

Transcript of an Oral Interview
with

MATTIE GILBERTSON LECKWOLD

Interviewed
by
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Oral History Program
Alaska and Polar Regions Department
Rasmuson Library

University of Alaska, Fairbanks
May 1985

H76-24

INTRODUCTION

Narrator: Mattie Gilbertson Leckwold (ML)
Interviewer: Neville Jacobs (NJ)
Interview dates: September 1974
Interview location: Palmer Pioneer Home
Transcribers: Ginger Polon and Cynthia Simpson
Transcription date: March 1985

NJ. Mrs. Leckwold I've heard about you.

ML. Have you?

NJ. Uh huh. because there are very few women who have run the mail and have been a contract carrier for the government with their dog team,

ML. yeah

NJ. and then you were an early settler in the Matanuska valley, before the Matanuska valley was a colony.

ML. we were the first homesteaders

MJ. you were the first ones

ML. we were the first homesteaders in the Matanuska Valley and that's the four corners

NJ. Oh, I didn't know that.

ML. four corners

NJ. well where were you born

ML. in Minnisota

NJ. in Minnisota in what, 1890's?

ML. um huh

NJ. and you came here right after when was it, 1912, 1914

ML. 1916

NJ. 1916 with your husband

ML. ya

NJ. and uh, how did you come here?

ML. walk

NJ. oh you didn't, now you didn't walk all the way from Minnisota

ML. (laughs) no no, you come on the boat, you come on the train

first from Minnisota to Seattle, and then you get to Seattle then you have to take the boat and take that up

NJ. what boat did you come off on

ML. on uh, Northwest

NJ. on Northwest?

ML. uh huh. and uh, then we come there, then we had to walk we had to walk 39 miles to get over to old Knik.

NJ. where did the boat let you off?

ML. down in Anchorage

NJ. Oh, it did huh?

ML. uh huh

NJ. well then how did you get from Anchorage accross the inlet

ML. accross the inlet? well we came up on that small train you know

MJ. I didn't know there were any trains here then

ML. yes, just a freight train box car that would get you there and then we got to to the junction there, or down there to the Matanuska well then we had to get off there and then we had to walk 39 miles to a, to the, huh, well I just told you the name of that place, didn't I.

NJ. not four corners?

ML. no, no the uh, well, isn't that awful? (laughs)

NJ. well, old Knik, you got to old Knik somehow

ML. ya, we went to old Knik, and then we had to , when we got there, of course, he was in the army, and he was an injured veterine and he to begin with, he came from from the war

NJ. well, 1916 was right in the middle of WWI

ML. ya, and he come over from over seas, and of course, he was

injured, and they couldn't do a thing for him

NJ. what was the nature of his injury

ML. well he was full of bullets that was running in his tissue

NJ. I see

ML. and they couldn't do a thing for him so they , well he struggled along, and well, he wanted to take this homestead. He had the map someway, and he looked at me, and he said if I could get back over, I'm gonna go and take that homestead, at four corners. and so we did. So he met me and of course, we got married and uh, so we came up. He said, well, what do you think about it, and I said, well, that's perfectly alright, whatever you want to do now, it's up to you. You know what you want to do. So when he did that he had no difficulty at all because the government then, a government man came one day, he says uh, "I think you are the party I'm looking for." " Oh is that right? what did I do this time" ya know. course I always had an answer I was taught that at home, ya he says, "say we need someone to (caught) pick up on those homemade mailboxes on the trees on the trail there", he said " and I want you to pick up the mail in those boxes for the people " then he says, "and I know you would, you'll sort their mail and I know you'll put whatever they got back into their box. Yes I said, "providing they take care of it" cuz I said you know anybody and everybody could look into their box and then say "Well, I'm going to take that and find out what is in it,. and he says," you are right" so I said "all right". if they will take care of their mail, they will know that I make this trip everyday. All right, I'll do it,

and so I did. and uh, I did it then till I fell on my nose.

NJ. till you fell on your nose?

ML. yup

NJ. I don't think that's a figure of speech is it?

ML. (laughs) no I um, I took ill see, the doctor said he says to me " you know, this might sound funny to you, buy he says, you know what is wrong with you ?" and I says, oh, I guess I'm tired, and he says "you're sure?" and uh, I said, yup, I'm pretty sure, I said shorten the road a little bit and that will help me a lot. I will have no difficulty. and uh, he said, "well, before I get through telling you, you know what has been wrong with you all this time? You didn't realize that you were a women," he said "you thought you we a horse. And he said, "You did work for a horse all this time, he said, what do you expect to be, it's a wonder you haven't broke down a long time ago. He says, " There's nobody that could stand to do what you've done."

NJ. I kind of wondered about that, because how long was it? 10 years you, you took care of the mail? Day in day out?

ML. Um huh, ya, oh yes, the dogs say ooooooooooh at 2:0'clock in the morning that meant you get up and get someting to eat and then after after I've had something to eat, then we have to be on the road at 3 0'clock.

NJ. you would start out at 3 in the morning

ML. yup,

NJ. to go 10 miles

ML. Yup

NJ. From Knik, from four courners

ML. from four corners on down to the junction

NJ. to the junction of... what was the junction then

ML. that's the old uh, old uh, what's the name of that place, I wouldn't forget that cause I...

NJ. Now is that on the Glenn Highway?

ML. No, no that's where the railroad runs through

NJ. where the railroad goes through, like Wasila

ML. um huh, come to Wasila and then down, down to the other station there, and uh

NJ. and Willow, well Willow is up the line

ML. No, Willow is up

NJ. well, this is down toward the river, in other words, the station at Knik

ML. That's right, and anyway, I um, then when I made that, I knew his condition you know, and I thought, I'm gonna get home and help him, as much as possible with what he's got in mind to do and so I always managed to get back home by 4 O'clock in the afternoon..

NJ. I see, so you would start out ...

ML. 2 in the morning, cause I had to feed the dogs first

NJ. so you'd put in a 14 hour day on the mail run and then you'd get home and take care of your husband.

ML. Ya, that's right, that's what I did and he felt terrible about it. But I told him forget it, it don't hurt me a bit.

NJ. Well except that when the time came that you were tired, it was time to rest.

ML. Oh ya that is when the doctor told me I didn't know I was a

women but I thought I was a horse.

NJ. Well, in the winter, you... well how many dogs did you have?

ML. eight dogs and then I had a, I had one of those dogs, watch dogs, you know on the right side of me, now you come along and give me the time of the day (bark), you'd get it.

NJ. It was free running?

ML. ya. but they never left my right side, then on 25 foot clothesline I mean rope you know, I had 2 airdale with the big white mustauch and big white you know, and there's a little dot underneath their eyes, and when the bear would hear the squeak out of that dog, in front of me on the trail, I could see humpity, humpity, humpity I could see that black fur so I said we got a bear in front of us and they, well I'll tell you ooo, they wanted to go faster then what we were doing you know, and they were gunna get that bear

NJ. Airdales, were they harnessed

ML. No, no, no, they were running on this rope, they were 25 feet ahead of me so that way, we could clear ourselves very nicely, then I'd take the gun then, and I'd shoot them. If I thought I was in danger, you know.

NJ. Now what kind of bears did you have to contend with?

ML. ordinary black bears that you got here

NJ. Never grizzley's

ML. uh uh, no, we never did see a brown bear, although there are brown bears in Alaska. But we never, no, we had the black ones. and they go humpty,

NJ. I know there are grizzley's in the Talchitna area

ML. Oh ya,

NJ. there are grizzley's around

ML. Oh yes, I didn't see them

NJ. You just fortunately didn't encounter any

ML. No and when we come to a turn in the road there, on our trail, and there was a slough down there waters up and if the bear was ahead of us, and and and that there squeak out of those airdales dogs, they couldn't stand any more of it, they went down the bluff there and rolled themselves into that mud.

NJ. they'd roll down to that lake

ML. They'd roll down to that water and muck and mud and there down there they'd give him a look just as to say none of your business

NJ. What time of year would this be

ML. Oh this starts the minute it freezes up and the snows start to fly. ya know, and of course that varies it all depends what, what time, sometime it starts a little early and sometimes a little later ya know, but we have to get the snow in order to go on the roads.

NJ. How about bears going into hibernation. they would go into hibernation for part of the winter

ML. well, oh they had their own and it usually was over by the mountains see, where they are away from everybody they they, we are in the clear, noone is going to touch us here. You could just see it on them that they had it all figured out that you can't make it up there anyway, see, seeing you couldn't make it up there why were perfectly safe, that's were going to hibernate

NJ. Uh, I see, on the hillside?

ML. Uh huh.

NJ. and they start coming out of hibernation in the spring,

ML. In the spring, when it gets a little bit of rain and the snow starts to get soft which we could get out of there and then I said greetings, we gonna have some company now. the airdale dogs knew we would, he was looking for him all the time.

NJ. The airdales, they were a bear dog, weren't they?

ML. Oh, airdale next to a bear, can't stand the squeak out of him.

NJ. By golly, I never knew that, I hadn't heard that

ML. And they're such a homley thing, they got a great big white moustache like that and then over the eye all you can see is a black dot, that's the eye.

NJ. What kind of dog did you have to pull the, pull the sled?

ML. well, now I couldn't tell you

NJ. were they Husky type dogs?

ML. yup, they were huskys, no small dog in the bunch, no, no-no they were sure a nice team, they seemed to take the same drag of everything

NJ. They pulled equally, they were matched for pace

ML. Yes. that's right, and when I say, alright, lets go, that's all I'd say

NJ. How did you get your dogs?

ML. Oh, there was some fellows from the Interior they come down, they had a bunch of dogs and uh, they said, say you ought to have dogs, and I said yes I want some dogs, I said Uncle Sam wants me to do something about these mail boxes they want to put on the trees, and uh, we will fix you with the dogs and they give

me the nice species of mothers that they had there and you know all I said to them, they never, never went against what I had to say, When I said stop, or lets go that was all I said, but I said all right, down and they all flopped down and looked out the corner of their eyes

NJ. they were already trained when you got them?

ML. No, I trained them when they were pups

NJ. You got them as pups?

ML. Uh-huh, and a, but they were that type of a dog that was easily trained seem like they just lived for that training and, so then, and my husband of course, he cooked, he had a pan about so square, bread pan and it cooked fudge candy and he cut little thin strips, just enough so that, mm oh that sweet, and you know the first time he did that why he, I said alright let us go, and I had to take the harness off and everything off before we go over this little foot bridge cause of the pools, everything would go in the water and so he had this and he the first candy he said alright down, and they all layed down and look at the corner of the eye, he go over their and give one to each of them a taste of em. It wasn't enough, they like to have had some more and so they started ooh, ooh. Oh whats the matter? So he said, "alright, alright", he said "lay down and keep quiet" and he would give them a little bit bigger piece of candy, fudge see. He'd give each one, "Mm I could take the third shot, but I don't suppose he'll give it to me", so he said "alright" and he'd cook dinner for them you know. His pots were all filled with fresh, each had their own pots you know, there was fresh food for them

to eat everytime they come. And so then he, we come to the bridge, they lay down so I could take the harness off and take the mail bags, that was fastened to the harness, took that off and then I took their harness off put that on the sled, then when I did that I said "alright now you go" so dad would say "alright let us go". Oh I tell you, you couldn't reach then with a ten foot pole the way they shot across that bridge and up they went and then they sit down "whipping" oh they had so much trouble. And he "alright, alright", he said "now lay down lay down now then I'll give you some more" then you get one more piece and well he said that, thats all you're gonna get, cause we gotta eat.

NJ He'd play with them with that chocolate fudge?

ML Oh yes, and so alright, they knew what he said, he said no, no more. And so then they got up on their feet and they would come walking like little soldiers on each side of him, walk down to the dog house and each one, they knew their place, they never, I'll take any of them, no sir, this is yours and this is yours and this is yours, he trained em so that, this is your food.

NJ- Each dog went to his own bowl?

ML- Ah you bettcha they never went to the other fella's bucket.

NJ- That was a big help to you?

ML- Oh yeah wonderful help, and you know, when two o'clock come in the morning, they'd had their candy and everything, but they didn't want to leave the door, without him give em a little nibble of chocolate fudge.

NJ- Is that right?

ML- Yeah, just a thin little slice, just enough so it was a taste you know.

NJ- Just that little bit of sugar isn't that amazing?

ML- Yeah.

NJ- I never heard of a dog musher who fed their dogs chocolate fudge before, those were pretty spoiled dogs.

ML- Yeah, but they were so nice and he never had to talk to them twice, you sit down, no sir he says " alright down ", legs went under, down they went, but they had one eye, just one eye that they looked to you know, foxie see. And he get such a bang out of it, it really kept him alive that much longer, just by, of course he couldn't work you know, he couldn't work like I did. And so but that there was something I didn't have to do it and it was kind of a oh...

NJ- Take a little bit of the load off of your shoulders and keep your dogs happy?

ML- Yeah, and then he get such a bang out of it you know, he says " Can you beat that" and I look at em, can you beat that? And they'd sit there. When Dad and I would be talking, they'd never, they'd get every word of that.

NJ- They wouldn't miss a word.

ML- They had to get everything.

NJ- Tell me did you ever have any actual problems in delivering, in making this daily run?

ML- No. The only, only trouble I ever had was, it was one day there, it had been storming all night long and she was cold, she was 60 below zero, down by the creek. And so, oh Dad worried so about me going, you know, he says you dress for it to, he said, so alright. I, I oh, started out but I got up, when I got about two miles away from home we was up on this bluff here you know, we were going to start to go down to the flats now you know, where the post office is and what have you way down there. And

in that opening you see this, it was just open, just like here you know no protection at all from woods or anything else.

NJ- The wind had a long reach.

ML- Oh you're not a kiddin'. So see I got dead flesh up to my elbows out and up to my knees. That's why I got those big rubber shoes.

NJ- Your tennis shoes?

ML- Yeah, I got to have them, they're double, double rubber for to try and get the bottom skin to stay on, it be alright you know, until it was like your skin should be but the worst part of it all is, it doesn't take much before right around the toe nails and the other toes, it starts to peel and the bottom sole comes right off.

NJ- You mean on that one day you got frozen ?

ML- Uhmm.

NJ- What were you wearing?

ML- Shoe packs.

NJ- Did you have a fur parkée?

ML- Yeah. So, my foot gear was good because I had mens socks, you know went up to here you know, in those. And but I frozen so that the doctor, army doctor he was the one that said well I'll be, oh they said it was 65 below zero and its a 60 mile wind.

NJ- Oh my lord, that was so a 120 below or something in that effective temperature. When you go down to Knik station...

ML- Then I got down to the, so that I could see the flats now where the Post Office and that was down there. Then, the army doctor says.

NJ- There was a doctor there was there?

ML- Oh yes the army doctors, they were there they had a lot of soldiers there to you know.

NJ- There was an army post there a Knik at that time?

ML- Yeah, and so he said he told the deputy marshall go get her he says if shes coming we gotta see what condition she's in. And you know when we got out when I was on top of the hill, I thought, oh if I only could get down this hill now, down on the flat I'll be alright. But I didn't realize I was froze stiff as a board up to here and to here.

NJ- To your knees and your elbows.

ML- Yeah. And so then when we come down there.

NJ- Were you running on the runners?

ML- One foot, but the biggest portion of the time I run. And of course I could give them more push by running. And, so then he said to the deputy marshall "You take over her old rig and all of that and sort out her mail and everything and I'll take her in here. And he put my feet and my arms together, like that, and he had a, you know those old fashioned wash tubs that you wash clothes in? And one of those with the old fashioned wringer to wring out your clothes out of this hot water? And he had this boiling hot water, he had a little electric stove underneath and had bath towels and he would wring em out and slap me. And that brought, they would turn fiery red, you know see the blood was thawing out and coming to the surface.

nJ oh my

ML so then after he could feel my bone in there he said, well, slap her another half hour. you don't mind do you. No I said,

if it's gunna do me any good,...

NJ could you feel it?

ML oh yes. I could feel a sting where the bone was, where the marrow was coming to life, see it would just sting you you know, and I let them hit me again, so he hit me with those hot bath towels wouldn't wring them, quite a bit of water left in them. and he just come down and just slap me just as hard as he could then finally when he saw that I got all red, see then the blood had thawed out you see. I wasn't white anymore. I was just as white as the snow to begin with. But it turned red. So he said Ah, we got the upper hand on the frost anyway. See. So that's how they thawed me out, the army doctor did that. And my husband was home, he was a nervous wreck, he went out and looked at the thermometer, you know, and he saw what it was, 65 below, and he didn't know what to do, so he dressed himself in fur coat, and boggles and all and went over to the neighbor there and they said, "don't worry about her, she has a mind of her own, don't worry about her. Shell be alright, shell be alright. So he said I'll tell you what I'll take you home you have a good hot soup for her or something like that he said, she needs that after this you know, so he said well I'm gunna go home and he said alright so he took him home see, he had one dog and a small sled, and he put him on there and wrapped him up in a big fur robe, and he took him up to the house, and he saw that the fire was good in the house and fair enough, he had the dinner cooked you know, when I come back home. And he said, "did you have any trouble, did you have any..." and I says, "no, no. I didn't have

no trouble. but see that Freddy Hoffman you know and the Marshall he had to come up there to check on me again, you know, cause it was government you see, so he came up there to see if I got home all right and if I felt alright and if not, why they'd take and put me in a hospital somewhere you know. And so course he tells Dad the whole story. He said, "you wouldn't tell me that would you," and I said, "why should I tell you that daddy, no," I said, "you got troubles of your own", I said, "you take care of yours," I said, "and I'll take care of mine." And he says, "I know, I know." He says, "that's fair enough." See, you even got to trick knee.

NJ You got one of those elastic bandages on it

ML ya.

NJ So gosh, you uh had to put up with the problems of ah, the skin sloughing from the frozen legs?

ML I sure did, but I by golly next day, I was on the route again.

NJ is that right?

ML you bet your life

NJ my gosh

ML because I made up my mind that if I run in action that's the best thing in the world for the flesh.

NJ Well, that is true

ML because you let it lay dormant, and it'll harden like a rock, so I said 'NO.'

NJ How long were you there at the hospital before it thawed you out?

ML oh, just a day, that was early morning you know, I started

from home at 3 o'clock

NJ Ya

ML they look at it you know, and the doctor there and deputy Marshall got together and they said, the deputy Marshall they called me the crazy kid, they said I wonder if that crazy kid is on the road. He said, what do you think about us kinda being on the lookout, and he said, I'm gonna keep the hot water in case she's too cold when she comes in.

NJ He was ready for you,

ML oh, he was ready for me, he had it all fixed. Then he said, you go and get the crazy kid. So the assistant and 2 other men at the depot, they went to work and we got to men there and I think that will be just the thing he says, and they was on each side of me those fellows and had me by the arm here and uh, we run, see.

NJ They ran you into your hot towel?

ML Ya, they run me right down there to the hot towel down below

NJ [laughs]

ML they ran 2 miles and a half out when they come out and got me

NJ is that right?

ML yah

NJ they ran in with you that 2 and a half miles?

ML yup, they did

NJ well, I'll bet that took an awful lot of nerve for you once you got thawed out to turn around and mush back home again.

ML Well, but what do you do?

NJ Well, you could have stayed there until it warmed up. A lot

of people would have done that. They would hold up there until it warmed up.

ML Well, I didn't. I was right back on the run.

NJ That night, that afternoon?

ML Yes

NJ You mushed home

ML I mushed home, but the deputy marshall said, we're gonna follow that crazy kid, so they rode horse-back, they had horses you know from that road commission, and they rode horse-back, and they had me ahead of them. I thought I heard thunk thunk, I'm pretty sure I heard horses running, but I can't see them.

NJ Well, there out there running along after you at 65 below, it is still 65 below?

ML Ya

NJ They rode horse-back

ML Ya, they rode horse-back.

NJ And the wind is still blowing

ML The wind was still blowing. And I could feel it blowing through the woods.

NJ Good grief, and now how far was it from 4 corners

ML That's uh 5 miles straight

NJ So you made a round trip of 10 miles

ML 10 miles on the run and I had to make that 10 miles and I wasn't through then, then I had that other- when I got everything fixed up here now, then I had to take that other run again, which would give me an extra 5 miles.

NJ Oh, what was the other run then,

ML Well, I had to pick up some mail.

NJ I see

ML So I uh, I was running of course the people like to see their mail go out and they like to get their mail too, so I thought, well, that's the least we can do for them, ya know, ya...

NJ Ya, the American mail system is really a remarkable thing, the loyalty people have to getting that mail through...

ML Oh yes, and, ya know, I'll tell you what, there is so many things that would happen to you, me and everybody else something that we should know, and how are we going to find out and how are we gonna get it around to the rest of the folks that's way out? That's what people gotta stop to figure on too. Ya know. That's the least that you can do for your human race, is to try your best to help them.

NJ To keep in touch with one another in your case

ML Yup, that's right

NJ How many people did you have to deliver to?

ML Oh golly, I couldn't tell you that,

NJ Hi, that 5 miles down

ML I had plenty, I had uh (laughs)

NJ Twenty or thirty or something like that?

ML Something like that. The boxes were nailed on the trees you know.

NJ Well, who delivered the mail before you got there?

ML Nobody.

NJ Well how did they get their mail?

ML They had to go to Knik.

NJ I see.

ML They were good to me, they razzled me so much you know,

NJ They razzled you?

ML Oh ya,

NJ That crazy kid?

ML yup, like crazy kid. Oh they never got over that, the deputy marshall called me the crazy kid. They got the biggest bang out of that, you know.

NJ Do you remember when that was that you made that run that you got frozen? What year it was, roughly?

ML Well, that was in, let me see now (long pause) ... 1910. I could be mistaken at that.

NJ Ya

ML But oh, that was an awful year.

NJ What else happened that year?

ML Oh there was plenty of it, my there was so many old timers froze to death, and it was just horrid.

NJ One of those extremely cold winters?

ML Oh that winter was... I'll tell you right now, it was just like when you stuck your nose out the door it was like someone goes with a knife, just like that you know. Like on your face, I never felt anything like it. Minnisotâ was bad, but it couldn't beat that. No. That was hard.

NJ The inlet here, the moisture, it can really get cold. 65 below in Fairbanks, it's pretty bad to, but, anywhere 65 below is rough.

ML You bet your life.

NJ What have you got there?

ML You'll be surprised.

NJ Post cards, pictures, a little book

ML A little keepsake

NJ Oh, a picture. Oh isn't that lovely!!

that's you and your husband

ML Yup,

NJ That's the crazy kid, a beautiful woman.

ML Ya,

NJ That is nice

ML That was the crazy kid

NJ Oval faced, like me, the doctor told me the other day, well I see you're fighting the battle of the bulge, and you haven't won any major battles lately, you know, and well, anyway, that's nice.

ML. That's sneak. A sneak picture, you know how they sit there with that darn camera in their hand and they get you dot dot dot dot talking and you listen, and...

NJ Were you Norweigen?

ML Ya, I'm a Norweigen, I can talk Norweigen fluently.

NJ Your a wiking

ML A viking

NJ A viking. That is lovely.

ML That's a sneak, sneak picture you know. The party had this camera and he snapped it and then he, I was fixed up all ready for to go to that party, a big dance, ya.

NJ By golly, your wearing the red poppys, and yet they look like they were taken on 2 different days. They were taken on the same day, though?

ML Ya, that's right.

NJ With your white curly hair, when you were young here in this picture, as a girl I can't think what movie star it is but, you kind of remind me of a...

ML I was 17 years old in that picture

NJ That was in Minisota then?

ML Yah

NJ Was that your husband in the picture?

ML yes, my dear dad, my dear husband. This was taken on our travelings.

NJ When did you get married?

ML We got married back down home, ya know, and then started for Alaska.

NJ You started for Alaska right after you were married.

ML Ya, well, we had to go the next day.

NJ You did?

ML Ya

NJ How did you decide to set off so quickly?

ML Because he had to get back.

NJ Was he in the Army up here?

ML Ya, he was in the army.

NJ Up here?

ML Ya, he was still hooked up with them, but this trouble of his injury and all, he had to be on deck.

NJ I thought he had been discharged.

ML Well, he was discharged to a certain extent, but the army, they say what can we do for his health. Ya

NJ Tell me something, when you ran the dogs in the summer, when you packed the mail in the summer, how did you carry it?

ML In the summer?

NJ uh huh

ML Well, on the packsack.

NJ on your back

ML sure, and a pack on the dogs too.

NJ You used the dogs

ML Ya, I had dogs, and I'm a dog too. I had One pack on my back and a pack on the dogs. I made them out of canvas. Canvas bag, you know, and a strap ya, they march right alongside of me, I had them hooked to my belt so we went, trip trip trip trip trip trip, we were running.

NJ You jogged?

ML yeah

NJ you ran?

ML I ran, We had to, the dogs, they will run, they don't want to walk.

NJ My word, what tramendus physical shape you must have been in

to do that every day.

ML Why sure, and everybody said. I had one fellow, he's a lawyer, and he met me when I came home, well in fact, he knew me when I was a kid, and he was touring Alaska and ah, he met me down in Knik, down there for a party, and so here he was, sitting in the lobby and he said, well, crimminy sake, look at this and my husband looks at me funny you know, why would he say it that way for, there's nothing wrong with me. He didn't think there was anything wrong with me, what was wrong, so then he said you know he said, I knew her when she was home living with her folks, and I remember to, you got married when you were just a kid, didn't you? Well sure, I said, what's wrong about that, I says, I got a wonderful home, what more do I want, you know, my husband, he said now it's catching up with you, from where you started out, from Clarissa Minnosota,

NJ From where

ML Clarissa, c-l-a-r-r-i-s-s-a

NJ Clarissa,

ML ya, that was it.

NJ What was your house like that you built there? How did you build your house.

ML Oh it was a beautiful log cabin

NJ You did

ML Yes, but first one was an old room cabin, see, so we had something to live in and tools to work with that you know and uh, and of course, he could be out of the cold, and work inside too, so that was the was we lived there. Then he built the big nice house, and uh, we had a beautiful cabin, my boys, they got a

enlarged picture of it, the cabin.

NJ How many children did you have?

ML 2 boys, that's all

NJ and they are...

ML Right here, my youngest one, he's um, I'll tell you what he does.

NJ Now you were running the mail about the time they were born?

ML Oh, yeah

NJ Now how can you possibly take time off from the running the mail to have a baby?

ML Oh, that's easy,

NJ You just stop on the side of the trail I bet.

ML Why sure, No, my youngest son, he is isn't this awful? I can't even tell you what my son is doing now, he has a business of his own.

NJ Here in the Palmer area?

ML In the palmer area

NJ So they were probably born around 1920, weren't they?

ML Something like that. You know, those boys have been so good to me

NJ What was that story you started to tell me earlier, something about the mouny with you, going up the hill? There was a policeman with you and you were going up the hill? Out in the hallway, you said should you tell me the story about when the policeman or the marshall was with you? policeman was with you?

ML Oh ya, sure, When he come over to get the crazy kid

NJ Oh, I didn't know about that, what was that?

ML Well I told you.

NJ You mean when you were frozen?

ML Ya, oh ya

NJ oh ya

ML Well, I was crazy before that

NJ Oh, you were?

ML Yes there was time and time again, he said, oh look at that cloud, ooh

NJ Oh?

ML I'll bet shell be riding the road, same old story, he said, she'll stop at nothing, stop at nothing,

NJ come rain or shine, wind or snow

ML Ya, and he says, we gotta go, go and, so here they come, horse back riding

NJ came after you

ML ya

NJ I see what you mean

ML oh they had to check on me. And he says, whats the matter with you crazy kid, did you look at that cloud? He says, you could never buck that storm if it strted over the flats. And I said do you think I look like a sissy, what is the matter with you. and he laughed and then he, his poor little wife, she couldn't, oh she couldnt she said she felt terrible calling me a crazy kid ya know, and the stuff he would say to me you know, and he said you know I should put you in the jail over there, that's the only place for you.

NJ Anybody who would set and run the dogs on a day like this...

ML Ya, he said I ought to put you right in there. and uh, he just did it just for me to get sticking up for my rights. See, I knew. And he poor Florance, he was just standing there

NJ What was his name

ML Hu? Frank Hoffman and Florance, his wife, you can't talk

like that to that poor kid, you just leave that poor kid alone, and he says, Oh, I'm gunna fix her, I'm gunna take and put her right in the jail over there. That's the best place for her, and Frank, don't talk like that to her. No, she defended me you know. And It didn't bother me the least, you know.

NJ Did you go over to Anchorage very often

ML No no we didn't go over to anchorage until we sold our house we were living in and had a little cabin,. And he said, you know what he said, he said, youknow I think we will go to work and get ourselves a home in Anchorage. He said. And of course, he said, I can't farm. No, I know that Dad, and uh, so he got that and we had a nice home in Anchorage.

NJ Oh, you did?

ML Oh yes, that big house is right along where the Elks hall is

NJ overlooking the inlet, to the North,

ML Ya, we had an 8-room house there. And uh, so we well he said that if I don't come back, he wasnt sure when they picked him up and took him to see if they can do something for him, down in Seattle ya know, and uh, said I want you to get rid of all the property, I don't want you to worry about anything like that.

NJ He did?

ML Yup, and so I said alright, and I did just what he said. That's the finest thing I ever did.

NJ Is that right?

ML You bet it was

NJ Well what did you do after that then?

ML Oh I lived in the house, I had a small house, and I had 2 boys. And we had an adopted daughter, she was the oldest. And uh, we had 6 doctors come up to show the Alaskans they didn't know how to care children, and we're gunna give them all this

shots, and show them how those kids have got to be taken care of in Alaska. And you know what they got? When they got through shooting them, full of that junk there, they got wood flesh and that killed them. That killed our daughter, and she was a beautiful piano player, she was 17 years old then, and she played piano, and violin and accordian, and she sang beautifully, and she didn't know she was adopted. The mother called the marshalls to come and get us a 1:00 in the morning because she wanted us to take the baby cause she said she didn't think she would live through. Sure enough, it hadn't been a day since she gave us the baby and she passed away. You know. And uh, so we had her well she was 17 years old when she was killed ya know

NJ When was that

ML Oh boy,

NJ 30's sometime,

ML Ya. so she

NJ How tragic that was

ML And the funny part of it all, was the army had taken dad and had him in this big hospital on the ridge there in Seattle ya know, and there's another one down here that they take children to, so they brought the army, went right up and got her and took her down there and lord help us, he died and she died 3 days later.

NJ Oh my oh what a tragedy

ML ya. So my life hasn't been all peaches and cream

NJ You have the two boys left

ML Yes, I have the two boys and they are very, very good they are both married. My youngest sons wife is the head nurse of

the big hospital

NJ Oh

ML Valley hospital

NJ Oh, here in palmer

ML and then my oldest boy, he is a machanic on electrical appliances and all that kind of stuff. And it doesn't matter, tinkery stuff that maybe break on you ;and he fixes all that, so he is busy, and he is so worried ya know, they like to come and take me out for a ride and they like to be with me for a few minutes a day or something and they can't make it because they are just up to here and my youngest son and his wife have that new tasty freeze on the new highway, that's there tasty freeze

NJ Oh I've seen that tasty freeze

ML Well, that is my youngest son.

NJ Oh my

ML and his wife so I told the boys you've got to live your life and I lived mine.

NJ Well, Mrs. Leckwold, when your husband and your daughter died in Seattle then you were out there in Seattle at that time?

ML No, No, the army give me orders that we are taking all responsability and burying your husband alongside his mother and dad that's buried there. And the daughter next to him.

NJ I see

ML And they stood all the expenses and everything for me, they said that I had enough, see, so they did that for me.

NJ so you stayed up here, and you were living in Anchorage then,

ML Oh yes and so I stayed right, well I'll tell you, I wasn't to

good myself, I had to have a big operation you know.

NJ Well, yes, you were in your 40's then

ML Yes, and uh, so uh, I had this operation to go through, so I just couldn't see it, well the army they were foxy and they knew that I had to go to the hospital for this operation they knew that they found out somehow, so I, well that's what they did for me. they buried my family.

NJ Well, that's a tragedy in your life, but you certainly made a recovery, and you worked after that didn't you?

ML Yes, I worked right to the day,

NJ Where was it you worked?

ML For the Army

NJ In Anchorage?

ML Yes,

NJ What were you doing for the army

ML Golly, I was in the , in the um supply

NJ I see

ML I work, work, work.

NJ You never had a lazy day, and easy day

ML No It's nice to work, because that keeps you going

NJ It keeps you busy, that's true, I suppose it is a little bit difficult for you to um have such a lazy time here

ML You know what? Since I frost my hands, I can't do anything, I can't trust my hands to pick up anything, I won't pick up a thing that might break, you know

NJ How about knitting, crocheting

ML nope, I can't crochet, I can't knit, I can't tat, I can't do a thing,

NJ and by golly that happend, ...

ML and I can't take a needle and thread it and try to sew a tear or a button or something into my clothes. I can't do that. See, so I'm lazy

NJ Well, by golly, that's allright, you've done your share and now it's time for somebody to

ML My boys says mother, don't you talk like that. They tell me

NJ don't talk like how?

ML When I say I am lazy

NJ Oh, your not lazy, your a lady I thought you said I'm a lady

ML yes, I said I'm a lady, but I'm lazy. Mother don't you ever talk like that.

NJ No, no, you're not lazy. Have you been outside at all

ML Oh yes, I went out to see my father before he passed away.

NJ Have you been to any orther parts of Alaska

ML Oh I have been to Fairbanks, Nome, Sitka

NJ Now what took you to Nome, to see it?

ML I was um a candadate

NJ A candadate?

ML A candadate for the convention

NJ Oh, the territorial, the statehood thing?

ML The uh, state conventions, so I uh, I been to all those places

NJ The constitutional convention for Alaska Statehood, were you elected as a delagate?

ML This here is concerning the lodges isn't was it.

NJ No I don't know what your telling me, I don't know about this

ML Ya, ya, through the lodge

NJ Oh, the pioneers?

ML uh, huh

NJ Oh the pioneer convention oh... of course

ML and I have been to Nome 3 times and Petersburg and Fairbanks
3 times

NJ And are you going to go to Sitka in October?

ML I don't know. The boys have begged me not to do any more of
that Mother till your sure of your knee. They said if you should
happen to fall or do something like that, you would have to
suffer that all over again, from what you did before.

NJ What was the first pioneer lodge here in the Matanuska Valley? Which one did you join? Or did you join in Anchorage?

ML No I joined in Matanuska

NJ You joined in Matanuska?

ML Ya oh yes, I'm a 30 year pioneer, I got a 30 year pin from the pioneers

NJ You've been a member 30 years?

ML ya,

NJ by golly,

ML and that there one

ML the ivory ring? I was admiring the ivory ring with the gold nuggets around it that is as pretty an ivory ring as I have ever seen

ML The, that there was given to me when I was froze

NJ oh really? By whom

ML By an organization

NJ Oh really?

ML They said I done what I have done and don't realize what I have done

NJ When did they give that to you, at that time?

ML At that time when I got back out of the hospital

NJ Well, when were you in the hospital

ML Well I was in the hospital and had that big operation ya know, I had and uh, then I came out and that operation I had that before daddy passed away.

NJ I see

ML And of course it was from over work and I had lifted to heavy so it was up to me to get myself straightened out

NJ that's a problem, women do lift, well, that's a wonderful story, I have just enjoyed hearing of your wonderful life, and the things you have done.

ML I'll tell you, I haven't got a thing to be ashamed of

NJ I guess not, no and you said the army had written a book about you

ML Uncle Sam, in Washington DC

NJ Well, what's the name of the book

ML I don't know

NJ you don't know, don't you have a copy of it?

ML They were supposed to send me a copy but I'll tell you what it was, when I hadn't been here, we hadn't been in the valley, we didn't even have a decent cabin built yet and here comes a man and he says, by the way, he says, is your name Matty Leckweld? Yes sir, I said that's my name and he said your the party I want to see. Oh is that right? Well, what did you want to find out about? And he says, oh, I just want to tell you something, you know he says, were gunna have mail all through Alaska now, all through the railroad, on the railroads and on the highways and everything like that, so they said they wanted me to be on the lookout for the mail. Then, oh ya, then they wanted to know about, they said they heard I'd been driving dogs, I said sure dogs, we didn't have no horses. We didn't have anything else but dogs. Well they wrote, well, he sat there with the little

NJ Notebook

ML No, he snapped a picture of me

NJ oh he had a camera

ML Yes, of course, that old flat thing, I always look at their

hands and they laugh at me you know, and so he was sitting there playing possom and he took his, and he said, alright, if you don't mind, you might see your name in a book, and if you don't mind says,