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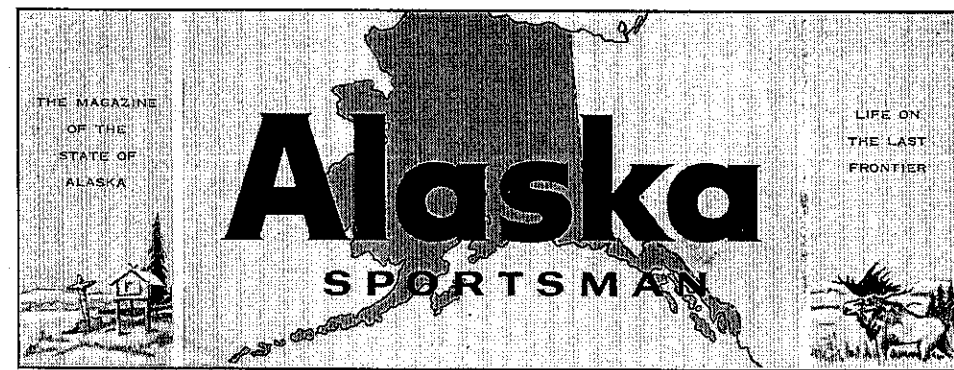
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BOB HENNING Editor

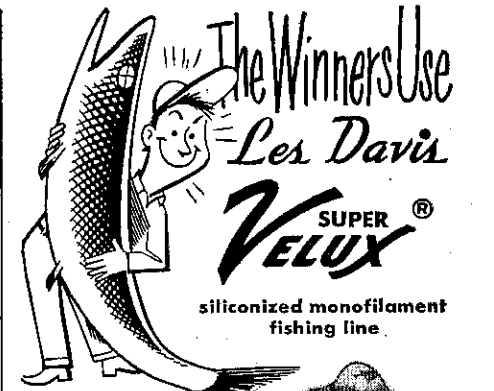
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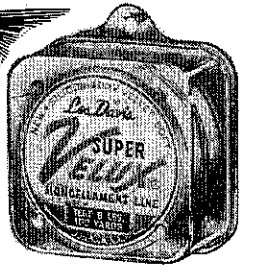
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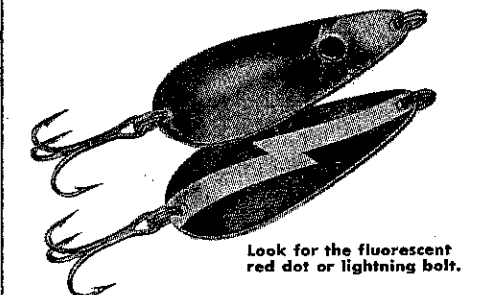
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- My wife and I have spent nearly thirty years on Alaska's Panhandle. It's a way of life that's right for us.

Letter from Elfin Cove

by Max W. Dorman

MY WIFE and I recently made a trip Outside, where we visited several places and many people and tried to answer a great many questions about Alaska.

Selling Alaska is easy for us. We've spent nearly thirty years in this part of the world, living here because we like it. Talking, even bragging about it, comes naturally. We can't answer all the questions, though. All we can tell is of the Alaska we know, in the way we know it.

Alaska isn't just a state, a county, or even a section of any other place where you've ever been. When my wife and I speak of Alaska, we speak of the Panhandle, Southeastern Alaska, and mainly the islands of the Panhandle.

You may think such a relatively small area could be fairly easily described—that the climate, temperature, rainfall, snowfall, vegetation, the animals, birds and fishes in a small island group would be much the same.

But the climate around Juneau isn't like the climate in Haines or Skagway. Petersburg, or Wrangell, is different from Ketchikan. Elfin Cove, our home, isn't quite like Sitka, and so on with all the towns and villages of the Panhandle. The nearness of the Pacific Ocean makes the temperature, rainfall and just about anything else a little different on the outside islands (and on the ocean sides of those same islands) from that of islands surrounded by inside channels. The many valleys leading into the waterways from the ice fields of the mainland affect weather and climate on the inside islands. Latitude produces gradual changes.

How do you explain all this to persons who have never been here? How

do you explain that various factors cause differences between one spot and another when a person can look at a map and see for himself that the miles between the two spots are few?

How do you explain to an outdoorsman that it isn't an easy matter to shoulder a packboard full of camping necessities and take off through the mountains and valleys for a few days of hiking and camping? What do you use for comparison when you try to tell about the devil club patches, the jungle-like growth along the streams,

beaches and lakes? The soupy muskeg, the rocky cliffs, the buckbrush? How picture the ruggedness of the rocky shores, where it is impossible to land a boat or find an anchorage along many miles of our waterways?

Are we trying to undersell Alaska? Are we trying to discourage people from coming to see our scenery, visit our country, or become Alaskans?

Come on up!

The answer is no! Many times no! We want people to come to Alaska, but we want them to see and know the country as it is, and we hope they'll like it this way. We want them to be prepared for what they will find—miles upon miles of rugged coastline, thousands of islands that don't seem far enough apart that a boat can pass between them, and sometimes aren't, acres upon acres upon square miles of heavy timber and dense undergrowth crawling up the flanks of steep mountains and gradually giving way to alpine meadows and rock cliffs and perhaps the snow and ice of many seasons.

"We're coming to Alaska to live," many people told us.

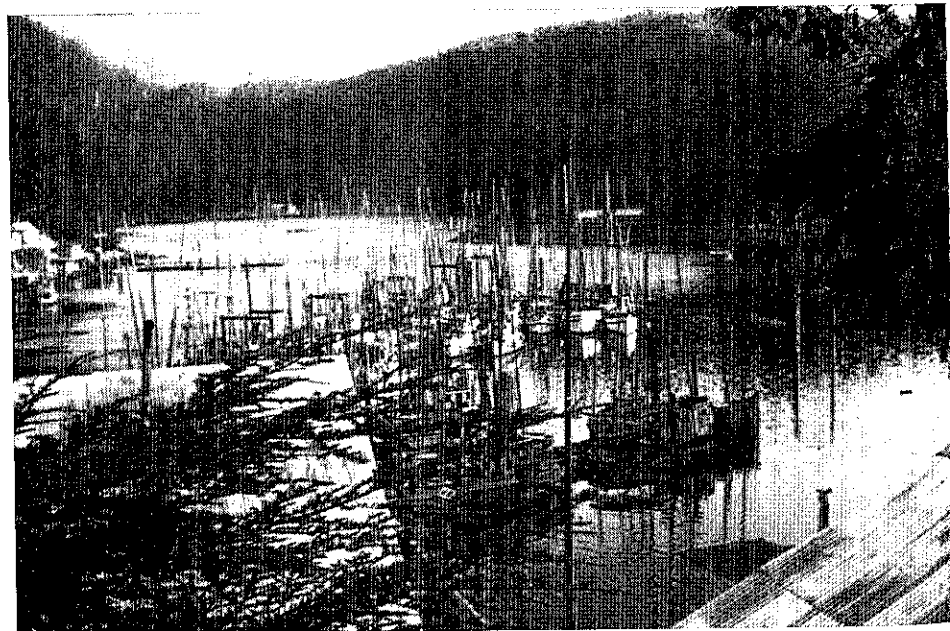
"Do come," we would answer, "and welcome, but don't cut loose your home ties, don't give up a job or sell the family home first. Make that first trip a visit, a vacation. See our great country, and then think about coming to Alaska to live."

We know from experience that not everyone will like Alaska. Not everyone will want to make it his home; not everyone who does will be entirely satisfied.

You hear of the deprivations, the extra cost of living and traveling, the

—please turn to page 88

- Elfin Cove is isolated, true, but snug and safe. We call the inner harbor "God's Pocket."



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LETTER FROM ELFIN COVE

(Continued from page 36)

lack of things generally considered necessities. Yes, it does cost more to live here. It is a pioneer life, without many of the conveniences of modern living.

But, you tell us, that is just what you want—the free life, out in God's own wilderness, where you're your own boss.

Wonderful! That's just what we have.

It isn't the deprivations, the no-seesums and mosquitoes, nor the weather, that may discourage you from becoming a real wilderness-dwelling Alaskan. It isn't the isolation, the absence of television, movies, cocktail lounges and the many things that most people take for granted, that may keep you from being happy in the tall and uncut.

No, in our opinion it's your own personality, what's inside of you, how much you want to be your own boss, how much fortitude you possess. These are things you may not know yourself, even, until you've tried our way of life.

Our towns and cities have the essentials of modern living to the same extent as towns and cities of the same populations in the other states—perhaps a greater extent than the average. They have competition, traffic and time clocks, too.

But we in the bush, in places like Elfin Cove, do not have television, movies, cocktail lounges. We do not have cars, roads nor traffic problems. No hotels, apartments, houses for rent, restaurants to eat in. We travel by boat or plane. There's no other way to get from here to there. Our cost of things we must buy, as in other villages off the steamship routes, has to be higher than in the coastal cities. Mail service is twice a week in summer, weather permitting, and once a week in winter.

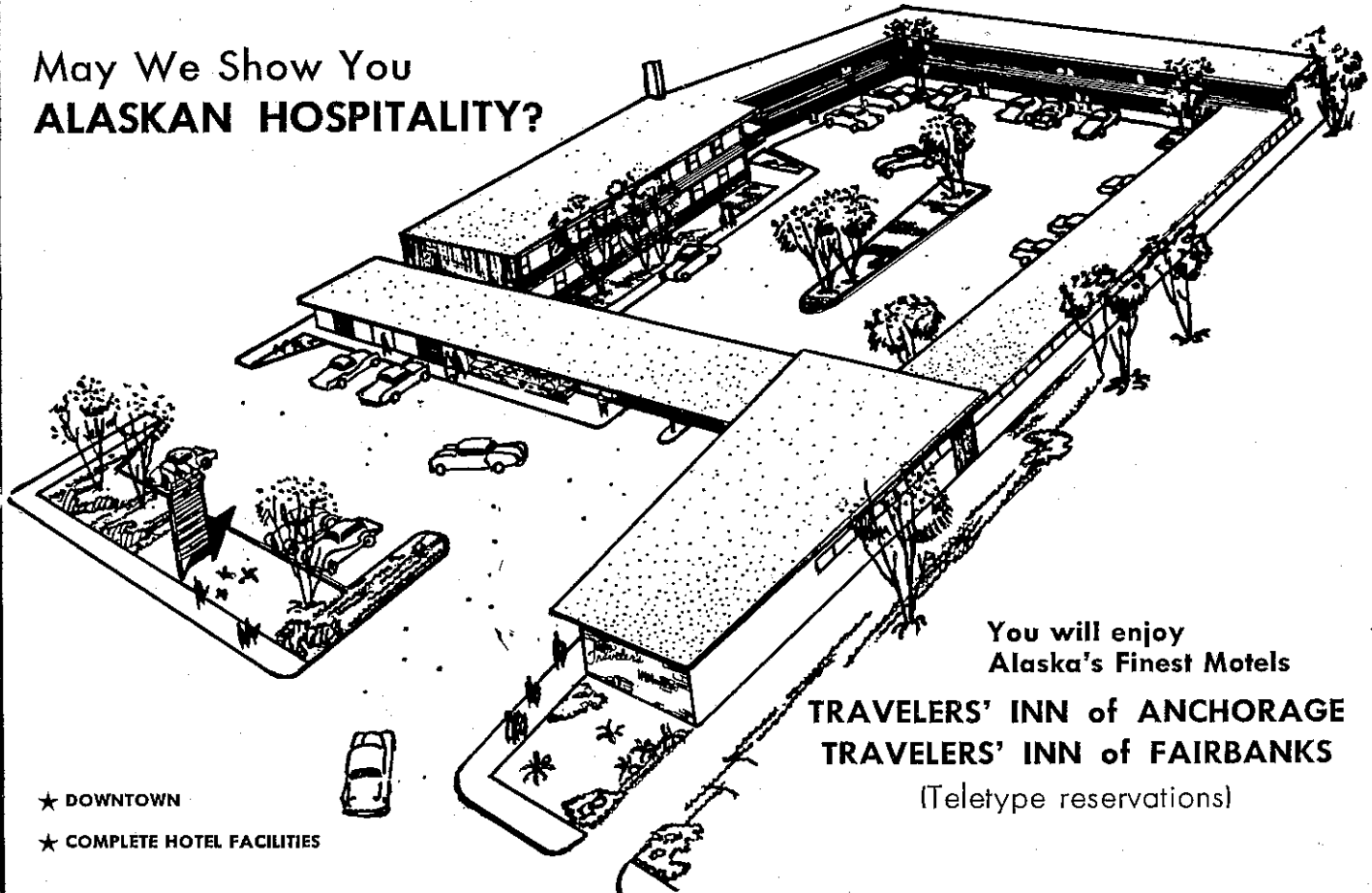
What do we do? Don't we get lonesome? Where do we go? How do we spend the long winter evenings?

Like Farmers

We do the same things that farmers do in isolated communities in the other states. We claim that if you can live with yourself, by yourself, and be yourself in any part of the world, you can live in an out-of-the-way place in Alaska.

We have parties or gatherings whenever it is convenient for a few people to gather in one place. We read a great deal, listen to the radio, if possible never miss a newscast. We're interested in local, state and world affairs. Politics and politicians we read about, listen to and discuss, and our vote on election

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day means a great deal to most of us. These things are our recreation, our amusement, our lives.

The plumber, carpenter, electrician or fix-it shop isn't around the corner nor in the next block. We do, make do, repair, call on our neighbor for assistance. He in turn does the same. If our task calls for more manpower than we possess, we call upon a neighbor. Seldom do wages enter the relationship.

This is the pioneer spirit that our forefathers had when they trekked across the nation and homesteaded the virgin land—independent, yes, but each depending upon others when his own resources and capabilities fell short. Friends and neighbors are all-important. This way of life must come naturally, or you won't stay in the wilderness of Alaska.

What do we do for a living? And what can you do for a living?

As an Alaskan big game guide, now inactive, and a commercial salmon troller, I've made a livelihood—my wife works with me as many fishermen's wives do—these last twenty years.

No Riches

But, we hasten to add, few fishermen get rich or live off the fat of the land. Living out here, the overhead—lights, water, assessments, garbage disposal, taxes—are at a minimum. Few fishermen who have families living in the cities can make enough money fishing to carry them through the winter.

What kind of boat do you need to make a living fishing?

How can we answer that question, a stock question when we showed our color slides of the fishing industry, without making you feel we're trying to discourage you?

Our answer is: if you aren't a fisherman and don't have a boat, come up and look into this business first. With your boat paid for, and a knowledge of the fishing grounds garnered through years of experience, you should be able to make a reasonably good livelihood fishing.

Some Are Lucky

Granted, some come to Alaska for the first time, with little knowledge of fishing, go through the season with little or no trouble and come out with a profit. But God has his arm around those few. Ask any fisherman. If you are used to making your own decisions, if you can put in twice or three times as many hours working for yourself as an employer would expect of you, if you can fail miserably and then fail again and yet pull yourself through in some fashion, and still want to keep on with this kind of life, you're in!

On the brighter side of this gloomy picture, there are rewards that can't be found anywhere else in the world. There's contentment and fulfillment in doing something for yourself and suc-

ceeding. The good day's catch of salmon, the fur in the trap, the wood you've cut, the cabin you've built. There's the beautiful sunset on calm waters, the gentle fall of snow, the pleasure of meeting old friends or making new ones, being able to help someone in trouble or being helped when you need it; the serene quiet, the only noise that of the wind in the trees, the call of the loon at sunset in a quiet anchorage; the fresh, clean air, the majestic mountains with their tops covered by never-melting ice and snow, the grandeur of a mighty river of glacial ice, the humility of seeing yourself in comparison.

These are the good days, the days you wouldn't trade for any other time in any other part of the world.

Then your engine conks out, miles from help. No mechanic around the corner to be summoned by telephone. The tide is ebbing, there isn't anything between you and Japan but water and you're heading in that direction. Each year there are those who don't get back—those whom Lady Luck abandoned. Is it worth it? Well, that all depends upon you. We think it is.

What do we do when we become ill or have an accident and need medical care?

There are doctors and hospitals, as good as any, in our cities. We get a boat—a neighbor with his boat if we can't run our own—or call a plane, weather permitting, and are taken to a place where we can have medical care. If you are the type of person to worry and stew over such eventualities, you will be better suited to life in town.

Well, neighbor, we haven't begun to fill in all the details in this picture of our country and our way of life. We don't know them all. We don't claim to be examples of the hardy pioneer. We claim only that we've found the way of life that's right for us, and these are just a few of the many things we thought you'd like to know about it.

We think you'd enjoy a trip to Alaska. We think you will like our scenery, our mountains and waterfalls, our islands, the green of our forests, the blue of our glaciers, the ruggedness of our coastline. So be sure to bring your camera and plenty of color film.

If you think you would like to try our way of life, investigate it thoroughly. Talk to the people, especially those who are living the way you would like to live. If you decide to try it, we welcome you as neighbors. No matter what you decide, may good health and good fortune be yours. ▲

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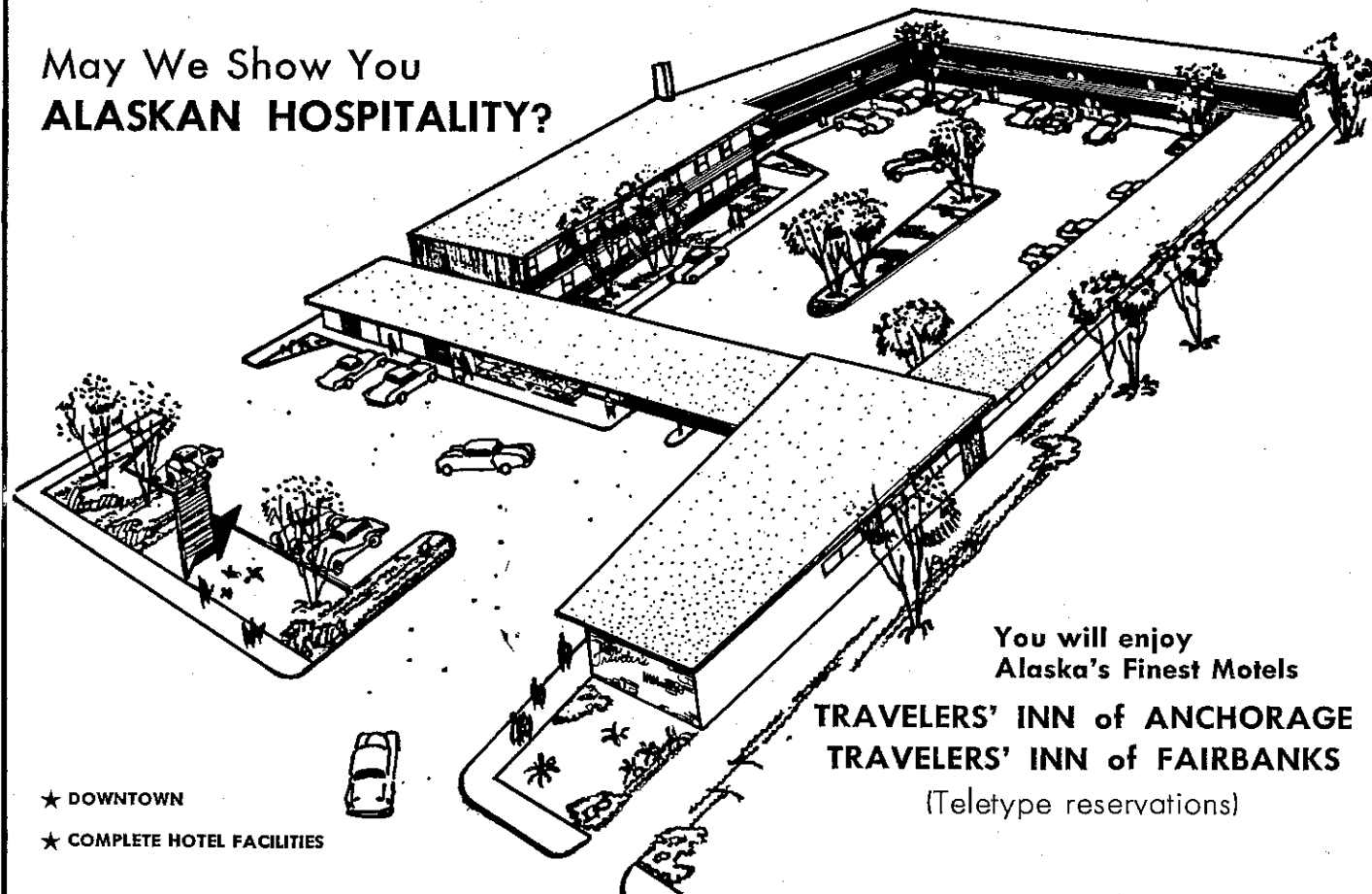
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