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"Early Day Alaskans"  
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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  
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## INTRODUCTION

Narrator: Mattie Gilbertson Leckwold (ML)  
Interviewer: Neville Jacobs (NJ)  
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Interview location: Palmer Pioneer Home  
Transcribers: Ginger Polon and Cynthia Simpson  
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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.

NJ: 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: ~~At~~ Clarissa,  
^ Minnesota

NJ: In Minnesota in what, 1890?

ML: Uh huh.

NJ: And you came here right after, when was it, 1912, 1914?

ML: 1916

NJ: 1916. With your husband?

ML: Yeah

NJ: And ~~oh~~ how did you come here?

ML: Walk.

NJ: Oh you didn't, now you didn't walk all the way from Minnesota

ML: ~~(laughs)~~ No, no. You come on the boat, <sup>you know,</sup> you come on the train

first from Minnesota 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 ~~the~~ 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? ~~uh?~~

ML: Uh huh.

NJ: Well then how'd you get from Anchorage across the inlet?

ML: Across the inlet? Well we came up on that small train, you know

NJ: I didn't know there were any trains here then,

ML: Yes, just a freight train box car that would get you there, <sup>see.</sup> ~~And~~ then we got to to the junction there, <sup>N</sup> or down there to the ~~junction~~ ~~there~~ then we had to get off there and then we had to walk 39 miles to get to the ~~junction~~ ~~there~~ 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: Yeah, 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: Yeah, and he come over from over seas, and of course, he was



and so I did. ~~And~~ 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, <sup>to you know</sup> buy he says, "You know what is wrong with you?" and I says, "Oh, I guess I'm tired." and he says "You're <sup>tired? He says are you sure?</sup> ~~sure?~~" ~~and~~ ~~uh~~ And I said, "Yeah I'm pretty sure, I said shorten the road a little bit and that will help me a lot, <sup>but</sup> ~~but~~ ~~don't give me~~ ~~no~~ difficulty." <sup>And</sup> ~~uh~~ <sup>so then,</sup> 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 <sup>was</sup> ~~were~~ a women," <sup>but</sup> he said, "You thought you we a horse." And he said, "You did work for a horse all this time," he <sup>say</sup> ~~said~~, what do you expect to be? <sup>It's a wonder</sup> 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~~ ~~look~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~clock~~ Day in day out?

ML: ~~Um~~ ~~had~~ ~~ya~~ Oh yes, the dogs say oooooooh at 2 O'clock in the morning that meant you get up and <sup>give me</sup> ~~get~~ someting to eat and then after after I've had something to eat, then we have to be on the road at 3 O'clock.

NJ: you would start out at 3 in the morning?

ML: ~~yup~~ Yeah.

NJ: To go 10 miles?

ML: Yeah.

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~~ <sup>usually get</sup> that <sup>be</sup> cause I...

NJ: Now is that on the Glenn Highway?

ML: No, no that's where the railroad runs <sup>up to</sup> ~~through~~.

NJ: where the railroad goes through, like Wasilla?

ML: <sup>well it</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>up</sup> ~~there~~, come to Wasilla and then down, down to the other station there, and ~~is~~.

NJ: ~~and~~ Willow, well Willow is up the line?

ML: No, Willow is up.

NJ: <sup>Now</sup> ~~well~~ this is down toward the river, in other words, the station at Knik

ML: <sup>yeah,</sup> that's right, <sup>and,</sup> <sup>so</sup> anyway, I ~~am~~ then when I made that, I knew his condition, you know ~~and~~ I thought, I'm gonna get home and help him ~~x~~ as much as possible with what he's got in mind to do, ~~and~~ <sup>so</sup> I always managed to get home by 4 o'clock in the

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

ML: <sup>Three in the morning, two</sup> ~~7~~ in the morning, ~~because~~ I had to feed the dogs first.

NJ: <sup>So</sup> 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: <sup>yeah,</sup> yes, that's right, that's what I did. <sup>And</sup> he felt terrible about it, <sup>but</sup> 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 <sup>yeah</sup> 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), ~~and... you'd get it.~~

NJ: It was free running?

ML: ~~yeah~~ <sup>yeah</sup> ~~but~~ <sup>he</sup> they never left my right side. Then on 25 foot clothesline I ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> rope, you know, I had 2 airdales with the big white ~~mustache~~ <sup>che</sup> 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 than what we were doing, you know, and they were gonna get that bear.

NJ: Airdales, were they harnessed?

ML: No, no, no, they were running on this rope, they were 25

~~feet~~ <sup>on 25 foot rope</sup> ~~feet~~ <sup>on that rope, you see we</sup> ~~feet~~ <sup>cause</sup> ~~feet~~ <sup>him.</sup> ~~feet~~ <sup>But I</sup> ~~feet~~ <sup>thought I was in danger, you know.</sup>

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

ML: Ordinary black bears that you got here,

NJ: ~~Never~~ <sup>you don't have any</sup> grizzly's?

ML: ~~uh uh~~ <sup>No</sup>, ~~we~~ <sup>no</sup> we never did see a brown ~~ie~~ <sup>is</sup> bear, although there ~~are~~ <sup>'es</sup> brown bears in Alaska. But we never, no, we had the black ones. and they go humpity.

NJ: I know there are grizzly's in the ~~Talchitna~~ <sup>Talkeetna</sup> area

ML: Oh yeah.

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~~ 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 <sup>down to</sup> ~~into~~ that mud.

NJ: They'd roll down to that lake?

ML: They'd roll down to that water and muck and mud. ~~And~~ ~~They~~ <sup>were</sup> 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. <sup>You know,</sup> ~~And~~ of course that varies it all depends what, what time. <sup>Sometime</sup> it starts a little early and sometimes a little later, <sup>you know.</sup> But we have to get the snow in order to go road.

NJ: How about bears going into <sup>hibernation.</sup> ~~hibernation.~~ They would go into <sup>ernation</sup> ~~hibernation~~ for part of the winter?

ML: Well, oh they had their own and it usually was over by the mountains see. <sup>Where</sup> they <sup>are</sup> ~~were~~ away from everybody <sup>where</sup> they, we are in the clear, <sup>nobody's</sup> ~~no one 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. <sup>Seeing</sup> you couldn't make it up there why were perfectly safe, <sup>there's</sup> ~~that's~~ <sup>were</sup> going to <sup>ernate</sup> ~~hibernate~~

NJ: <sup>uh. huh.</sup> ~~uh.~~ I see, on the hillside?

~~ML: Oh 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~~ <sup>it</sup> gets soft which we could get out of there, And then I said, "Greetings, we <sup>we</sup> gunna 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~~ <sup>(unclear) the</sup> to > bear, can't stand the squeak out of him.

NJ: By golly, I never knew that, I hadn't heard that <sup>before</sup>.

ML: And they're such a homely thing. They got a great big white mustache, 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 <sup>that</sup> I couldn't tell you,

NJ: Were they Husky type dogs?

ML: Yeah, they were huskys, no small dog in the bunch, no, no, no they were some nice team. They seemed to take the sledging of

NJ: They pulled ~~equally~~ <sup>easily</sup>, they were matched for pace.

ML: Yes. that's right, and when I say, "Alright, let <sup>us</sup> 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 ~~so~~ <sup>so</sup> 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, <sup>that</sup> they want to put on the trees," And uh, we will fix you with the dogs and they give

me <sup>all</sup> 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, <sup>"Alright"</sup> ~~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~~ 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, mmm 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, <sup>otherwise</sup> everything would go in the water. ~~And~~ so he had this and he the first candy he said, "A", "down," and they all flopped down and looked out the corner of their eye, he go over their and give one to each of them a taste of ~~them~~ <sup>them</sup>. 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 "whinning" 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's, that's 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, ~~the dog house~~ if the dog house, this is yours and this is yours and this is yours, he trained <sup>em</sup> 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 <sup>em</sup>, 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, *They'd sit there very alert.*

ML: You had to get everything.

NJ: Will you ever have any more problems in <sup>not</sup> delivering the but 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.

*You had shoe packs.*

ML: Yeah. So, my foot gear was good because I had men's 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 got 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 <sup>riding</sup> ~~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 town. And I put my feet and my arms together, I do that, and he he, you know those old fashioned wash tubs that you put 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 ~~drains~~ wring 'em out and slap me. And that brought, <sup>that</sup> ~~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 <sup>he noticed that he</sup> 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 gonna do me any good,...

NJ: Could you feel it?

ML: Oh yes. I could feel a sting where the bone was, where the ~~nerve~~ <sup>nerve</sup> was coming to life, see, It would just sting ~~you~~ you know, but I said, "Oh that's nothing" ~~and so 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 ~~slap~~ 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. It 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, 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 goggles and all and went over to the neighbor there and they said, "Don't worry, ~~he said,~~ "She's got mind of her own, don't worry about her," ~~well,~~ <sup>well,</sup> ~~she's~~ <sup>she's</sup> alright ~~she's~~ <sup>she's</sup> 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 that," you know. So he said, "Well I'm gonna 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." <sup>And so</sup> ~~but see~~ that <sup>Frank</sup> Freddy Hoffman, you know ~~and~~ the deputy 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," <sup>and</sup> 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 <sup>a</sup> ~~to~~ trick knee.

NJ: You got one of those elastic bandages on it

ML: Yeah.

NJ: So gosh, <sup>and</sup> you ~~uh~~ had to put up with the problems of ~~it~~, the skin <sup>uff</sup> ~~sloughing~~ from the frozen legs?

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

NJ: Is that so?

ML: Yeah, but you see.

NJ: My gosh.

ML: ~~Best~~ Because I made up my mind that if I run in action that's the finest thing in the world for the flesh.

NJ: Well, that's ~~so~~ true.

ML: ~~Because~~ 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, <sup>in</sup> ~~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: Yeah.

ML: they look<sup>ed</sup> at it, you know, and the doctor ~~there~~ and deputy Marshall <sup>there</sup> 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 <sup>him and</sup> the assistant and 2 other men at the depot, they went ~~to~~ work <sup>ing too, he said, "I</sup> and ~~we~~ got to men there and I think ~~that~~ 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 ~~it~~, we run, see.

NJ: They ran you into your hot towel?

ML: <sup>yeah,</sup> they ran me right down <sup>then</sup> to the hot towel down below.

ML: They <sup>come two</sup> ran ~~an~~ miles and a half out when they come out and get me

NJ: Is that right? They ran in with you, that <sup>two</sup> and a half miles?

ML: ~~Yeah~~

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

ML: ~~Yeah~~ they did,

NJ: Well, I'll <sup>think</sup> ~~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 <sup>2</sup> up. A lot

of people would ~~have done~~ <sup>do</sup> that, <sup>you know</sup> 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 horseback. They had horses you know from that road commission. And they rode horseback, 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: Yeah.

NJ: They rode horseback

ML: Yeah, they rode horseback.

NJ: And the wind is still blowing?

ML: The wind was still blowing.

I was going (unclear) for selection  
up through the woods.

NJ: Good grief, and now how far was it from 4 corners down to the station?

ML: That's ~~uh~~ 5 miles straight.

NJ: So you made a round trip of 10 miles on this run.

ML: 10 miles on the run. And I had to make that 10 miles ~~and~~ <sup>then</sup> 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~~ <sup>another</sup> 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, you know. Yeah.

NJ: Yeah, the American mail system is really a remarkable thing, the loyalty <sup>that</sup> people have to getting that mail through. —

ML: Oh yes. And, you 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, You 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: ~~Yes,~~ that's right.

NJ: How many people did you have to deliver to?

ML: Oh golly. I couldn't tell you that.

NJ: IM I like like down.

ML: I had plenty. I had ~~up~~ (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: That's along way temporarily. No, I got no kick coming

~~They~~ they were good to me, <sup>but harassed</sup> they ~~harassed~~ me so much, you know.

NJ: They <sup>harassed</sup> ~~harassed~~ you?

ML: Oh yeah.

NJ: That crazy kid?

ML: <sup>Oh, that</sup> ~~yeah, the~~ 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 <sup>(long pause)</sup> ... 1910. I could be mistaken at that.

NJ: Yeah?

ML: But oh, that was an awful year.

NJ: What else happened that year?

ML: Oh there was plenty of it. <sup>My</sup> there was so many old timers froze to death, <sup>you know</sup> 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 that. You stick your head out in. When it was like someone goes with a knife, just like that <sup>right in</sup> ~~you know~~ ~~like~~ on your face. I never felt anything like it. Minnesota was bad, but it couldn't beat that. No. That was <sup>out,</sup> ~~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: Yeah.

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

ML: Yeah.

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.~~ *And he hadn't won any major engagements lately. 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" talking and you listen, and...

NJ: Were you Norweigen?

ML: Yeah. I'm a Norweigen. I can talk Norweigen fluently.

NJ: Your a wiking

ML: A viking

NJ: A viking. That is lovely. And this one here is in the Pioneer home?

ML: That's a sneak, sneak picture <sup>too,</sup> 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, yeah.

NJ: By golly, your wearing <sup>those</sup> the red poppies <sup>ies</sup> and yet they look like they were taken on 2 different days. They were taken on the same day, though?

ML: Yeah, that's right.

NJ: With your white curly hair, <sup>you know,</sup> 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: <sup>Seventeen in that picture,</sup> That was in Minisota then?

ML: Yeah. They were snapped...

NJ: Was that your husband in the picture?

ML: Yes, <sup>my dear that was</sup> ~~my dear~~ my dear husband. This was taken on our <sup>wedding.</sup> ~~wedding.~~ He said....

Oh I see.

NJ: When did you get married?

ML: We got married ~~back~~ down home, <sup>you know,</sup> and then started for Alaska.

NJ: You started for Alaska right after you were married?

ML: Yeah, well, we had to go the next day.

NJ: You did?

ML: Yeah

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: *Yeah,* he was in the army.

NJ: Up here?

ML: *Yeah,* 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 *felt, we* ~~they~~ *got to see* what can we do for his health. *Yeah.*

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: *Yeah* I had dogs, and I'm a dog too. I had one pack on my back and a pack on the dogs. I made you out of canvas. I had a strap, *Yeah* 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, *when you get with* the dogs, they ~~will~~ *ill* run, they don't want to walk.

NJ: My word, what tremendous *really good* physical shape you ~~must have been~~ *were* 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, <sup>then</sup> he was touring Alaska and <sup>so</sup> he met me down in Knik, down there for a party. ~~But~~ <sup>So</sup> here he was, sitting in the lobby and he said, "Well, <sup>for cry many</sup> ~~criminy~~ 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 too, 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. <sup>My</sup> husband, he said, "Now it's catching up with you, from where you started out, from Clarissa Minnosota,"

NJ: From where?

ML: Clarissa, cl-a-r-i-s-s-a

NJ: Clarissa.

ML: <sup>Yeah, Clarissa</sup>

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

ML: Oh <sup>we had</sup> ~~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 <sup>the way</sup> ~~was the way~~ we lived there <sup>in the cabin.</sup> Then he built the big nice house. And <sup>SP</sup> ~~we~~ we had a beautiful cabin, <sup>My</sup> boys, they got a

enlarged picture of it, the cabin.

NJ: How many children ~~are~~ <sup>do</sup> you have?

ML: <sup>Two</sup> 2 boys, that's all.

NJ: ~~And~~ they are...

ML: ~~Right here,~~ <sup>They're</sup> ~~my~~ youngest one, he's um, I'll tell you what he does. <sup>Wait a minute now, I'll tell you what he does. Well isn't that</sup> ~~well~~ <sup>awful.</sup>

NJ: <sup>Well,</sup> ~~How~~ 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 <sup>or in Anchorage?</sup>

ML: In the <sup>Palmer</sup> area

NJ: ~~So~~ they were <sup>about</sup> ~~born~~ <sup>born</sup> ~~around~~ <sup>around</sup> 1920, ~~weren't they?~~

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

NJ: What was that story you started to tell me earlier, something about the moun~~ty~~ 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 <sup>yes,</sup> 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~~ yeah

NJ: Oh yeah

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, oh~~ cloud ooo,"

~~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~~ <sup>yeah</sup> and he says, we gotta go, go and ~~go~~ <sup>see</sup> here they come, horse back riding

NJ: Came after you.

~~ML: ya~~

NJ: I see what you mean.

ML: ~~Always~~ <sup>Always</sup> they had to check on her. And he says, "Whats the matter

D.S. { when you crazy kid, did you look at that cloud?" He says, "You could never buck that storm if it stried 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, ~~you know~~ <sup>what</sup> and the stuff he would say to me, you know, and he said, ~~you know~~ <sup>what</sup> I should put you in the jail over there," ~~that's~~ <sup>He says,</sup> "That's the only place for you."

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

ML: ~~Ya~~ <sup>yeah</sup> he said, "I ought to put you right in there." And ~~uh~~ he

O.S. { just did it just for me <sup>to get</sup> ~~to get~~ sticking up for my rights. See, I knew. And he, poor Florence, he was just standing there

NJ: What was his name

ML: ~~He?~~ Frank Hoffman and Florence, his wife, <sup>She goes,</sup> "You can't talk

like that to that poor kid, you ~~just~~ leave that poor kid alone."

And he says, "Oh, I'm gonna fix her, <sup>I oughta</sup> ~~I'm gonna~~ take and put her right in the jail over there." <sup>He says,</sup> "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 <sup>A</sup> Anchorage until we sold our house <sup>that</sup> we were living in and had a little cabin. And <sup>so</sup> he said, you know

<sup>he says,</sup> ~~what he said, he said, you know~~ "I think we'll ~~will~~ go to work and get ourselves a home in Anchorage." He said. And of course, he

AS, { said, "I can't farm." No, <sup>I says,</sup> "I know that Dad." <sup>A</sup> And ~~he~~ 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: <sup>eah,</sup> we had an 8-room house there. And uh, so we well he said,

AS, { "That if I don't come back." He wasn't sure when they picked him up and took him to see if they can do something for him, down in Seattle, you know. And ~~he~~ he said, "I want you to get rid of all the property I got. I don't want you to come back and looking like a fool."

NJ: He did?

DS, 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. <sup>And I ~~had~~ <sup>they lived with the</sup> ~~two~~ boys. And we had an adopted daughter, she was the oldest. And ~~uh,~~ we had 6 doctors <sup>that</sup> came up to show the Alaskans they didn't know how to care children. And we're gonna give them all this</sup>

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. *So* 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, *you know.*

NJ: When was that

ML: Oh boy,

NJ: *Thirties* ~~30's~~ sometime?

ML: *Yeah* so she...

NJ: How tragic that was.

ML: *So* the *bad shape* *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: *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. *that's in*

ML: *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: *Yeah* 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 Balmer?

ML: And then my oldest boy, he's a mechanic on electrical appliances and all that kind of stuff. And it doesn't matter, tinkery stuff that maybe break ~~on~~ <sup>for</sup> you, <sup>you know why</sup> and he fixes all that. So he's busy, ~~and he is~~ <sup>so</sup> worried, you 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 the <sup>in</sup> 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:~~ Mrs. Leckwold, when you lived and your daughter lived in Seattle then you were out there in Seattle at that time?

ML: Nope, No, the army give me orders that we are taking all responsibility and burying your husband alongside <sup>of</sup> 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, <sup>so</sup> they did that for me.

NJ: <sup>So</sup> 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~~ <sup>Yeah</sup> And ~~uh~~ so ~~uh~~ I had this operation to go through <sup>and</sup> 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, <sup>sure</sup>.

NJ: What were you doing for the army?

ML: Golly, I was in the , in the ~~arm~~ 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 ~~un~~ 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: <sup>silly little</sup> 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 *quite a while back.*

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 al~~x~~right, 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 <sup>that</sup> 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 <sup>I said,</sup> "I'm lazy." "Mother don't you ever talk like that?" *of course they said I had payed for mine.*

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: A candidate.

NJ: A candadate?

ML: A candadate for the convention,

NJ: Oh, the territorial, the statehood thing?

ML: The uh, state conventions. <sup>And</sup> so I ~~uh,~~ I been to all those places,

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

ML: <sup>Oh yeah,</sup> This here is concerning the lodges ~~isn't was it.~~ *is the ones that...*

NJ: No, I don't know what your telling me, I don't know about that.

ML: <sup>Yeah, yeah,</sup> ~~ya, ya,~~ through the lodge

NJ: Oh, the pioneers?

ML: Uh, huh

NJ: Oh the pioneers' convention, oh... of course.

ML: <sup>I've been to</sup> And I have been to Nome 3 times and <sup>I've been to</sup> Petersberg and Fairbanks, Fairbanks 3 times,

NJ: <sup>Oh</sup> ~~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 <sup>he said</sup> "If you should happen to fall or do something like that, <sup>you'd</sup> ~~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: <sup>Yeah,</sup> 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: <sup>Yeah,</sup>

NJ: <sup>By</sup> golly,

ML: <sup>I was...</sup> and that there one...

ML: the ivory ring? I was admiring the ivory ring with the gold nuggets <sup>all</sup> around it, <sup>That</sup> is as pretty an ivory ring as I have ever seen,

ML: ~~The~~ <sup>That</sup> there was given to me when I was froze.

NJ: Oh really? By whom?

ML: By an organization

NJ: Oh really?

ML: They said <sup>that</sup> I'd done <sup>what</sup> I had done and didn't realize what I have done.

NJ: <sup>For goodness sakes</sup> when did they give that to you, at that time?

ML: At that time when <sup>after</sup> 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 you know, I had <sup>to</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>And</sup> then I came out and <sup>that</sup> operation I had that before daddy passed away.

NJ: I see.

ML: And of course it was from over work and I had lifted too heavy. So it was up to me to get myself straightened ~~out~~ around.

NJ: <sup>Yes</sup> 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: <sup>yeah</sup> I ~~will~~ 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~~ <sup>oh</sup> 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: <sup>Not</sup> 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? <sup>So then</sup> he says, "Oh, I just want to tell you something." <sup>he said,</sup> "you know," he says "We're gonna have mail all through (look) now, all through the railroad, on the railroads and on the highways and everything like that. <sup>that</sup> So they said they wanted me to be on the lookout for the mail." Then, <sup>yeah,</sup> 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 <sup>that and then so</sup> ~~well~~ he sat there with the little...

D.S. 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 possum, <sup>you know</sup> and he took this <sup>picture, you know</sup> and he said, "Alright, if you  
don't mind, you might see your name in a book. And if you don't  
mind, <sup>he</sup> says, I'll be the guilty party."