



## CHAPTER 2



# Sitka at First Glance

A glimpse of Sitka, Mt. Edgecumbe, and surroundings, where my Alaskan peregrinations began, is important to set the scene. I return to my arrival in 1949 and first few months in Alaska to describe this now-familiar place as I saw it then. First impressions, while not always accurate, have a wide-eyed approach to detail that can never quite be duplicated once everything becomes familiar. And this is a book about first impressions. When I reread letters and notes I wrote at that time, I discover information that long association has made me take for granted to the point of forgetting. Or I'm amused at the credulous newcomer. But if you had followed in my footsteps, I think this is the way it would have looked to you, too. I begin on the Alaska Steamship Company's Denali sailing from Seattle to Sitka.

Denali, Oct. 24, 1949

Third Day out of Seattle

There was some roughness when we entered Queen Charlotte Sound, where the Gulf Stream comes in from the open sea.

Passengers disappeared like mice scampering into their holes for the long afternoon.

At nightfall I visited the bridge to meet the Captain and look at the radar screen and navigation charts. It was a thick, dark night making the radar essential and more impressive than it might have been at another time. The screen is about a foot and a half in diameter and can be adjusted to show a radius of from one to ten miles. It has been installed on the Denali and all the other Alaska Steam Ships for about two years at an initial expense of \$12,000 per installation. Before radar's invention navigation in these waters must have been hazardous indeed. This Inside Passage as seen on charts is truly a maze. In my land-lubber ignorance I had assumed that Inside Passage meant going up Hecate Strait from Queen Charlotte Sound in fairly open water. Not so! In truth it winds around through narrow channels not even shown on any but the largest charts and the slightest miscue might head a ship straight for a hidden rock.

Denali, by the way, means "Mountain of the Sun" and is the Athabaskan Indian name for the mountain we have so prosaically called Mt. McKinley. The ship Denali unlike the other Alaska Steamships, which are one or the other, is half freighter and half passenger ship.

This morning around 10 a.m. we passed into Alaskan waters. The dividing line is somewhere near Annette Island, a Metlakatla Tsimshian native reservation with perhaps 1000 inhabitants. On one flat side of this island, which is actually a mountain, the CAA (Civil Aeronautics Association) operates an airstrip used as a refueling station and servicing about ten flights daily, as well as not infrequent emergency landings. There is even overnight accommodation for passengers stranded by the unpredictable weather. The Metlakatlans are a fiercely proud and private tribe notable for their red hair. They are also an unusually affluent tribe, having made most of their original money from

canneries. They now carry on a lucrative business in oil as a direct result of the airstrip. Even so they exact an exaggerated sum for the lease using as their reason that it has ruined their hunting grounds. Although air traffic may indeed inhibit hunting, the CAA considers this a feeble excuse since the Metlakatlangs have long since ceased to hunt as a livelihood.

Once in Alaskan waters the scenery becomes progressively more beautiful. At 1:30 this afternoon we made our first stop at Ketchikan for two hours, time enough to wander the streets and absorb my first view and impression of an Alaskan city. To me the most striking thing was the frontier look. Unpaved streets with plank sidewalks, wooden buildings with rococo fronts, and, of course, the whole town built straight up the side of a mountain so that from the dock all the houses and buildings are visible. It has the look of a frontier novel come to life.

There are incongruities galore. Mingled in this frontier architecture and atmosphere are modern concrete buildings of as many as five or six stories. Ketchikan's new federal building is a beauty. The people are as incongruous as the structures. Natives and hard-bitten characters lounge about mixed with svelte looking women downtown for an afternoon of shopping.

As might be expected I gravitated at once to the bookstore where I spent a half hour chatting with three charming middle-aged women one of whom was sitting at a desk littered with Publisher's Weekly's and other familiar looking reading matter. (I was only days from my publishing career and still in book promotion mode. At the University of Washington Press we had recently published Viola Garfield's *The Wolf and the Raven*, a study of Alaska totems.) We discussed *The Wolf and the Raven*, its sales and its excellence. They hope to arrange an autographing party for Viola when she is in Ketchikan this winter. Everyone here is much incensed over a book by a man named Hilcher from Fairbanks, titled *Alaska Now*. He has not described

the major Alaskan cities to the satisfaction of their residents. His goose is really cooked by the fact that he gave gentler treatment to Fairbanks than to the rest.

Pixie in Ketchikan had the time of her life. She was overjoyed to get off the boat. Sensing that we had arrived somewhere she was champing at the bit when I went down the hatch to get her. She pulled me up and out onto the gangplank wild with happiness and barking joyously in all directions. She had only barked once since leaving Seattle. That was at the Captain when she was up on deck and out-of-bounds for dogs. Pixie has no respect for rank or for self preservation. During our stroll about the town she eagerly investigated every new sight and smell. Also in Ketchikan as elsewhere she became at once a center of attention. Everyone stopped to talk with her and pet her and small children trailed us up one block and down another.

Petersburg tomorrow at 4:00 a.m. Leave at 6:00 a.m. Juneau at 2:00 p.m. And Sitka at 7:00 or 8:00 Wednesday morning. From Sitka the Denali goes on to Seward, entirely outside and a rough trip at this time of the year, then South via all the same stops to Seattle. Most of the passengers are either moving to Alaska or returning home. There is just one seating for meals, which incidentally are superb.

There was a whale sighting yesterday. And the constant wheeling of the seagulls is a source of hypnotic fascination. Curious looking black ducks with long necks follow us continuously and dive for food. The sailors call them Hell Divers.

Denali between Juneau and Sitka

October 25, 1949

Much of last night I spent on deck, bitter cold but fascinated. Somehow a ship going places at night seems ever so much more exotic than in the daytime. I waited until 2:00 a.m. to watch us navigate the Wrangell Narrows, a series of twists and turns

around many small islands. It must be run at high tide and so for several hours it was necessary to kill time in order to hit the passage just right. Time killing comprised various maneuvers sometimes going in circles. It was interestingly confusing to know where we were at any given moment.

The Narrows itself is marked with red and green lights between which the ship picks its way. Green is starboard (right) and red is port (left). A mnemonic for this is “red port wine.” It’s a bit like a slalom run on a ski slope. I’m told that in the daytime one can see houses on each of the islands and people out working in their yards. It is supposedly possible to reach out and touch the trees along either shore. But in the darkness only the red and green lights are visible. No one else was on deck. I am apparently the only foolhardy passenger. At 4:00 a.m. we docked at Petersburg where my cabin mate disembarked causing some commotion. As a result I slept in until 11:00 missing breakfast.

By this time the scenery had undergone another change and was becoming more breath taking by the moment. Snow covered peaks on either side were, in spite of the low-hanging clouds, an inspiring sight. We passed a magnificent blue-green glacier that must have been the Taku, responsible for Juneau’s far-famed winds. As a result of my laziness, I missed seeing an iceberg that startled everyone. I also missed two more whale sightings.

Not long after lunch, long enough though to become well chilled by the cold wet rain on deck, we came into Gasteneau Channel and up to the Juneau docks. Here to my surprise my leisurely life as a tourist ended abruptly and I became a VIP. Dr. and Mrs. Googe were waiting on the dock waving a copy of the Juneau newspaper announcing my arrival. The radio also carried this earth-shaking news! I was driven to the Alaska Native Service (ANS) offices and introduced to what seemed like hundreds of people in kaleidoscopic sequence, all of whom welcomed me as a long-expected friend. There was no wandering

idly and anonymously about Juneau, and Pixie never even got off the ship.

I did manage to spend some time in the Native Arts and Crafts Shop on the first floor of the ANS building, again talking up Viola's book, and pouring over the small natively carved totem pole replicas and the spruce-root baskets. There was an elegant chief's cane that the artist had to sell after completing because he had been unable to resist the temptation to carve a frog figure on it. He was not entitled by tribal heritage to use the frog. Criticism rained down on him so ferociously he was forced to dispose of it. So now it's on display, not for sale, in the shop.

Juneau was as wet and cold as its reputation, but withal an interesting city. The Baranof Hotel has an air of opulence. Most appealing are the paintings hanging on the walls of the lobby and dining halls. The famous Sidney Lawrence painting of Mt. McKinley that covers one whole wall is so glorious I could sit for hours gazing at it. Somehow he achieved a phosphorescent sunset glow that seems alive.

So far nothing in Alaska has been a disappointment, not even the weather.

October 26, 1949

At 7:30 AM the Denali entered Sitka Sound. Experiencing my first case of channel fever, I'd slept little during the night. Earlier in the evening, I saw that the steward had battened down my porthole. Because the stateroom overheated quickly, I reopened it. Later he stopped me in the companionway and explained that we were due for rough weather in the night and unless I securely closed the porthole, my room could be flooded.

I followed instructions, though they seemed ridiculously overcautious. But after tossing and turning in the stuffiness until two o'clock, I decided to open the porthole just long enough to let in one good gust of fresh air. We were slipping along in such

peaceful moonlit water that I could not bring myself to screw it down tightly again before falling asleep. About three o'clock in the morning I was rudely awakened by a sudden lurch and what seemed an ocean of frigid salt water pouring into my face. Needless to say I scrambled to secure the porthole. For three hours, we pitched and tossed, and things crashed to the floor despite my efforts to anchor anything movable. I wondered about landlubber Pixie down in the hold.

At a little past seven, I woke again to a serene ocean and hastened to get dressed and out on deck to watch the entrance to Sitka. None too soon, either! We were already approaching Japonski Island, which I recognized at once by the dominating presence of the new five-story hospital I had seen in an architect's sketch in the Juneau ANS offices. The community of Mt. Edgecumbe is rather impressive from that north-channel approach, even in semidarkness and rain. Sitka comes out second best because all that is visible is the fishing floats and docks along the waterfront. In that early morning dim light, it was overshadowed. This is not to belittle Sitka. It is beautiful against a backdrop of snowcapped mountains. One stunning peak to the south has a natural cross of snow at its pinnacle, not surprisingly it is named Cross Mountain.

It was still dark and drizzling a fine rain as the Denali approached Sitka. I haunted the island side of the deck, the starboard side, striving to distinguish every possible detail of my new home and was offended by a ship's officer who stalked past me several times reiterating officiously, "Port landing! Port landing!" Was he suggesting that this tourist couldn't even distinguish the interesting side of the channel?

Inching up to the dock and making fast seemed a painfully slow process to me, longing to see a husband after four months of separation. In the dim light I could see only blurs on the dock for nearly twenty minutes of snail-pace approach. (By this time

I'd obligingly gravitated to the port side.) Eventually our lines were heaved to the dock, but we were still another exasperating twenty minutes pulling over in troublesome wind and current. By now I could distinguish faces on the dock, and Bob's was not among them. My enthusiasm was punctured and deflated. I nearly went below to eat breakfast as less eager passengers were doing. However, when we were three quarters of the way through the docking maneuver, one of the little shore boats came putting around the Denali's prow, and there he was. From then on for hours life was a confusion of introductions, baggage, nurses, attendants, dogs, boat rides, automobile rides, and kaleidoscopic sights. My arrival alone would have been sufficiently disorganized with all the paraphernalia I had in tow, but added to that were some fifteen other passengers arriving to new jobs at the school and hospital. They were as excited and bewildered as I was. They needed to be greeted, introduced into proper channels, and made to feel at ease and at home. In the midst of the disorder, I kept having glimpses of the once familiar person of my husband who now was unaccountably master of this chaotic situation, which, to judge from his behavior was not in the least unusual. It was afternoon before we had a chance to say more than "hello." It was late evening before we were disentangled from people and events. By then I was too dazed to do more than stammer a few inarticulate sentences and fall into bed.

The next morning I began making the acquaintance of my new home, and there was much to learn about it. The Mt. Edgecumbe installation itself is not a thing of beauty despite its wild and appealing surroundings. It was built by the Navy during the war and has the utilitarian look of a military base. In 1947 it was abandoned because of numerous impracticalities and turned over to the ANS for its present use. Growth of the complex was so tremendous and so rapid that it soon became the main and largest operation of the ANS. But since there was noth-

ing here prior to the war and only the Navy during the war, no current material on Alaska gives it more than scant mention. Maps give it none at all.

To build its installation, the Navy leveled off steep hills and scraped them into the Sound, creating causeways between the larger island, Japonski, undoubtedly named because of Mt. Edgecumbe's resemblance to Mt. Fuji, and several small adjacent ones bringing Sitka and Japonski Island closer together. The narrow span of water between Sitka and Mt. Edgecumbe can be crossed in three minutes by the Navy's old shore boats. The community is named after the perfect cone-shaped volcanic peak located on Kruzof Island some miles southeast of Sitka and a hallmark for both towns.

Housing on the island, thanks to its armed forces heritage, creates the semblance of a hierarchy. There are four large and lavish houses occupied by the Island's administrator, the school superintendent, the orthopedic surgeon, and the medical director. These were built to house the base's commanding officers and are still referred to as the MOQ-Master Officers' Quarters. Down the road apiece is a series of twelve duplexes called the JOQ, Junior Officers' Quarters. These now house staff doctors and department heads. Next in line is the BOQ, Bachelor Officers' Quarters, also known as The Club, where unmarried nurses and teachers live. The rest of the 1,200 people who are not patients or students are housed all over the Island, making use of remodeled navy barracks and other structures. There is a neighborhood called Millerville, another called Charcoal Island, and obscurely, one called Hollywood. A section housing CAA (Civil Aeronautics Authority) personnel is Iggorote Village. For the most part, these are medium-sized houses and apartment units and are as various as the people who live in them. They are reminiscent of the wartime housing projects in all the large cities stateside. Thanks to the rapid expansion, especially of the med-

ical center, there is a constant housing shortage, and construction of new units does not begin to keep pace with the influx of new personnel. Although the difference in quality of the houses is probably no greater than that in any community, it is pointed up by the inescapable arbitrary assignment of housing according to professional position. This led one youngster in the school, when asked to define society, to reply, "society: MOQ, JOQ, and BOQ." Since nothing resembling grass grows in the muskeg covering most of the island any landscaping must be done at considerable effort and expense hauling in topsoil from elsewhere by boat. Consequently there are few attractive yards. The MOQ's, of course, have expansive lawns leading down to the water line of the channel.

The island itself, or, more accurately, the group of causeway-connected islands, is an example of the extravagant waste of war. The Navy poured \$75,000,000 into the construction of this base before it was abandoned. When they moved out, they left everything helter-skelter and partially wrecked because although arrangements had already been made for the ANS to take over, no one in authority remembered to countermand the standing order to demolish as much as possible to prevent the enemy's benefitting from it. At the last moment, the lush furnishings of the officers' quarters were loaded onto a barge and carted off to Adak, to the disappointment of the first ANS comers, who had been dreaming of thick carpets, rich draperies and telephones in every room

Moving around the island, one sees all manner of weather-spoiled machinery: steam shovels, tanks, tractors, and landing barges. There are dozens of concrete bomb shelters, ammunition vaults, and lookout stations. There are also countless machine-gun nests, networks of tunnels, and barbed wire entanglements. The several huge but weather-beaten hangars are still full of equipment mostly useless. Part of the reason for abandonment

was the fact that it was never possible for land planes to come in here, so that the whole building program of concrete airstrip and hangars was sheer waste. Only the tower atop Hangar I is presently used as the CAA operating control tower for incoming and outgoing Sitka flights, all exclusively amphibious. On one of the farthest small islands actually out in the open ocean, where the wind whips across and the water rages, there was once an Army base. All of the barracks are now washed or blown away and half of what was a paved two-lane road is gone. The entire causeway will wash out in a few more years, but now one can still walk out to the end, and an exciting walk it can be, even, in fine weather. Still standing on the far vulnerable end of the causeway is a handsome log structure, a former officer's club, whose construction cost must have been astronomical. There is no way to move it back to the main part of the island and no electricity out to it. Now a total loss, it too will wash away before long.

When one sees these things and imagines by comparison what some of the islands in the Pacific must look like it, brings the devastating economics of war home with impact. While the attempt to make use of these remnants in developing the school and hospital seems on the surface a splendid idea, in actuality, the surplus material that is going into current construction is so impractical for its present use that it is certain to represent ultimate loss in manpower, repair, and general dissatisfaction.

More about the ANS: It is the branch of the Bureau of Indian Affairs that serves the native residents of the Territory of Alaska. In addition to its vocational school and hospitals at Mt. Edgecumbe, it maintains two other boarding schools, one at Wrangell in Southeastern Alaska, for younger orphaned children, and one elementary school for Eskimo children at White Mountain north of Norton Sound. In communities all over the Territory, no matter how remote, where there are twelve or more

school-age children with no other school available, the ANS provides teachers and schoolhouses. There are other, though smaller, hospitals at Juneau, Tanana, Kanakanak, Bethel, Kotzebue, and Point Barrow.

At Mt. Edgecumbe the students are representative of literally every part of Alaska. Presumably they start from the 7th grade and go through the 12th. Not infrequently, however, the teacher in a faraway outpost sends a problem child with the notation that he is ready for Mt. Edgecumbe. Examination may disclose that he is at 3rd grade level. In most cases, he can't be sent back for the purely physical reason of lack of transportation, so Edgecumbe teachers have no recourse but to start him from that point.

The biggest problems, though, are the result of the environments that produce the students, environments so alien to our western concepts of education and society that it is well nigh impossible for us even to contemplate how perplexing the abrupt change must be. We might well stop to ponder whether or not it is such a wonderful thing we are doing imposing our civilization on these people. They lived for centuries within their own culture. We have reason to suppose that they lived those centuries successfully and happily, uncomplicated by neuroses and most of the ailments rampant in our society: measles, whooping cough, the common cold, and that great Alaskan bugaboo, tuberculosis. The diseases were "gifts" from the first European men to penetrate the northland and have wreaked havoc here ever since. The neuroses occur when the disruptive aspects of what we try to teach bombards them. Any Alaskan doctor can testify from discouraging experience that when a native Alaskan does develop a neurosis or psychosis, it is likely to be impossible to heal. There is no common ground of reasoning and understanding to provide a starting point for talking it out. Treatment comes to a dead end before it begins. Still, there is a strong and justified

argument for educating Alaska's native people: survival of the fittest. There's no evading the fact that Western Culture will ultimately absorb Alaska. Good or bad, it is as inevitable as a steamroller. Those adaptable enough to adjust will be able to make a go of the new ways. We do our best to teach and prepare those who can learn and try not to anguish over what is lost. It's not a pretty picture. There is much they could teach us, but we do not take time to listen. If someday we humans could learn when cultures collide to select the best from each and discard the worst we might see true progress and enrichment for all.

The medical accomplishments of the Native Service are happier to contemplate. When you have cured a sick man or mended a crippled child, you do not have to ask yourself, "Would he be better off if I had left him alone?" It has its gloomy aspect too, for there is so much to do and progress is so slow. Here at Mt. Edgecumbe, the medical aspect is gaining by leaps and bounds. With the completion and filling of the new hospital, the total number of beds available in the TB sanitarium will be 300. Until Mt. Edgecumbe was inaugurated, only one small sanitarium in all of Alaska was actively treating tuberculosis. After Mt. Edgecumbe, there will be still another, larger sanitarium in Anchorage. The orthopedic hospital of 60-odd beds treats almost entirely children. An active volunteer organization, Alaska Crippled Children's Association, supports this work with money, gifts for the children, salaries for teachers, clothing, and, in the Sitka chapter, actual time spent visiting and entertaining the patients. Added to this are 25 general beds, a school clinic, and a regular outpatient clinic. Upwards of 13,000 patients are seen in the combined clinics yearly. Fruitful though this sounds, it is a mere drop in the bucket of Alaska's need.

Most Mt. Edgecumbe residents are employed by the ANS to serve this picture in some way. Though the focus is the school, the hospitals, and their continuous construction and mainte-

nance, the community nature of the island makes the variety of work the same as one would find in any small town-with one exception. There are no shopping facilities. None! This is a nuisance. We must take a shore boat to Sitka for all shopping, even groceries. One does soon become nonchalant, however. You dash over on the 1 o'clock boat, select your groceries at the Cold Storage, and leave them to be delivered to your home. You do any other necessary shopping, chat with friends on the street, have a cup of coffee in the drugstore, and return on the 2:30 or 3:30 boat. You try to avoid the 4:30, which carries Mt. Edgecumbe's children home from Sitka's schools. Catching the 4:30 is like riding a school bus. If the weather is inclement, which is often, you may order groceries by telephone. But there is no running to the corner for a last minute loaf of bread or a pint of ice cream. Planning ahead is crucial.

The first really new fact of life here is boats. Boats are as essential as automobiles are where most of us came from. A day you don't step foot on a boat is a day you hibernated indoors. Going to a party in Sitka on a cold, rainy night is an experience that defies description. Getting up and down the ramps (the tide may be out 10 or 12 feet, making steep angles on the ramps) and in and out of various boats demands agility. Keeping clothes, shoes, and hairdos from becoming hopelessly bedraggled is a feat of magic. We do it, though, daily and nightly with aplomb. I soon took to carrying dress shoes in a bag and avoiding tight skirts.

Perhaps the most intriguing single aspect of Sitka is the Russian Orthodox Church, St. Michael's Cathedral. The church has universal fame since it is the one remaining emblem of the brilliant Baranof regime in Alaska, when Sitka was known as the "Paris of the West Coast." The "Baranof Castle," which occupies a site on a high hill with the most commanding view in the area, is of little historical import now. It is not the original cas-

tle, and it has become dilapidated. There is nearly always someone living there. It rents for \$1 a month payable to the Department of Agriculture. Tenants supply their own heat and other utilities and, because it is a porous barn of a place, it costs more to heat than rent and utilities combined cost elsewhere. Its difficulty of access makes just the delivery of fuel a major item.

Unlike the castle, St. Michael's is all that any history buff could ask. It also is not the original but was built during the Russian reign when Bishop Innocent returned to the Sitka diocese from his missionary barnstorming in the rest of the Territory. His success in these peregrinations earned him both the honored title and the honored position in Sitka. The present church was completed in 1848 and was the only building to survive the fire that destroyed the castle. The first church had been built in 1799, when Baranof designated Sitka as the Alaska capital and headquarters for the Russian-American Fur Company.

The church was a special pet of the Tsar who once sent a shipload of treasures to glorify it. Sadly, the ship was wrecked on Cape Edgecumbe and nothing recovered. Still between the Tsar, other interested persons in Russia, and the colonists themselves, a truly impressive collection of icons, chalices, crucifixes, tapestries, and miniatures was gathered together in the cathedral. Some of the precious tapestries of unadulterated gold and silver threads were woven by Baranof's daughter, to combat her boredom. The most phenomenal treasure, astonishing to find in such an out-of-the-way corner of the world, is the Sitka Madonna, a painting of Our Lady of Kazen by Vladimir Borovikovsky who, according to Father Sergius, my guide, was a Russian painter comparable to Raphael. The painting's beauty suggests that this is not exaggeration. Icons are almost always adorned with beaten gold and silver, covering most of the painting. Only faces and one hand are left uncovered. The gaudy effect of Russian church art almost blinds a westerner to its intrinsic beauty. In St.

Michael's, the effect is made more absurd by the meager background. The present banning of religion in Soviet Russia made the Orthodox Church an exile, and St. Michael's is so poverty stricken that it is impossible to keep it up as an appropriate home for such treasures. The icons, materials of worship, and the great golden doors are magnificent and probably priceless. But Father Sergius showed us two chalice covers of gold and silver threads on green velvet woven by the Princess herself, spreading the display on a warped kitchen table covered with cheap, worn, green and white checked oilcloth.

This particular church's poverty is a little hard to understand in view of the fact that it is the center of a still active missionary program. Every village in the Aleutians has its Russian Orthodox Church, though there are only three or four priests remaining in the Territory. Each parish sends regular tithes to the Sitka Cathedral. Priests live at starvation level and are hard put to subsist at all. The Bishop, however, is apparently a well-to-do though miserly man. His home is reputedly full of more valuable treasures than the church itself, though few people and no one I know have ever been shown through it. True, the Bishop's House belongs to the church, but I once asked an old man of the village and stalwart of the church if the Bishop had a private income. He shrugged his shoulders. Then with a rather sorrowful twinkle in his expressive eyes said, "The Bishop is not a very good Christian, I'm afraid." Father Sergius told me that when he came here from Kodiak, he was given a list of the valuables in the church but found only a fraction of them actually there. His explanation was that "past priests and bishops must have taken them."

From the first, I heard about Father Michael Ossorgin, a young and talented priest who had been in Sitka and had left not long before to live in San Francisco. He was adored in the community, and all were hoping find a way to facilitate his

return. Subsistence at St. Michael's was threadbare, and he had been receiving alluring offers from outside. He is a musician. Music, especially concert piano, is his first love. He entered the priesthood originally because of the opportunity it afforded to study music.

Though born in Moscow, he grew up and studied in Paris. Then he was caught by the war and spent years in a German concentration camp, after which he came to Alaska as a displaced person. What I heard about most was the acappella boy's choir he had created from students in the Mt. Edgecumbe School. Sitkans had no adjectives too superlative for this choir. I skeptically reserved judgment. This was, after all, pretty far from discriminating music centers. None the less, it was clear that this man had left behind him an uncommon void.

Fr. Sergius had been called from Kodiak to take Fr. Ossorgin's place. At first I inclined to sympathize with Fr. Sergius, for trying to fill those shoes seemed a thankless task. But Fr. Sergius had known Fr. Ossorgin when he was a small boy in Paris and took a fatherly pride in his success. He, too, wanted Ossorgin back. And Fr. Ossorgin, having had enough of the disquieting effects of metropolitan life, was as eager to return as everyone was to have him. Only material considerations presented obstacles. Finally, the ANS offered him a teaching position and housing on the island to supplement his work in the church, and just before Christmas, he returned. The boys of his choir were at the Alaska Coastal Airlines float to meet him when the plane was due. The plane, however, was 18 hours late, having been forced to overnight in Hoonah. At sundown, the dejected boys trooped home. At the crack of dawn, they were back and resumed their vigil shivering on the float until at last, the Gruman Goose seaplane arrived. Their radiant faces stiff with cold, they sang their favorite, "Dem

bones, dem bones, dem dry bones,” as Fr. Ossorgin, flowing black hair, beard, and robes, came up the ramp. It was awesome.

When at last I heard them sing, I was struck dumb. I don't believe I have ever been more moved. These Aleut, Eskimo, and Indian boys came from the really far reaches of Alaska. They have an evident natural love of music but no previous training. Ossorgin plucks music from them as he would a piano. I'm sure they could enthrall any audience from here to Carnegie Hall.

Alaska has a persuasive tendency to encourage people to resurrect half-forgotten talents, brush off the dust of disuse, and have fun. As a result, a group of us on the Island organized an “orchestra” of musical has-beens (or, wish-they-had-beans,) strictly for our own amusement. After one of our sessions, Fr. Ossorgin and our pianist, who was certainly no has-been, sat down with a volume of two-piano arrangements of Beethoven symphonies. On a single piano, they performed all of the 1st Symphony and the first movement of the Eroica for a spellbound audience. It is less thrilling but perhaps even more intriguing to see Fr. Ossorgin in orthodox clerical vestments, execute a competent jam session on Bumble Boogie, Mule Train, or, I've Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts.

Which incongruous train of thought calls this event to mind: On a blizzardy Saturday in early winter, we attended a Hawaiian Luau at the Sitka Elk's club, complete with barbequed pig, coconuts, orchid and carnation leis, and grass skirts, all flown in from Honolulu. On the same night, the House of David basketball team from Benton Harbor, Michigan (which happens to be my home town), played the Alaska Native Brotherhood team on the new gymnasium floor just laid in Hangar 3 by members of the Mt. Edgecumbe Lion's Club. What a small amazing world this is!

A weekend excursion with friends on their 48-foot yacht, Romany III, was my initiation to the wildness and variety of

southeastern Alaska. We did not go far, but we might as well have traveled 2000 miles for none of the places we visited looked at all like Sitka and environs. Romany's course was south until we reached an appealing cluster of small islands off the middle of Baranof Island. We prowled over these for hours, skiffing from one to another.

Hunting season had ended the week before, so the rifles we carried were for target practice or the unlikely chance of meeting a brown bear. Though what we would have done in case of such an encounter I have no idea. We climbed to the top of each craggy island to watch the surf pounding against the rocks below and shooting up gigantic spray screens. Hundreds of small gnarled trees with a mossy-vine-covered undergrowth blanketed the rugged terrain. The awkward scrambling over and under the rocks and branches brought out latent mountain goat traits, especially in Pixie, who skipped about delightedly as though she'd been born there. We took care not to go ashore where there was any suspicion of bear, for Pix would have been likely to scare one up and give us a more exciting time than we wished. Presumably the bears mind their own business so long as trespassers mind theirs. But minding her own business is not a Pixie strong point. The picture we made in outdoor clothing and packing rifles was good Alaskan form marred only by Pixie, who couldn't look like a hunting dog no matter how hard she tried. And she did try. She posed like a pointer and sniffed trails like a hound, showing her true canine instincts. Still, she looked like a misplaced pocket model.

Late in the afternoon, we went on to Goddard Hot Springs on Baranof Island. Were it anywhere in the lower states, this would be a thriving resort. Its sulphur hot springs reach a temperature of 146 F. The Dr. Goddard who gave it his name built it into a resort, but it proved so inaccessible that it was finally deserted. There is a rambling hotel and four or five smaller cottages, all

heated by pipes circulating hot-spring water through the rooms. There is just one permanent resident, Gus, though Gus had a fisherman crony named Christie with him. These two are isolated except for Christie's troller, Gus's Cris Craft runabout, and occasional visitors like us. Gus cooks in a kitchen designed to feed dozens of paying guests. Gus told us that years before, he had been a chef and later a waiter in Chicago's old Auditorium Hotel (he switched to table waiting when he found there was more money to be made). When the brand new LaSalle Hotel opened, he transferred over to it. The LaSalle's dining room opened for business before construction was complete, and the management brought in branches from the woods to disguise and decorate the uncovered ceiling rafters. Gus the waiter was carving roast duck for a table of customers. To his chagrin, the knife slipped and the duck took off toward the branches. Losing professional poise, Gus exclaimed, "Hell! The godarn duck wants to fly yet!"

He was "godarn" sure he would be fired because "cussing was agin' the godarn rules." But the delighted guests told the headwaiter that Gus was "the best godarn waiter in the place."

Christie, a weathered-looking tough old fisherman, took one look at Pixie and lost his heart. Ignoring Gus's assertion that she was only a "soup-hound," he was determined to lure her into being the first mate of his troller. He told her crooningly that she could have fish and beefsteak and he would shoot a deer just for her. She could have cigarettes and coffee, if she liked, but no whiskey. He would teach her to bark every time he landed a fish, and she would have so much fun she would never, never be homesick. I promised Christie that the first puppy Pixie ever had would be that first mate. That will be the most loved and spoiled dog in the world.

Goddard's grounds are abundantly green, and naturally so, not imported landscaping. Gus gave us celery from his garden

that was so deliciously sweet and juicy, we ate it ravenously. He gave us cabbages, lettuce, tomatoes, and onions all of a size and quality to please the most discriminating produce merchandiser. This plethora of growing things seems the more remarkable when one has climbed the ridge immediately behind the resort. For here is a stretch of land out of a wild and eerie nightmare - the Burn. It is one of only a few places in Alaska where fire has destroyed timbered area. The soil is all muskeg, southeastern's equivalent of northern tundra. It's sour and spongy and saturated with water even when, as in this instance, it is on a precipitous mountainside. Walking through it is horrid. You don't see the water until you're in it. We kept sinking to the ankles in what looked like solid ground.

Although the burn happened twenty or thirty years ago, moss and coarse grass are all that's grown back. The trees are bleached and beaten by the weather until they are dead white and smooth as driftwood. But they all remain standing where they once grew, their grotesque shapes and color making them a nerve-jangling ghost forest.

Yet the Burn was not the most disconcerting place we found. Coming down from the ridge where charred land and the lush hot springs merged, we entered a jungle of low growth. Long, tenacious branches wore tentacles of hanging moss, like some southern bayou. The treacherous, uneven ground was carpeted with lifeless pale green moss. Sunlight filtering through the branches came from a late afternoon sun that did unorthodox things to colors. It was such an Alice-in-Wonderland world that I could easily believe I was wandering dazed in some schizophrenic fantasy. It was a profound relief to emerge finally from this twilight world to the green freshness around the springs.

Back aboard the Romany after our day in the wilds, each of us had a hot shower. Luxury! We had a dinner of meatloaf, carrots and peas, baked potatoes, fresh celery, hot rolls, and choco-

late cake with burnt sugar frosting. We lounged with warm slippers on our no longer wet feet and read a week-old New York Times. We listened to music from South Pacific and the Caesar Franck Symphony and played Canasta until an early and welcome bedtime. Very civilized indeed.