduous trees, all bare now, plus pine trees. I saw moose now and then, running away from the train tracks. The sky was a bit cloudy earlier, but now sunny and clear, I will get good photos. There are small cabins seen now and then, almost completely covered with snow, they are not used during winter months, but are for forest service employees. A man and woman, with a huge white dog, got on at a flag stop, rode for about 45 minutes, then got off in the middle of nowhere. They were carrying snowshoes, maybe going to find their cabin and clear away the snow, they carried backpacks also. We rode through marvelous scenery, the range where Mt. McKinley rises, provided spectacular views for about 1 ½ hours, I took many photos and felt fortunate it was clear, not foggy and grey. Viewing this range tops any mountain scenery I've seen, in the Rockies, in Switzerland, etc. The Himalayan summits were in fog and clouds when I saw them in India. This train travels miles and miles between two mountain ranges, providing breathtaking scenery. I wonder if my pictures will do justice to the real thing?

Surprise!!!! At Hurricane, the lady who was left behind, got on as we stopped. She said she ran after the train, as it pulled out of Talkeetna, then went into a café and bar there, grabbed at a man, offered him \$100 to drive the road that is along the train tracks (we crossed it many times), to Hurricane, 70 miles away. He sped along the highway, was with her at Hurricane when the train pulled in. She was to be met at the Denali Park station by friends, is going to be an employee at Denali National Park Hotel for the summer. The train slowed at the Denali Park station, but it was still closed for the winter, snow all over the road. A little further on, at a crossing of the highway, the train slowed, then stopped. A car, and friends were waiting to pick her up. A thrilling adventure, all the passengers in our coach were happy for her.

As we passed Denali National Park, could look across a wide valley to many buildings, these were apartments and hotels for the summer tourists who flock here each year to enjoy the scenic area. I'll never forget the ethereal beauty of these snow covered mountain ranges – not just the tops covered in white, but the whole, entire ranges. We went on slowly, after passing Denali, crawling along sheer rock mountainsides. It had taken much dynamiting of the mountains and great engineering, to create this railroad and the highway for autos. We were above the river Nenona, for many miles, it was ice covered, and snow clung to the sheer cliffs around it. I understand it is a very swift river and rafting is done for sport, in summer months. -----Now, we are further along, stopped on a siding. Railroad work crews are near the tracks. Another train of the Alaska railroad is passing us, for freight, pulling 20 flat cars loaded with cut logs from the forest, 37 tank cars (probably transporting oil from the north part of Alaska), 6 box cars, and then a few other type freight cars. I passed the time waiting, by counting all of them, it was a very long train. Near the work crew there was a huge derrick, evidently a machine used in maintenance for the tracks, it must take constant care to keep this train running, in severe snow, ice, thawing, and heavy rains. The roadbed must need constant care, and observation. We have gone through many tunnels, and over high bridges. A man standing near the big derrick just left,

got on an ATC vehicle and rode up a tiny road that was all snow packed. Man and machine can do wonders!

We have been at very high elevations, now are coming down slowly and I'm noting many more pine trees, less snow, and sometimes bare ground is showing. It is 6:00 p.m., have been riding all day, guess I'll eat my beef sandwich (lettuce and tomato slice were wrapped separately) that I brought from the hotel. I also have a cookie, an orange, a couple of granola bars, and some dates that I brought along. I'll keep the bars and dates, for the return trip to Anchorage tomorrow. At 8:30 p.m. we arrived in Fairbanks, right on time according to the schedule. There was a female attendant present, she was very helpful to me. I had copied 3 phone numbers for Bed and Breakfast accommodations in Fairbanks, from a magazine loaned to me by a lady passenger on the train. She lived in Anchorage now, but had lived in Pismo Beach, California, we talked now and then on the long ride. I made a phone call to Rosie's Bed and Breakfast, obtained a room there for \$40. Rosie and her husband came to the station, picked me up in their car, they were a retired couple, very pleasant. It was not dark yet, though past 9:00 p.m., the sun had not set. They were very kind, and since I was only going to be in Fairbanks overnight, drove me through the city, the business district, hospital, the clinic across the street (I wonder if that is where Dr. Ralph Marx worked, after leaving Saudi Arabia), the library, and then out a way to a lovely large assortment of buildings, set up on a hill, the University of Alaska. They drove past several churches, I mentioned that I was Catholic, they then took me past the Sacred Heart cathedral and next past their parish church, the Immaculate Conception parish. They also were Catholic. The building was of wood, looked quite old, Rosie said that mass had been at 7:30 p.m. this evening, but was now over, she checked, and the door was locked, it was 9:40 p.m. How nice of this couple, to show me the sights of Fairbanks. They took me to their lovely home, had it built in 1954, raised their 9 children there.

My room was upstairs, a lovely one, even had a TV in it. After getting suitcase upstairs, they invited me down for hot chocolate and a little visit. They said if I wanted to possibly see the Aurora Borealis in the night sky (Fairbanks is very far north in Alaska, closer to the arctic circle), rise at 2:30 a.m., put on heavy coat, go outside and look at the sky. They gave me an alarm clock. I did that, went out, stood there for about 20 minutes, but no display showed. I was not lucky. I did make a comparison though, I was born and lived 56 years in Aurora, Illinois, and another coincidence, the Alaska train is named "The Aurora". Returning to my bed, I slept well, reset the alarm for 6:00 a.m. The town of North Pole, Alaska, is about 45 minutes away from Fairbanks. So ended a wonderful day, riding on the "Aurora" train, viewing the splendid mountain ranges.

## **SUNDAY APRIL 9**

I arose at 6:00 a.m., looked out the window to the east and north, there was a lovely layer of pinks toward northeast, and quite a bit further east, was the yellow color preceding sunrise, not the pinks. So I guess I saw some of the Aurora Borealis anyway. The street lights in towns, display too much light, most people do their viewing away from city lights. A breakfast of strawberry-orange juice, cereal, a banana, toast and coffee was served me, I also had time to chat again with Rosie, felt I was fortunate to find such nice people and their "bed and breakfast". When paying for my room (\$40), I gave her a \$10 tip for driving me

around last night, they were a very pleasant couple. She took me to the train station, I boarded o.k., another passenger boosted my suitcase up into the baggage car, there was no attendant present yet.

Soon the same conductor we had yesterday, came along, checked us into the train. He was a comical man, very happy, I took a picture of him next to the train. We left at 8:45 a.m., to ride back to Anchorage, another 13 hour ride, and again passing the scenic mountain ranges. The beauty I've seen, was worth the long ride to Fairbanks, and back again. After boarding I discovered I was in the same seat that I had yesterday, in the almost empty passenger car. About an hour into our journey we went on a siding, a freight train passed us, loaded with long pipes, for the Alaska pipeline. Another local passenger told me these were made in Japan, also the oil tanks on another freight car. The sky is partly cloudy, to the south, more clear in the north, not as bright and sunny as yesterday. LATER: we are near the spectacular area along the Nenana river, way down below us, high mountains rise up from it's banks. I just noted a huge frozen waterfall across a ravine, and a person was climbing it!! This is called ice climbing, and with my binoculars could see the person plainly. What a feat! I've seen this done, on a documentary, never before in person, that ice fall goes straight up. It became more cloudy as we approached that long expanse of Mt. McKinley and Foraker areas, and I am so glad it was all clear and sunny yesterday, for taking photos, the sun peeks out a bit now and then, but there's more clouds. Rosie, at the B & B, said about 35% of the people who ride the train in summer, never see the peaks, because of cloud cover.

At Cantiwell, the snow covered range to the left (as we head toward Anchorage) appears for open viewing with spectacular views. Later on, the range to the right of the train appears, sky is part cloudy, part sun, the majestic peaks seen at times. Mt. McKinley is in this area, 20,320 feet high. The train crosses the continental divide, not far from here, at 2,363 feet, the lowest rail pass in the Rocky Mountain chain, from Mexico to Alaska. Summit lake, in this area, eventually drains both into the Pacific and the Bering Sea. These are some of the interesting things learned on this train ride, literature was given to passengers, I enjoyed reading it. The train stopped briefly at Hurricane, the time was 2:50 p.m. A little further passed Hurricane Gulch, the conductor told us that Mt. McKinley is only 16 miles from here. There were a lot of clouds today, not good for photos.

We made several "flag" stops, to pick up people and children who had ridden this train yesterday, to get to small houses out in the wilderness. Some are summer cabins and people come out from Anchorage on spring weekends, to shovel away the snow, go back to Anchorage on Sunday. From conversation I heard, quite a few families who live far away from a town, home-teach the children, which is a good idea because I'm sure no one comes regularly to clear small tracks, away from a highway.

We are nearing Anchorage now, it is 8:06 p.m. and still light. I think we will be late, on arrival. This has been a LONG ride for 2 days, but the only way I could see Mt. McKinley, the Alaska and Chugash ranges. I can see, as we came south toward Anchorage, there is a lot less snow. It melts fast after mid April, people say. There are brown spots here and there, and some wet ground. It is a lot warmer here, than at Fairbanks, 385 miles north.

We arrived in the Anchorage station at 9:15, were over an hour late. Sunset today was at 9:05, so it was still light. I was tired, but so happy I could make this trip. The van from Day's Inn came and picked me up. I had some food, then a nice hot tub bath, before bed and sleep.

## **MONDAY APRIL 10**

I slept soundly all night, felt good on rising, did my floor exercises, showered, then walked out to find a food shop. The air was brisk, 28 F, needed heavy coat and gloves, but the air felt good. I've always liked the early morning. At a restaurant I had a fruit plate, cottage cheese, muffins and coffee. I walked on further, found a small food store, they had raisin bran cereal, my favorite. It was \$3.89 a box and I bought it. I often eat in my room, when traveling. Later, I called some tour people for information about going to Seward. They do a one day tour, from Anchorage, including a short boat trip near Seward, cost \$175. With more information, I decided to take a local bus to Seward, \$30, and stay there a few days, instead of taking just the one day trip. The tour people travel the same road as the bus, and hopefully I'll find a person to take me out to view glaciers, from Seward. I'm used to traveling by myself, have gone around the world, alone. Maybe I'll find an air trip, over glacier fields. Regular tourist ship cruises that pass glaciers, don't start until May 15, the beginning of tourist season. As I walked around this morning, I still found big piles of snow, but sidewalks and roads were clear, icy in some places yet, I walked carefully. The Rebok shoes I'm wearing have sturdy soles, I have not had to wear the heavy boots I brought along. Some piles of snow are 8 feet high away from the walks. I have a nice view of the south end of Chugash mountain range, all covered with snow, as I sit in my room. The range is along the east side of Anchorage.

I took a taxi to the bus depot, starting my adventure to Seward, which is a deep water port, at the end of the Kenai peninsula, on Resurrection Bay, the Pacific ocean. It was another beautiful ride on this small bus, snow had been cleared from the highway, to the center lane, where it was piled 8 to 10 feet high. The driver said he owned the bus line, drives it daily, all year, and they had 2 inches of snow last night in Seward, where he lives. We left Anchorage at 2:30 p.m., arrived Seward at 5:45 p.m. The bus depot, where I was let off, was just a tiny wooden building alongside the highway – nothing else was there! That was surprising. The lady clerk called 2 hotels for me, the first one was not open yet, for the season, the second one, Seward Hotel, had rooms available. I was told it had two sections, the new one, \$79, the older side (which was updated) was \$49 with private bath, \$39 without. I looked, chose one with private bath – it has telephone, TV, coffee maker, with coffee and creamer, a nice room. I always find a room, when I travel, don't make reservations. This is a quaint, old type building, modernized some, very cozy. The lobby in the old side has been left as you see in old time western movies, the check-in desk is authentic, there is antique furniture, it has stuffed musk-ox, civet cat, bear, and lynx on display. There is a microwave, table and chairs, in one corner, for use of guests. On the wall is an enlarged photo of the waterfront area, and terrible damage done here by the earthquake in 1964. Seward suffered much to boats, piers, etc. at that time. They have been rebuilt. I walked out into this tiny town, finding a two block business district, some restaurants, city hall, gift shop, small grocery store, pawn shop, all

in one block, on both sides of the street. I'm sure in summer it will be bustling with fishermen and tourists. I wanted to come in the winter months, seeing how the locals survive this cold area. I found it much colder here, than in Anchorage, had the big boots and warm cap on, first time to wear them, here.

## **TUESDAY APRIL 11**

I slept so good, didn't wake until 6:45 a.m., that is unusual for me. I did some exercises, made coffee, ate raisin bran covered with apple juice, and a banana that I bought last evening. After getting directions, I set out walking to the other end of town, the harbor area. I had called a tour agency listed in the phone book, but got no answer, hoped to find a fisherman going out today, who would take me along. It was cold, about 28 F and windy, but I dressed warm, and enjoyed the mile walk. I passed a Catholic church, just 2 blocks from the Seward Hotel, noted how near it was. As I neared the harbor, saw 2 bald eagles flying directly above me, watched them soar in the blue sky, a lovely sight. Arriving where there were many boats, and a store with fishing equipment, I asked around if any boat was going out today, got negative answers from everyone. The clerk, Cindy, at the Fish House, was very pleasant, took my name and hotel, said she would call me if anyone else came around and inquired.

Back at the hotel, I noted that the Rotary Club met on Tuesday at the Harbor Club, directly across from my hotel. I had spoken of my world travels, to the Rotary Club in Thousand Oaks, California, and since I thought I could not go out to sea today, would offer to share my experiences with them, at their meeting. They accepted. Just a short time after that, a call came from Cindy, that Jim Barkley was going out on his boat, the "Fox Island". Two other girls, from England, had inquired too, Jennifer and Jeanine, he would take the three of us out for \$100 each. I accepted readily, had to call the Rotary Club, and tell them, "Sorry, I can't come, have found someone to take me out to sea".

Jim came to the hotel, picked me up, drove back to the harbor, and his boat, the girls were there. He first showed us the safety equipment, the red survivor suits we would put on, if the boat capsized, they covered body and head fully, would keep us alive in the frigid water, also helped keep one afloat. That was very important to know. Then he pulled up to the marine gas pump, filled the tank, and we were off! It was a beautiful day, sun was shining but the air was very cold out on the water. I had on a sweat suit, heavy jacket, big boots, cap and gloves. Jim headed out to sea, the first thing we saw were sea otters: one was lying on his back, eating. He had the mollusk shell in his paws, was getting his meal out of it, they bring one up from the bottom, crack the shell with a rock, eat the animal inside. There were others near, some were rolling around in play, with the field glasses I could observe more, a little distance away. In Resurrection Bay the water was fairly calm, further out in the Bay of Alaska, the sea became very rough, we were bounced, and jerked around. I was warm, with my layers of clothing, though face got cold. We saw 3 spoutings of whales in the distance, but none broke the surface, all three of us stayed up on the top deck, so we could observe marine life better. We rode a very long way, observing the snow covered mountain ranges back on land, off and on we saw groups of seals swimming around. As the wind blew, and air got colder, I took off the cap I wore, and put on the double-knit, warmer one, then felt better.

We passed "Bear glacier", a solid sheet of ice coming down from mountains, but did not stop there, Jim just pointed it out. Now the wind was blowing hard but we continued further and headed for "Holgate" glacier. This was wonderful, so huge! There were chunks of ice floating in the water all around us, as we went quite close in and Jim stopped the motor. These were the tips of small icebergs, that had fallen off the glacier. Here in front of us was this massive downflow of ice, from the mountain above, the bottom portion was about 200 feet high, above the water. The total ice is about 1000 feet thick, from the top. Through the field glasses, you could see cracks in the ice, chunks would fall off and drop into the water. This is called "calving". We stayed in that spot for a long time, occasionally we would hear a sort of groan, slight movement of the ice does make a noise as the weight of ice presses down with the slight melting. It was breathtaking, to get so close to the glacier in this small 36 foot boat, was a special thrill. A few pieces did drop off and fall into the sea, as we stayed there, chunks bumped the boat, the two girls reached down and picked up a few. Jim then prepared a snack in the cabin, reindeer sausage, made here in Alaska, pieces of cheese, cranberry catsup, made by his wife, and hot chocolate. Yum, Yum! He related that the sun is shining on the glacier about 2 out of 10 days, others are overcast, foggy, or rainy. We were so lucky today, with clear weather. I took pictures, then we left the area, started back toward Seward. In the bay of the glacier, the water was smooth, it became rougher, with high swells, as we came into the open sea, sometimes was quite scary as we bounced around. But, I didn't get seasick at all, was proud of that. I really enjoyed this big thrill today.

On the way back, at a rocky projection coming out from an island, we saw Stellar sea lions lying there, at least 50 or more. This was another thrill for me, Jim drove the boat quite close to them, for photos, they were making roaring noises at us. Also Jim saw a Dall sheep, with the long, shaggy hair, way up in a rocky area, pointed it out to me, I found it easily with the glasses, it was eating. I could also see it with the naked eye, but not as plainly. This is the first one I've seen, though I have watched for them from the train, and from the bus on the ride to Seward. He also drove us very close to a small island he and his wife own, they have a resort on Fox Island, a main building and several cabins where they accept guests in summer months, he is also a fishing guide, has a couple of boats. He is retired (though still young) after teaching high school for 20 years in Anchorage, "homesteaded" this nice piece of land with a natural beach area, in 1971, and therefore acquired the land. He was a very nice man, I was lucky to have him take us out for 8 hours, and see these wonders of Alaska. We now speeded toward Seward, it was 8:10 p.m., the sky was bright. But as we looked back, to the west where we had been, the sky was dark and a fog was creeping in. I'm surely glad we got to do this today, maybe tomorrow the weather will not permit such a trip. We were ahead of the fog all the way back, arrived in Seward at 9:15 p.m., it was still light there. Jim took me back to my hotel, I thanked him sincerely for this wonderful day, went to the Apollo restaurant, had a big bowl of thick soup, rolls, dessert, and retired.

## **WEDNESDAY APRIL 12**

Good Morning! I slept soundly, awakened to a grey sky, not sunshine on the fjord-type mountains all around, felt so happy I got out to sea yesterday when the sun was shining and weather was good. I did my exercises on the floor, put on the little coffee maker, am going

to luxuriate in my room for awhile, drink coffee, and relax. I will stay in Seward today and tomorrow, like it better here than the big city of Anchorage, for 2 days. I'll take the Seward bus on Friday at 9:00 a.m., back to Anchorage, the bus driver will pick me up at this hotel. That is one of the advantages, coming here in the "off season", you get individual attention when there are no tourists around, I'll stay overnight in Anchorage, fly out on Saturday. I'll be home on Easter Sunday, and have to work teaching classes Monday and Wednesday, also have a slide lecture to present on Tuesday, so will be back to my usual routine in thousand Oaks, California. This hotel is so neat, keeps a male and a female figure near the front entrance, each dressed as butler and maid, and holding a silver tray for your calling card: there is a mermaid figurehead, from an old sailing ship, on the wall, a squat carved Indian figure on the floor, also a totem pole, true artifacts of this area. Many tourists come here in summer, to fish, also there are boats that go out to Valdez, to Kodiak Island, and other islands. The weather is bad at times now, so boats don't start their service until after May 15. Luckily, I've seen what I came here for, moose, snowshoe rabbit, a ferret, bald eagles, the mountain goat, a V of flying geese in the sky, the spouting of whales, sea lions, seals, otters, cormorants and ducks, which have recently returned to the north. It gets 40 and 50 degrees below zero here in winter, everything is frozen, but the snow will be gone, except on peaks, by end of May.

I had bought a carton of milk last evening in the restaurant, and left it outside the window in my room, where it stayed cold, so I'll soon have my raisin bran, banana and milk and another cup of coffee. Then I'll walk about the town, have not had a chance to shop or explore. The local library is right across the street, I will also visit there. Later: I am so lucky that I got out to sea yesterday, today a front came through (probably that grey sky and fog that followed us in last evening) and it is very blustery and cold, no sun at all. I found an Alaska patch, for my travel hat, and a sweat shirt, in the drug store, no tourist shops are open yet, then walked about. It was very cold, my heavy coat and warm cap felt very good. I stopped in at the Senior Center, which I had passed earlier, visited with the director, she invited me to come back tomorrow, eat lunch with them then, and talk about my travels throughout the world. People were very pleasant.

I next walked down along the bike path right next to the water, and in the park also, the air was very brisk. I had lunch at the Harbor Club, just across the street from the hotel, ordered halibut, and it was DELICIOUS, just melted in my mouth. A salad, potatoes and roll filled me, I enjoyed it all. The library is next to the Harbor Club, I went in, asked for some books of Anchorage, Seward, Kenai peninsula and Kodiak island. They gave me much knowledge of these areas, I always like to learn about places I visit. Coming out again, the blustery winds were so violent I had to bend against them to make progress as I walked – no boats would go out on Resurrection Bay today, especially a 36 foot one, again felt lucky to have done this yesterday.

### **THURSDAY APRIL 13**

I slept very well, don't think I stirred all night. But the weather is bad, foggy, windy and cold, could not get any good photos today. I'm sitting in the glass-walled lobby of the New Seward hotel, and the beautiful snow covered mountains I've written about, cannot be seen. As I look out now to the big body of water 2 blocks away, all I see is fog. The street right in

front is wet, it must have rained last night, temperature is 32F. Seward is near the end of the Kenai peninsula, and has a moderate climate, due to the stability of the water temperature. I hear a short wave radio going, in a little office near the lobby, someone is calling a boat, probably a large commercial fishing vessel. I'm really enjoying this hotel, with it's "old west" flavor, but modern conveniences, makes one feel very comfortable. I'm all cozy inside here, outside it is foggy, drizzly, and cold.

This is my last day here in Seward, and it is Holy Thursday. I plan to attend the 7:00 p.m. mass tonight at the Sacred Heart church, just 2 blocks away. After relaxing awhile in the hotel, I walked out into the cold air, and the mist, stopped at the drug store to buy a few more cards, then walked to the Senior Center and talked to Judy, the director. I accepted her invitation to have lunch with about 20 people, who come there daily. The meal was turkey, mashed potatoes, peas, cranberry sauce and a muffin, all very tasty. She said I was their guest, but I contributed toward the food, for I know that places that help senior people always are short of funds. Judy introduced me, telling of my world travels, working in Saudi Arabia, etc., all after retirement age. I related interesting events in many countries, they were appreciative, asked many questions and I answered them. They thanked me, said they don't have many visitors, in the winter months. I walked to the National Park Headquarters next, looked at brochures of parks in this area, also watched a film they show about glaciers near the Kenai peninsula. Walking back, I took the last picture on my film, as the fog was lifting toward the east, and a bit of blue sky was visible.

Mass at 7:00 p.m. was well attended, there were many families with children, also an organist and a red-robed choir of men and women. The priest was young, of stocky build, black hair and dark complexion, he conducted the special service for this day, including the washing of the feet. This is done in remembrance of Jesus doing this for His apostles, at the Last Supper. Eight members of the parish came forward, sat on the step near the altar, took off one shoe. The priest knelt, washed the foot of each one using a large chrome basin, the altar boy with him supplied towels. It was an impressive ceremony, I have attended this mass often at my home parish. At the conclusion of the mass, the priest carried the host in procession, to the lower level of the church, all present followed him. There he incensed the host, and sang the Benediction, the host would be placed there for a few hours of prayers, the usual custom. On the way out, I thanked the priest for the nice service, noted that he might be of Eskimo ancestry, also saw others in the church who might be the same. Walking back to the hotel, I had some coffee and food, thinking I had a pleasant day (despite the cold winds) in this close-knit small fishing community of Seward. If it had been a bright, sunny day, I had planned to take an aerial flight over the Harding ice fields, a huge glacier area, but clouds and fog prevented that. On the TV news, more rain is predicted for the next several days, with a high of 40 F. I am lucky I took so many photos on Tuesday.

## **FRIDAY APRIL 14 (Good Friday)**

Slept very well, but awoke early as I always do on a travel day. After doing floor exercises, bathed, dressed, ate raisin bran with milk, again, I kept the little carton outside on the window sill so it was cold. I finished these things, had my suitcase closed up before 8:00 a.m. I will be picked up at the hotel, by the bus service, at 8:45 a.m., to go back to

Anchorage. I've enjoyed staying here the last 2 days, even with the cold, wet weather. The small town flavor is enjoyable to me, I like it better than staying in large cities. I'll be in Anchorage this afternoon and evening, then leave tomorrow morning for Los Angeles. The bus drive takes one through the Kenai peninsula, a beautiful place with steep fjord-type mountains and heavy forests. A nearby town is called Moose Pass, so named because huge herds of moose choose this area to cross the mountain from the forests, to arrive at the marine side, where moist air provides better growth of grasses, bushes, etc. This is their food. The town of Valdez is the next closest large one, to Seward, it is also a fishing village, right on the water. In summer months, the Alaska train runs from Anchorage to Valdez, but not now. The town of Seward has 7 streets, horizontal with the shoreline: 1st Ave. is upward, next to the forest area, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th follow as the land slopes down to the water. It is about one mile from the hotel end of the city to the harbor area, where all the tour boats, sailboats, etc. are at the marina. There is a long berth, across the way from the marina, where coal is brought by rail from Healy, near Fairbanks area, and with a special crane-loader, is put into freighters and sent to Korea, or other countries. It is used there to make power, generate electricity. Interesting things happen, here in Alaska, it has so many natural elements, oil, coal, minerals, gold, silver, etc. Of note to me was that the town of Seward does not have even one stop and go light! There is a plan to build a large sea-marine research place here, money to come from private corporations, plus the fees that oil companies had to pay in fines, for the Valdez oil spill, a couple of years ago. I remember that well, did not know I would ever be up here. This would bring development, I'm sure.

The drive to Anchorage was good, I kept looking for moose or other animals, on the way, did not see any. The driver said he had 2 moose in his back yard, this morning, a common occurrence. The sun was out today, as we were far away from Seward, and I noted that the snow was melting along the road. The rains yesterday probably helped that happen. I was dropped off at the Seward Bus Line office in Anchorage, and took a cab to Day's Inn a couple of blocks away. The fee was \$3.25 I obtained a room there, rested a bit, then walked to the new 4 story shopping mall on 5th street. It had all the franchise stores, restaurants, etc. that we see in the lower U.S.A, was a very busy place. The entire 4th floor was a food court, I selected fish and clam chowder for my meal, Alaskan economy comes from fishing. Next I walked to the Natural History Museum nearby, and explored that place. It is a very large building, but only had one full floor of displays, and the history of this area. The Aleuts and other native Indian tribes lived here, but Russian influence (people crossed the Bering straits from Russia), the Eskimo, and white man helped develop the area. It was purchased from Russia, by U.S. for \$7,200,000. Some called it The Seward Folly, at the time, thinking it a waste of money. The document (or a copy) from the U.S. Treasury department to Russia, in that amount, was shown. Very interesting displays of fur clothing, a bird-skin jacket, waterproof dress made from the intestine material of animals, was shown, worn by natives in the past. There was also a sod hut, furs stretched over a wood frame, for shelters, handmade boats made by Eskimos and used for whaling or salmon fishing: all very interesting to see. I spent the afternoon there, then walked back to the hotel. It was mild here today, sidewalks that were icy when I came on April 6, now are dry or have melting water on them. My dinner at the hotel was halibut, rice, salad, green peas with onions and cake. The fish was all right, but not like the halibut I had in Seward, fresh from the sea!

After dinner I got my suitcases ready for travel again, watched TV, and retired.

## **SATURDAY APRIL 15**

My last day in Alaska. Slept very well, awoke early to a grey, cloudy sky, more rain is promised. I had breakfast, after shower and dressing, went down to the lobby and waited for the bus to the airport. It came promptly; the airport is very modern, I was let out in front of Delta, pulled my heavy suitcase (with wheels) to the counter. It is loaded with the heavy clothing, and snow boots, I don't have to lift it, just pull it along. My big heavy coat is rolled up, and in the duffel bag – I really needed that big coat, knit hat, and leather gloves when out on the sea! To travel I wear a sweat suit, and the green puff nylon jacket, I put this up in the overhead bin, there is not much room in seating area of the Boeing 727. There were no long lines in the airport, much different than in LAX. The sky was cloudy for awhile, then became clear. The captain just called out information, we are flying over Sitka, down on the “tail of Alaska”, then Ketchikan, on the other side of the plane are the Charlotte Islands. It became a bumpy ride for awhile, then smoothed out as breakfast was served. Next we flew over Vancouver Island, could see brown land below, not much snow anymore. Seattle is below us, we did not land, but flew on to Salt Lake City, Utah. There I had to change planes, to Los Angeles.

My seat mates, from Anchorage, were a couple from Santa Barbara, they had flown to Anchorage, like I did, then rented a car. They had driven to the Denali Park area, on the long highway, just to sight-see, now were on their way home, near the same area where I live. After changing planes, I found they were in the same plane, in row 31, as I was. What a coincidence! The flight arrived on time in LAX, my baggage came in by 6:00 p.m. I waited inside the baggage room, as it was cool and cloudy outside, I had a chair, and was comfortable. At 7:05 p.m. I went outside, waited for the Great American Stage bus, which was due at 7:20, and rode it to thousand Oaks. My daughter Mary Lynn was waiting for me, as I had called her from the terminal, saying I had arrived o.k. She is such a good daughter, she had the lights on in my home, had a fresh bottle of milk and fresh strawberries in the refrigerator, also a nice bouquet of flowers and an Easter message on the table! On Sunday morning I attended mass, was a bit slow moving, but felt all right. I was very thankful for a safe and interesting trip. A friend Francis Fitzpatrick, had called me the day before I left, and wished me a safe and blessed trip, with my guardian angel at my side, I think his wish came true – I now have seen Alaska, our 49th state.

## **A WEEK LATER**

The week was busy, following my return, I taught the hydrotherapy classes on Monday, Tuesday exercised the cerebral palsy group at the YMCA, and gave a lecture of the series “Whizzing Around The World With Irma”. On Wednesday, taught classes again. On Friday evening, the 21st, had an auto accident – a car hit me as I was turning into a restaurant on T.O. boulevard. I was not hurt, but my car was, the insurance covered all repairs -- again, my guardian angel was with me.

The next day my sister-in-law, June Peek from upper part of Wisconsin, visited me, a planned visit. I was handicapped without a car, but with Mary's help, we got around. The car was "laid up" for 2 weeks, I did enjoy her visit.

Typed on computer by Irma Kackert in 2003 - Age 87