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Dog Mushing

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Notes: Original in 7-inch tape, master copy on CD. Produced by Roger McPherson. THESE TAPES WERE PRODUCED AS A PART OF AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM NOW DEFUNCT AND WERE BROADCAST OVER THE RADIO FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.

Arland [possibly Arlan? Arlen?] Dick introduces himself and the interviewer asks him to tell how he feels about dog racing. Arland says it's hard work and it takes a lot of time especially if one works for 5 hours a week [a day?] and only has evenings to train dogs. Some people use dogs for [hauling] wood but most people use them for sports, like at Winter Carnival in Fairbanks, [Open] North American [Championship]. There are preliminary races of 6 miles, women's and men's 10-mile, and races up to 12 and 16 miles. This year there were two 16-mile races in April. Besides that, one needs to keep eyes on their breeding dogs as one can't cross two dogs from the same litter. When the interviewer asks why, Arland says he doesn't know since he hasn't been in the business for that long. He says they might lack stamina. [Note: in-breeding of dogs leads to genetic defects].

He got his dogs from his uncle and he has 2 of those left, 6 other dogs and 2 out of another [litter]. The dogs that he got from his uncle didn't turn out too good. In summertime, he feeds the dogs fish.

Arland tells that he has had the dogs he has right now for about 8 years. Some are 8 years old and the rest are 1 ½ to 2 years old. In wintertime, they use dry fish or split fish that they mix with Purina dog chow. The interviewer asks if they cook the fish first and then mix it with Purina. Arland says they cook a bucket of fish and mix ¼ of Purina with it or almost half. They don't give as much food to the dogs in summertime because it's hot and the dogs don't do much but lay around all

summer. In winter it is cold and the dogs need more food. If one is really driving the dogs, one has to watch how they are fed. [A child is crying in the background.] They also need their rabies shots. Arland says they worm their dogs every fall and winter.

3:24 The interviewer asks how far they take their dogs when they run them. Arland says it depends on what the next race is. If it's 10 miles, one takes the dogs for 10 or 12 miles run to get them tougher. Then the interviewer asks Arland if he is going to enter into the 16-mile race during the Winter Carnival and he says he will. He doesn't know how long his training trail is since it has never been measured but it has ups and downs.

The trail that is used at the Spring Carnival goes out to Tanana and down the Yukon, down to Old Mission and then it crosses the river and comes back on the other side of the river.

There are 11 women in the women's race from Tanana and sometimes there's less. In men's races there are 9 or 10 teams. There are quite a few teams but some of them don't get in at all. There are lots of dogs.

5:00 the interviewer asks how many dogs Arland likes to run when he is in a race. He tells it depends on how many good dogs one has. One has to pick the best ones. He runs 14 or 12 dogs, or 8, depending how far he has to go. 6-8 dogs is enough for one day races. He picks the best ones and works on the slower ones.

Arland tells he is trying to figure out how to make dogs go faster. His wife goes with him when he runs dogs so the weight of the sled increases. He also uses other stuff for weight so he gets around 60 pounds. He keeps the dogs on fast pace. The interviewer asks how long he's had the leaders he has now. Arland says he has an 8 year old leader and just last year he's been training another leader. That dog is not too good but the old leader is getting too slow now and is only good for short 8-10 mile races.

The interviewer asks if Arland trained the 8 year old leader himself. He says he did. When he first got them, they were pups of 3-4 months and he started to work with them on a snow-go right at that time. He let them all run behind him and picked the dogs that ran ahead of everybody for leaders. Before that, he had two

leaders but they died. The dogs that run ahead of everybody else make good leaders if one trains them.

At 7:32 the interviewer asks if Arland makes his own equipment such as harnesses and tow-lines. Arland says he makes his own, but that some of the boys buy theirs from the outfit stores. Arland says he makes his harnesses to fit the dogs and for a tow-line he uses $\frac{3}{4}$ inch nylon. He makes his sleds out of birch and rawhide is used for making 12-inch twine. He makes runners about 7-feet long which is a good length for racing. Longer than that is hard to steer. He found out that one sled that he bought [?] is too light and it slides sideways. Some people like nimble sleds and others like stiff sleds. Everybody also trains their dogs differently. Arland tries to run dogs before races for 16 miles or so and then lets them rest a couple of days before the race. For past couple of weeks, he's been letting the dogs rest only 1 day and 2 days before the competition.

At 10:09 the interviewer wants to know if Arland has entered the races in Tanana "this year." He says he's done two 10-mile races, but didn't do too good in them. He corrects himself: he has done only one 10-mile race and there is a 16-mile race coming up.

Arland picked mushing up by himself, but learned from his uncle. He got interested in dogs and took them out with a snow-go before he decided he'd like to drive them. He kept raising 9 pups and later got a couple of more. "Other than that, it's a lot of fun, but a lot of work too." The interviewer asks if he finds difficult to keep up with the training and feeding schedule while having a normal job. Arland says it depends on the weather, too, since one doesn't want to drive dogs in cold weather and during winter the daylight hours are short after 4-5:30pm. One could take the dogs on an 8-12 -mile run on a lunch break as he has been doing all winter. He does that 5 days a week and the dogs are getting stronger. Arland says he is just learning mushing himself too.

Arland learned to make sleds when he followed other sled makers and he made "the red one out there" just last year. On long trips he uses snow-goes. Now he has a racing sled that he got from [unclear]. It has Petex runners but they are too narrow, only 2-inches wide. [Break in the recording.]

At 13:25 Mary Moses introduces herself. She has 16 dogs that come from variety of places. Some belong to them and some to the Summers [possibly Sommers?]. The ones that belong to Moseses came from Tanana, Nenana, Minto and Fairbanks, but she is not sure where all of the dogs that belong to Summers came from. She got dogs from the Riley family in Minto, but doesn't remember who gave them the dogs at Nenana. She thinks it was Edmund Lord. She's not sure where all of them came from.

The interviewer asks what she feeds their dogs and Mary tells that they like to feed the dogs fish, but if they don't get enough, they use Purina. They like to put tallow with the food and, of course, caribou or moose guts. Preferred food is the mix of fish and Purina. The fish usually runs out in the middle of the winter, "right about now." The interviewer clarifies that it's February.

Mary says they get their fish themselves, but some people buy fish. It's preferable to get one's own fish because it's cheaper. They use a net for fishing. Almost any kind of fish is good for dog feed. One can go seining in the fall and catch white fish and then fish for silvers. Most of the king salmon they eat and don't use it for dog food.

At 15:41 Mary tells how she first got into dog mushing: She says she married Milton Moses [laughter]. She was interested in the dogs as a child, but she only had 1 or 2 dogs and never ran them. She was interested and would go to the dog races. She also worked at a newspaper and got sometimes asked to be an official or a timer. She met Milton at a Nenana Dog Race where he was one of the mushers while Mary was one of the race officials. After a couple of years, they got married and Mary got a dog team. The first thing Milton did after they got married was to teach Mary how to drive dogs. That took a long time and Mary says Milton is still trying.

The interviewer asks how many dogs Mary likes to run and she tells she has run as many as 10, but that she likes to run about 5 or 6 dogs. She thinks that the further one goes with dogs, the more fun it is. The interviewer asks if she has taken any long trips with the dogs and she tells that she and Milton have, but that she hasn't done any lone trips. She's gone about 35-40 miles with Milton.

The interviewer asks her to tell about the trip. They went from Nenana to Old Minto. It was spring and the trail was soft. They had a tiny sled, 17 dogs and the two of them. They fell down every 500 feet and it was a miserable trip. When they came back they took fewer dogs and ran in the middle of the night so the trail was harder and that was good. "This winter" they ran to Fish Creek and ran some trap-lines that totaled about 30 miles a run. The only bad part about that trip was that while Milton was checking traps, Mary had to hold the dog team.

17:54 Mary's husband is trapping right now and he is about 20 miles out "from here." The interviewer asks if he can handle the dogs by himself and Mary says he does quite well with them. The dogs are supposed to be able to wait while the trapper is checking traps, but there is a snow hook that one can put in the snow to hold the dogs if they don't get too ambitious. If Milton wants to take time in checking traps, he can tie the dogs to a tree, but if he is only going to be gone for a few minutes, he can use just a command.

The interviewer asks Mary to tell about some of the races she has been involved with in Tanana and asks if she was in the short preliminary races. Mary tells that there have been 2 women's races "this year" that were 10 miles and Mary ran both of them. They were both on the river. Then they had a passenger race back in the woods, but the trail was so rough that the women weren't allowed to drive, but rode in the sleds. Mary tells that riding on ice is a lot easier than running in the woods where the trail can be mushy or trippy.

19:26 the interviewer asks how many dogs they ran during the 10-mile races. Mary says she had 8 on one race and 10 on the next. She has some problems handling 10 dogs since she's not as fast on her feet as her husband is and when she gets tangled up, she has lots of trouble untangling. If she drives a long string of dogs, she really has to watch what they are doing so they won't tangle up.

She had her latest dog fighting problem 6 years ago and she couldn't break up the dogs and so she doesn't know if she could do it now or not. She tries to avoid having dog fights.

The interviewer asks if Mary takes the dogs out before races in order to get them being used to her commands. She says she definitely does. Then the interviewer wants to know if she has a special command that indicates that they are almost to

the finish line and the dogs should speed up. Mary says the dogs can tell, but that there are some commands they use to get the dogs to speed up anyway. The dogs know that if Mary gets off the sled and starts pushing, she wants the dogs to hurry up. Particular dogs in her team like to go home. They are slow starters, but if they can see the town they really go fast.

The interviewer asks if there are problems when dogs are used for trapping and for racing at the same time. Mary says they plan the racing and trapping so that the dogs get a day or two of rest before racing. The only problem is that the dogs are used to going long distance and on short distance races they aren't fast starters because they think they have to go a long way and build up the speed. It's good in a long race, but on short races they just get started and the race is over.

21:34 The interviewer wants to know if Mary is entering the women's race at the Spring Carnival. Mary says she will. For training, she will probably drive scrap dogs while her husband trains the good team.

She has never won a race [laughter]. She has got as close as the 4th place and as far away as the last. Her husband usually runs 4th, 5th or 6th.

Mary says she enjoys dog racing anyway and doesn't go out with the idea that she is going to win, but with the idea that she's going to get the dogs to run. [Break in the recording.]

At 22:49 Lester Erhart introduces himself and tells that he first got into dog mushing when he was a kid. They lived out at a camp when he was growing up and that's where he first learned to drive dogs. All they did was to haul wood with dogs, trap with dogs and everything. That was a way of life. His first team wasn't very much. He could drive them for a mile or a ½ mile and that was a big deal for the dogs.

The interviewer asks when Lester started having his own dogs. He says it was probably 15 years ago. One of his friends gave him a female dog and another one a male dog and he got about 7 really good [puppies]. They were really fast and Lester got interested in mushing. He loaned some of his dogs to a friend who won a race in Fairbanks and got money from it and so Lester got really interested.

He got the first dogs from Peter Joseph's brother, Stanley, who gave him the female. The male was from John Gringley. Then he got dogs from here and there.

25:40 The interviewer asks when he first started racing and Lester tells it was when he was a kid. He didn't do very good. Today he has 19 dogs. Some of them are from his friends: Bill Taylor gave him some and he gave Bill Taylor some of his own.

Nowadays he runs about 12 dogs, but he says that the numbers go down more than they build up. Ideally he'd like to have about 14 dogs and about 18 good racing dogs. It's pretty hard to do and he has a family, too. Dogs are expensive. Lester tells he does lots of his own fishing and that's a way he can afford them. He also buys commercial dog food, vitamins and all kinds of stuff. It's more of a hobby.

Now that he's working, he doesn't have as much time to run the dogs as he'd like. He works 5 days a week for Wien Air so he has to run the dogs before work, on a lunch break, or after work.

He's entered the Tanana races "this year" and has done so every year. He's won once and came 3rd once.

At 28:35 the interviewer asks how he trains the dogs before the race and Lester tells one has to condition them and train them to race. In summertime, he uses a pickup to run the dogs. He's always fooling around with them. During wintertime, he runs the dogs depending on the kind of a race they are about to have. They have had short races recently so he has driven the dogs a short distance all the time.

When the Spring Carnival happens, Lester will train the dogs to run longer races. He's experimenting with things. Right now he needs to run his dogs to see if they are good or bad.

He raises dogs for sale too and the interviewer asks how he gets them ready for buyers. Lester tells that he's raising huskies mixed with hounds, but he's thinking about raising more huskies because they are easier to sell. They are good-looking with sharp ears and masked faces. He sells lots of dogs every year and he raises about 20-25 pups every year.

He doesn't loan dogs out too often because he doesn't have good enough dogs. He doesn't have any advice to give to starting mushers. He says it's a lot of work, but if one is interested, one just has to "take it the way it comes." Feeding stuff is important and if one can catch sufficient amount of fish, it's easier in winter.

Lester has a fish camp right in front of his house where he runs a fish wheel. It's about 1 mile out of town. He gets lots of fish for his dogs. He likes to feed them silvers that are dried, but white fish is good dog food also because they are oily. [Break in the recording.]

At 32:52 Gladys Earhart introduces herself and tells about the two 10-mile races she has been to "this year." She used 8 dogs on both times and passed a team both times. On the first race she was second and on the last race she came in 5th because he had had trouble. She caught up to a loose team that some people were holding for the driver. The dogs started barking at Gladys' dogs that just laid there for 2 or 3 minutes before Gladys got them past the barking team. It was a good, hard trail. Her husband trains the dogs and Gladys drives them in races.

The interviewer asks about the race course on the Yukon River. Gladys tells it's a real hard and fast trail now and it has some tricky turns. She almost tipped over three times, but managed to hang on. It's a little bumpy because of the snow-gos, but it's fast.

She doesn't do much pumping with her feet and she merely hangs onto the sled to steer it. She uses jinglers sometimes, but doesn't know how to use a whip so she doesn't use it. She never has to kick for speed because they always go fast enough and Gladys herself is so light that she goes flying.

34:47 She has a sled with Petex [runners] they bought from Dr. Lombard and if Gladys pushes it, it slides right up to the dogs.

The interviewer asks if there are many woman dog-mushers in Tanana and Gladys says there are 10 or 11. Most of the women have run 7 or 8 dogs previously, but this year Gladys has seen them run 9 and 10 dogs for the first time.

It's a stiff competition, but it depends on who one draws behind. If one can stick with a good team, "they got it made." But if there is a not-so-good team hitting one, that's trouble and one is going to lose time passing them. Gladys always

manages to pass one team. Last time she would have had it good if the loose team wouldn't have been there. Her dogs thought it was the end of the race there. "But that's all a part of the game. You learn from it."

At 36:19 the interviewer asks if Gladys will be entering the Spring Carnival race in Tanana and she says she will. That's the last week in March and two 10-mile races. Gladys says she will probably run 8 dogs on both races since she is not brave enough to run 10. She doesn't go out with the dogs beforehand to make them used to her commands. She cooks for them and feeds them so they know who she is, but she never does any training. She doesn't even ride with "him" [Lester Erhart].

Sometimes she has had on 10-mile races this year: This time she completed in 40:32 minutes and last time it was at 38 minutes. She was second that time and got beat by 57 seconds. She was slower this time since she lost. [End of the recording.]