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Howard Luke

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Fairbanks, Alaska

Bill Schneider and Leslie McCartney, interviewer

Series: Howard Luke Remembers

Bill Schneider asked Howard Luke to talk about dog racing in the Interior. Howard Luke talked about Fabian Carey. He and Carey used to drive together. Carey suggested they put their teams together. They started racing. They had a twelve mile race to begin with. He said in those days they didn't have racing dogs. Jeff Stoddard and others got together to race. He said a lot of the races got started in bars. There was one lady who joined them. Stoddard had thirty or forty dogs. They would race every year. They had sponsors. Johnny Allen from Rampart was a racer, too. Everyone would pitch in money for the winner. Five hundred dollars was a lot of money in those days. He talked about some of the racers. He said in those days they would work together. They don't do that now. The race was started down Second Street. People started raising racing dogs. People would come from Minto, Rampart and all over. There are hardly any Native boys racing now. He started racing in 1941. He won the race in 1947. He was racing against Kokrine. He was sick with pneumonia when he raced. They would have a banquet at the end of the race. He worries that people don't work together like they did back then. He was taught how to take care of his dogs and using the right harness. Gareth Wright was the youngest racer. Schneider asked if Gareth Wright raised dogs. Luke talked about the type of dogs Wright raised. They had floppy ears. Luke said he won the race in Anchorage. He said he was born to be a runner. His mother would put him outside when it was 30 or 40 below. He talked about using different routes. His mother would feed his dogs right before the races. His mother also helped him with training his dogs. Schneider asked about the Kokrines. Luke said he could not beat Effie Kokrine. He talked about using covers on the dogs feet now. He said it cuts off their circulation. He talked about a race that Jay Butler won. Some of Butler's dogs were Lukes. He said Jeff Stoddard would get donations.

He talked about them bringing snow in for the races in Anchorage. Schneider said in the old days people would drive their dogs into town to race. Luke said Titus and Woods would do that. Horace Smoke would do that too.

Luke starts talking about motor boat racing. He said when they started racing they had short boats with two people on them. A lot of people came up from Anchorage. Some people didn't check through. Some of them were lost. They started the Yukon 800. He won the race twice. He was the pilot. Once he ran out of gas. He'd like to do that again. He would take chances and take shortcuts. He talked about sponsorships. Schneider said you had to know the river pretty well. Luke said when you went over a gravel bar your boat would lift right out of the water. When you are in deep water the boat sits lower. He tried going on a lot of gravel bars. One time his steering wheel fell off and they went into the bank of

the river. He said he had a lot of close calls. There was once a big forest fire right at Manley. There's a big island in the river. Moe Samuelson was going past them. Luke said it was so smoky that he couldn't see where he was going and was just going round the island. He talked about how smart wolverines are and how tough they are. He tells the students these things. He tells the students if they fall in water to keep their boots on. The water will keep their feet warm. He talked about making fire. He demonstrates how to make fire.

Schneider asked Luke to talk more about the motorboat racing. Luke said you have to know the river. You have to know the water and about sweepers. Fred Alexander told him to follow the gravel to gain speed. Wes Alexander was his son. John Anderson knew a lot about boats. People had names for their boats. He named his boat the Blue Goose. There was another boat called the Blue Button. Luke talked about Rabbit Island. There were three cabins there. He talked about the brewery that was in Fairbanks at one time.

The dog races started at the bridge and went down to the campground where they turned around. He told a story about Fred Cunningham's dog and a story about dog's fighting.

His dad died when he was fairly young and his mother raised him up. His grandmother was a great lady. She once killed a bear with an ax. He commented about medicine men. He said there was a big potlatch in Nenana. People came from all over. He told a story about a blind man, the loon and a necklace. He told another story about a grandson who stayed with his grandfather when everyone went hunting. He said the old people taught him. His mother told him to never give up. When he didn't go to school for three days the teacher came down to see why he was absent. Luke said he was helping elderly people with their chores. He was in jail for six months once for fighting. His mother would not come and visit him. She told him that he did something that he was told not to do and he had to pay for his crime.

Luke asked Schneider to talk about training his dogs. Schneider said he took his advice about swing dogs training the leader. Luke talked about his leader, Queenie. She got to the finish line during one race and just lay down. She finished the race for him. Her pup, Diamond, was just like her. Luke said he never could beat Effie [Kokrine].