

Call number: 02-00-124 SIDE A

Harrie Hughes' early life. Trip to Anchorage

September 18-29, 1961

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Series: Harrie Hughes Collection

Notes: Original on 3-inch tape, master copy on CD

Recording begins with music, after which a man's voice [Probably Harrie Hughes] starts talking about his life story: He was born in Indiana, April 29th of 1899. When he was 4 years old, his parents migrated to Los Angeles when it was a small, 60,000 people town. He went to school there [address is given] and at the age of 17 he went to work for the Times [unclear] Printing and Binding Company for a short time. He also was a [unclear] boy for a period of time. He worked in studios until 1924 when he took off to New York City but stayed for several years in Everett, Washington and never made it to New York. He worked on buildings there. In 1925, he took a fishing trip on a coast guard boat to Ketchikan, Alaska. They went back to Seattle from there and Harrie returned to Everett, WA.

He worked selling water systems in Seattle and he went to all the logger dances in Wickersham, Bellingham and other places. He also spent many hours in roller skating rinks. He skated in almost every rink from Bellingham to San Diego. He ran a rink twice, both alone and with a partner.

5:42 He used to go fishing on the Pilchuck River and in 1929 he took a job as a [unclear] in Nushagak, Alaska with the North-Western Fisheries. He met Mr. Skarstrom [sp?] at the cannery, as well as Mr. Andrews who was a native fisherman. There was also a Russian priest and a Russian [Orthodox] church wedding that lasted for a week. The priest was a good carpenter and wanted to have Harrie's tools. The priest built sleds with which he traveled to other villages to administer to the needs of villagers, covering as much as 400 miles in a single trip.

Harrie landed back in Seattle in September where he worked for Two-foot [unclear] Contracting Company on the [unclear] building. He was an inspector on that project. Later, he went to Everett, WA and worked on a paper mill for a season. Then Harrie went to work at the shops at King County in Redmond, Washington. He was a seasonal firefighter and worked for two years for John C. Stevenson who was a chairman of the boarder county commissioners. He was a very good friend.

He had another friend who was a Klondiker: Captain A. J. Gourde and his wife, and some other former Yukon-Alaskan friends who tried to talk him into going back to Alaska to stay. Harrie came to Fairbanks with a letter from King County to Mr. Nash of the Alaska Road Commission to go work in shops. Harrie went to see Mr. Nash who said he had nothing for Harrie. Then Harrie met Mr. and Mrs. Nordale: Mr.

[unclear] Nordale, John Nordale, Alice Nordale, Roy Loftus of the Hotel. He received work at the Alaska Railroad Bridge and Building crew and worked for almost 5 years.

8:49 Harrie says he acquired a cabin at Late Night [Creek?] and prospected in Healy Fork area. He also was in the freight crew for dredging supplies from Late Night into Caribou Creek on Bill [William] Taylor's property that was leased to Mr. Dunkle. That was about 90-mile trip to Kantishna. They arrived at Johnny Busia's [sp?] cabin on the road near the Wonder Lake at night. They made camp and went to visit Johnny in his cabin. He had some powerful home brew in his cold box underneath the floor so they sat around, talked and ate something. It was getting late and they were heading to wannigan to get some sleep but Johnny wouldn't stand seeing his guests leave so soon and offered to put them up on bunks that were on the walls of the cabin. He had heavy blankets stacked to the closet. The blanket that Harrie took was a dozen of blankets quilted together. Harrie asked Johnny why the blankets were quilted together and he said he didn't like to make beds but with them all quilted together, all he needed to do was to catch one corner and shake and the bed would be made.

There were several old-timers in the area. One of them was Fanny Quigley and then there was Mr. Joe Dalton and a fellow by the name Tracy. Tracy heard about Harrie's fancy shooting on the trail and wanted his new .32.20 rifle. Tracy offered him a Winchester that he told had been dropped on the rocks at the Sheep Hills when they were hunting and that it wouldn't shoot straight because the barrel was bent. Harrie fired two shots to a stomp and they went right on top of each other and only about 6" off of the target in 10 yards. Harrie traded rifles and everybody thought he was taking advantage of Tracy. The Winchester rifle turned out to be a very good gun with which Harrie supplied meat to the camp.

12:07 They unloaded the freight train at Bill Taylor's camp at Caribou Creek and started back over the trail but they were told that the ice had went out at the Clearwater [creek? River?] and some of them decided to fly out. Mr. Dunkel came to Wonder Lake to pick them up and by that time the snow was very wet and soft. They all took snowshoes and packed a runway for taking off from the Wonder Lake. They finally got in the air and made it through the mountains at Polychrome Pass –area. The clouds were closing in fast as they traveled up through the pass without a chance for turning back. It looked like they could touch the snow, being so close to it. When they cleared over the last valley and over the Colorado Station at the Alaska Railroad, they were glad to be out from the mountain. Harrie arrived at his cabin at Late Night, happily relieved.

Harrie says he took some pictures on the trip that he took along the trail. There were only a half-a-dozen people living in that country those days. There were Dewey Burnette, Mr. Night and Mr. Barrows and Earl Pilgrim who is one of the last old-timers in that area. All the rest of them are gone. Bill [William] Julian used to be there. He lives in town now and is quite old. Andrew Dragish [sp?], a trapper, was quite a colorful character. He built a 5-story roadhouse at the Middle River in order to try to get the highway in from the Late Night Station on Alaska Railroad to Wonder Lake. It was a good terrain to put a road through. The highway will be completed this year. They didn't put the road by the roadhouse and Andrew got old. First Andrew had the old Singleton place in Healy and then he moved to Late Night and a lady by the name of Mrs. Bill Shannon came down to Healy Station to run the roadhouse for Andrew Dragish and finally she bought it.

Then Dragish built a place at the Late Night. It was a 2-story building with a big greenhouse, a blacksmith shop and 2-3 cabins. His neighbors were John Howard, Harrie, Lee Swisher and Frank Glacier [sp?] who was a hunter. A man named Gillum had a transportation company at Mt. McKinley Park and he used to keep horses at Late Night. Every summer they'd take the horses to the park for the people to ride because that was the only way to get into the park. Nowadays there are cars and a road but there are still a number of horses around.

16:35 There used to be a fellow by the name of Bill Hinrey who was a typical sourdough. He lived in a rambleshackle cabin, made home brew and dug some gold on sunny days. There was John Calvin who used to guide hunting parties until he went practically blind. Jean Tivves [sp?] who was a WW I veteran. Harrie went to see him in his cabin one day because his neighbors said he was sick. He was sitting by the stove and feeding the fire. It was 40 below outside. He was a sick man so Harrie asked why he's not in bed. He said that he can hardly keep his eyes open but if he lets the fire die, he'll freeze to death. He was in such a bad condition that Harrie asked Alaska Railroad if they would get him transportation. Harrie called Mr. Cunningham and he sent Harrie to get Jean Tivves' information and the ticket was booked. Jean was broke so Harrie gave him money to pay for his hotel at Curry where the train stopped for the night, before continuing to Anchorage. Jean only lived 5 weeks in Anchorage before he passed away.

Another old-timer, Pop Hollis [sp?], has been around for quite a few years. He used to live in Wyoming, Oklahoma, and is a typical old cowboy. Pop Hollis is close to 90 years old now and nearly blind. Harrie and he had lots of good times together. There was another boy who came from Pennsylvania and built a cabin across from Harrie. He was a miner who mined and lived off the country and is working for one of the coal mines up the Healy River. There are only 2 or 3 people around anymore out of those people who lived there when Harrie lived there too. A man named Dibold [sp?] lived 8 miles from where Harrie lived. He had been there from around 1904 and he trapped around the country when he was a young man. There was Robbie who died when he was 81 years old and was buried up on the hill near Ferry. Joe Koskey [Koski? Sp?] and Barlow are mentioned. Barlow was just taken Outside and he is close to 75 years old.

Harrie tells set traps and once stayed out for 8 months without coming to town. If he needed anything, he'd slip a note to a box near the railroad tracks and the section foreman would pick it up and drop things off the next trip. Harrie hit the trail every morning around 5 and was either prospecting or setting traps or covering the country. He could tell almost every moose and caribou, sheep and wolf in 30-mile radius. He always knew when a stranger came into the country. Now he'll terminate the tape. It's September the 18th, 1961 in Fairbanks, Alaska. [Break in the recording.]

21:43 Frank says this is a continuation of [Unclear, Charles?] story. Charles came back to Fairbanks and lived in their home and finally he had a stroke that affected his mind. He used to play with the kids just like another kid. He'd do some chores around the house and helped them. Finally he passed on. To keep them from going to [unclear] grave, the speaker and his wife buried him themselves. They still keep flowers going on the grave up at Birch Hill. They all think of Charlie and the wonderful music he wrote when he was alive. Harrie [?] thanks Frank and says they are moving onto their next location.

23:05 Harrie says it's Andy Wicken, Harrie Hughes, Frank Young and Dolly [Young] and they are stopping at a memorial park the City of Anchorage has set up. Alaska Railroad has contributed an old 556, an old engine that still has the blade on the front that kicks the moose and rabbits off the track. It's 4 inches above the rail and when they hit an animal it throws it on each side. Then Harrie asks if Frank knows any history of the engine. He says he doesn't know but that there must be some history or it wouldn't be in the park. It is possible that it's the locomotive that ran from Anchorage to Fairbanks or it might have been the locomotive that pulled the car of President Harding when he visited. Harrie says that the no. 1 locomotive is located right at the railroad depot on the monument. Old no. 1 from Chena railroad is located in Fairbanks, just across the bridge on Cushman Street. [Break in the recording.]

Harrie says they are moving down to Westward Hotel and have met a number of people from Juneau and Ketchikan: Lester Gore and his son and several old-timers from Ketchikan and Juneau. George Bojanich, Jimmy McDonald, Forbes Baker and Mrs. Baker arrived and went to trip to Kenai today. There's an airplane due in the morning with quite a number of people from Fairbanks. The train is due in the morning as well with pioneers on it.

At 25:32 Harrie says it's Thursday morning, September the 28th, 1961 in Anchorage at the Pioneers [of Alaska] Convention. They are at the hotel and have met people who are coming in. George Kennell gives his name on the tape and Harrie asks how many Pioneers he has "in here". George says they have probably 16-18 of them. Harrie asks if they are able to take care of many more today, to which George says they are. Harrie tries to get George Bojanich to come over but he flees. Harrie tries to persuade George to say something on tape but he refuses.

Harrie stops somebody else and asks his name. It's Lee Nelson and he's from Cordova. Lee tells that he's been to Alaska all but 48 years. He's 74 years old since April the 20th. Harrie says he's going to play the recording back to him.

Now they are at the International Airport, meeting some people from Fairbanks Delegation of Auxiliary no. 8 and Igloo no. 4. A man's voice says they had a wonderful flight down and expect to have a wonderful time. Mrs. Hering is the president of the Auxiliary and Harrie asks how many people are coming from the auxiliary but she says she's not sure. Mrs. Jones says they had a wonderful trip over. Harrie will play the tape back. [Break in the recording.]

At 27:44 Larry Black from Nenana introduces himself. He represents Nenana. There was Grant Pearson too but he backed out when he got to McKinley Park. He decided to stay there. Harrie says that Mr. and Mrs. Jones are from Nenana so there is some representation from Larry's hometown. Harrie asks Louie where he was born and he says he was born in Lorraine [?] [Unclear] in 1886. He's 75 years old. [Break in the recording.]

A lady from Auxiliary no. 8 says she had a terrible trip and that she just hates to fly. Harrie asks how Harry is and the lady says he's good. He'll be 79 in December. Harrie says he can only take everything out of life now. The lady says they are expecting a nice trip and that they are staying just a couple of blocks away. The lady and Harrie chitchat a bit more about how they caught 23 fish out of Shaw Creek

and she caught 2. More talking about the water there. Harry says something unclear. [Break in the recording.]

Harrie says that was a little conversation with some of the guest at the lobby. Andy Wicken and Harrie and quite a number of them spent the evening at the Pioneer Hall. It looks like there are 250-300 people signed in and a few stragglers will come the following morning. They had quite the cocktail hour with lots of things to eat and drink. Some of the 79-80 year old people were out dancing. They got Ruth [unclear] situated at her nephew's place in and she's happy now.

Andy says he had a good time at the cocktail party; he oiled his joints and danced about 3 or 4 dances. Then a Swedish artist came along and Andy managed to stick through that one. Harrie says they are going to call it a day and that this was the registration day, September 28th, 1961. Tomorrow they 'll start with a continuation of registration. Their program starts at Elk's Hall. [Break in the recording.]

At 32:24 Harrie says it's September 29 at the Pioneers Convention. Andrew Wicken and Harrie went for coffee and wondered around town. Now they are back to the lobby of the hotel. Merl Thomas is getting up and won't be able to talk before getting some breakfast. There are quite of number of Pioneers coming in. [Break in the recording.]

Now Harrie is with some old pioneers and wants to get their names on the tape: Alice Anderson, a daughter of Pete Waldon who is an old-time Cordovan. Her mother is there with her and her name is Mrs. Marina Waldon. Harrie says that Johnny Erland [sp?] is there too and asks how his trip was. He came down with the train. Johnny's birthday is in 1881, on 6th of October. He's a member of Igloo no. 4. Alice says it's nice that Johnny is visiting them. [Break in the recording.]

Alice says that Pete Waldon, her father and mother arrived to Alaska from Bellingham in 1921. [Address is given.] They lived on the other side of the high school and their address is still there. There weren't many people living there when they moved to Cordova but Alice's father had lived in Cordova since 1909. Harrie asks what she thinks of the change in Anchorage area. Alice says it's bewildering to have seen it grow so fast. Harrie thanks her. [Break in the recording.]

35:37 Harrie gives a history of Lake Spenard from an old-timer [Alice Anderson?] who is giving a history on the acquisition of land and some of the people who were "here" [in Anchorage] around 1921 or 1922. Harrie asks how Jimmy Vale and Mrs. Vale started "this club". In 1922 they had just a platform of a floor and a couple of logs. They had a piano with a piece of tarp over it. She knows some older folks who [unclear]. Across the lake on "this side" of Lake Spenard was a place known as Spenard Roadhouse and [unclear] used to call it Helen's Place which was changed to [unclear]. That was Helen and Jimmy Vale. The speaker didn't see Jimmy there much. Helen and her friends made most of the cutting. Helen was also fighting forest fires [?] when they had lots of forest fires. The fire was up below the island [?] and few hundred feet away from Helen's Place.

Harrie says he [unclear] when there was just a farmhouse in the whole area. Alice says that Jack Lindsay was running the roadhouse. He had several daughters of whom some are living "here." [Discussing the

daughters briefly.] Harrie asks if she knew Rose Larson who lives “here” [in Anchorage –area] and was a part of Joe Oat’s family. They have quite a lot of property “here.”

Harrie says all the old railroaders are gone and tells that Mr. Wynn worked for the railroad with Jimmy Bale whose wife ran a rooming house. Harrie says he visited old Lynn. All the old-timers who lived along the 4th Avenue are now gone. Alice and Harrie agree that Anchorage was like one big family then. Alice talks about when [unclear] from Pioneers had their doings in the fall and everybody was there. There were price cakes with little nuggets in them. They had a gay old time.

39:35 Harrie says Alice wrote a nice letter for Johnny [Erland] who had Harrie to read it so he’d know where to go. Alice tells she met Johnny a year ago. Harrie says Johnny Erland worked for the NC-Company for many years for the Utility Department, and for the City, climbing poles before he retired. Harrie says he’s been an electrician in Fairbanks for many years. Alice says her first husband died in Fairbanks. He was Ben Leak and Harrie says he remembers the name. Ben Leak’s father had been to Alaska since 1883. Alice has been in Alaska from 1920s. Fairbanks was very tiny when she was up there and Fairbanks people were very friendly. Alice says she had a good friend in Fairbanks by the name of Mrs. Buster Anderson, Myrtle. Harrie says he sees her every day. Alice continues that her sister’s name was Ethyl Burnette. Harrie says he sees [unclear] Morgan and that they live across the street from him. Buster Anderson’s and Morgan’s wives are close friends with each other. Alice says there were quite a few people she knew from Fairbanks but that now they have left. [Unclear] used to live there and also the [Unclear, sounds like Elks] who did carpenter work, and Rex Marberg. Harrie says Rex is still alive. Alice says he helped to build the Elks’ building and also [unclear] that’s now Harvard building on 4th Avenue.

Harrie says he’ll terminate the recording and play it back.

[End of the recording.]