

June 28, 1973
Frank and Neva Whaley

Frank and Neva Whaley live at 4658 Seventh St. in Broadmoore Acres...near the Fairbanks International Airport. They built their own home...with the help of a few friends and their three children, Brownie, Nina and Lon.

The Whaleys came to Alaska in 1933 from Seattle. The big depression had hit the Seattle area and Frank's charter flying business out of Boeing Field was not too good. Many of their charter passengers in the Seattle area were Alaskans. Frank and his partner and Neva decided in 1933 ~~xxxx~~ to try mining in Alaska - Nome, to be exact.

Frank learned to fly in 1929 and did some barnstorming and charter work. He met Neva in Seattle at the Chystal Pool Swim team. Both liked to swim. They were married in 1931.

So, in the ~~XXXXX~~ fall of 1933 they shipped their six-place Travelair to Valdez by boat. Neva, Frank and Frank's partner Harry Nelson went on the same boat. The Whaleys left their infant son Brownie in Seattle with Frank's mother.

When they landed in Valdez they unloaded and re-assembled their aircraft. Bob Reeve was there (they had become acquainted with Reeve in Seattle before this). Owen Meals of Valdez, who had a plane of his own, helped them assemble the Travelair. They flew the aircraft to Copper Center the first day and spent the night there. It snowed about a foot so Frank, Neva and Nelson learned one of their first Alaska flying chores...snowshoing (packing) down the runway so they could take off.

In Fairbanks they outfitted the plane with skis, but neither Frank nor Nelson had ever used skis before. Joe Crosson and a man named Robinson showed them the tricks of ski landings and takeoffs.

Then they headed for Nome. They landed in Ruby and then went on to Nulato. It was about -40 degrees at Nulato and by the time they got to the trading post (run by old Pop ~~Nex~~ Russell) they were cold. Neva also expressed a desire to answer nature's call so Pop Russell pointed ~~xxxxx~~ her in the direction of the outdoor facility. Neva's pants were the latest in style, blossoming out at the sides and with 20 buttons down each side. By the time she had answered nature's call and got her britches back on she was so cold she couldn't button them. She returned to the trading post half frozen and Pop Russell buttoned her side opening for her. They stayed at Nulato for a couple days and then headed on to Nome. In the plane all this time were Frank, Neva, Nelson and the Whaley's wire haired terrier "Snug".

Snug traveled with Frank on almost all of Frank's trips out of Nome. The dog logged over 100,000 hours in the air.

He learned to help Frank, especially in clearing the wings of snow. Frank would throw a coiled rope over the wing and Snug would grab the end in his mouth and Frank would whip the rope back and forth along the wing, knocking loose snow and ice.

The dog learned not to stand in the slipstream of the prop in the cold, cold months....making a mad dash for the open plane door when Frank was ready to leave. But, on the other hand, in the summer Snug learned to stay in the slipstream because there were no mosquitos there. Many places were so infested with mosquitos that the pilot left the prop rotating to keep the mosquitos away from the open door.

When Frank first went to Nome the only maps of the area were from the Lomens. He recalls "Maps in those days were spafge. I rmeember the best map that we could get ahold of was a Lome Commercial Co. tractor and road map." This map estimated ~~xxxx~~ heights of mountains in the Nome area. There was no weather. Nor was there any communication in the airplanes. The only weather assist was a daily report by wireless from Kotzebue.

In 1933-34 Winter Frank was aksed to return Brulik Rock to Pt. Hope. He took off with Rock, one other passenger, a pilot Billy Graham who showed Frank the way, and some mail. The landting was without incident, but ~~xxx~~ the take off was a disaster; the right ski hit a buried whale bone that was invisible (it being white like the snow) and the ski was broken off. It was flapping around so fiercely Frank thought he better land before it damaged the wing. The landging crumpled the right wing and part of the tail gear.

He had left Nome on Dec. 29th and it was 52 days later that he finally returned to Nome. It was 21 days before anyone in Nome knew that he was safe. His partner Nelson, after learning of the problem, flew a welding machine and some parts to Pt. Hope and the two partners began to rebuild the airplane. They made a "hangar" by using the side of ~~xxxx~~ a storage shed as one side; they made the other three walls with snow ~~xxxx~~ blocks cut from the hard, drifted snow. They managed to scratch up enough miscellaneous piedss of wood for a roof. When they replace the fabric on the wings they had to heat their "hangar" up to 65 or 70 degrees, and it was then that the snow began to melt. So it was a ~~xx~~ case of putting in snow blocks faster than they melted.

Another time Frank was forced down. This was on his way to Kotzebue from Nome. A bolt came loose and fell into a piston and the whole engine began to vibrate wildly. He cut off the power so the engine would not vibrate right off the aircraft. He was about 5,000 flying over an overcast, but he had spotted a hole in the overcast and did a 180 turn for that hole. He sat the plane down without incident on a lake. After securing the plane (by digging holes in the ice and lowering tie down ropes (with sticks attached) through

the ~~six~~ ice, Frank began building a shelter. He carried a ~~sq~~ saw aboard the plane for such emergencies. He cut snow blocks and stacked them up around ~~h~~ one wing of the plane, using the wing for a roof. This kept the persistent wind from the passengers and also kept them warm. Frank used his fire pot with a make shift chimney (which he also carried in his emergency gear) for heat.

~~X~~ Aboard on this trip were two school teachers headed for Kotzebue, Sidney Reed, the reindeer superintendent at the time. They were there three days before anyone found them.

In those days where there were no communications, the policy on a downed plane was to allow three days of good flying weather to go by before a search was launched. Reason for this, Wahley said, was that many times a pilot would get a charter trip or extra work at his destination point and there was no way to let the folks back home know.

After the three days had elapsed Neva ~~xxxx~~ got a search going and the plane was spotted quickly. Nelson landed and took the school teachers on to Kotzebue and then he returned Frank to Nome where the two gathered parts (from ~~xxxxxxx~~ a spare engine) and returned to fix the damaged engine. Again, they had to build a makeshift nose hangar in order to work on the plane's engine.

While they were waiting it out on the frozen lake, Frank heard dogs so he climbed a high point on the edge of the lake and saw a dog team in the distance. He attracted the driver, Johnny Kakaruk, and talked to him. Johnny was looking for his strayed reindeer herd and didn't have any grub with him. He spent only a few minutes with the downed aircraft, saying that he and his dogs had not eaten for some time and they were anxious to catch up with the herd so they could get some food. Frank asked him about any prospectors or mines. Kakaruk told him that there were ~~xxx~~ formerly miners in the Kugraak River area.

In the spring Frank and his partner and Neva struck out for the Kugarak area, looking for an old camp there. They shipped their gear out of Nome on the Kugarok Limited Railroad (about 80 miles) and then flew some of it into their destination (shoving it...well packed of course) out of the plane. Then they began the long walk into the area...over niggerheads, fighting mosquitoes, rain all the time.

They didn't find good enough prospects there, but they went onto the ~~X~~ Noxapaga River where they found good colors. They staked and mined that area for many seasons. They still own land there and will return this summer to do assessment work. Next summer (summer of 1974) they expect to mine...what with the price of gold up over \$100 an ounce now compared to the \$16 when they first started and eventually \$35 per ounce.

Frank was hired by Wien Airlines...the fifth pilot. Before him were Noel, of course. Then Sig Wien. Herman Leerdahl was another early Wien pilot.

Neva had learned to fly in an OX 5 Command Air in Seattle. She soloed in 1932. Frank taught her to fly. She helped him many times when he had an over load of mail, following up in the Whaleys' personal plane a Piper Cruiser.

August 15, 1935 they got word of Will Rogers and Wiley Post's accident at Pt. Barrow. Frank and a news camera man tried to get there from Nome and Kotzebue, but bad weather prevented their getting there.

Frank describes white-out conditions, telling how one pilot, Hans Myro (sp?) was lost once in whiteout. He couldn't tell the ground from the air....no horizon. Finally he spotted a fox running along the ground. Hans turned the plane around and followed the fox,,, using the fox for his sighting and his perception gauge.

Frank tells about how school children from village schools would be excused from school to help outline a strip that was fairly flat and safe....during whiteout conditions. The children had been drilled for this just as some children are drilled for fire. They lined up in two lines about 150 feet apart. With these little figures Frank could gauge his distances, etc.

He tells about tying planes down on the tundra in the Arctic... where the winds blows all the time. On the tundra he chopped a hole in the ground, a V shape. Then he put 1 1/2 to 2 feet of the tie down rope in the hole. With his fire pot he melted snow and poured the water into the hole. It froze immediately and soon the plane had a secure tie down on both wings and the tail.

Frank quit active bush flying in 1951. But before that he and Bill Munz of Nome rescued six air force men from the scene of a B-29 crash on Midnight Mountain. The reconnaissance plane was supposed to be over Kotzebue Sound, but it strayed in land and when the pilot saw he was headed for a hill he poured on full power and pulled the plane up. It hit the hill (mountain) anyway wheels up. One wing caught an outcropping thus causing the plane to swing around and come to an abrupt halt. Miraculously all eight crew members survived the crash. One went back into the burning plane and pulled out some sleeping bags and parachutes. They were able to use these to close off the open end of the tail section that had fallen away from the main plane. After a few days the pilot and navigator decided to walk to a village (where they were going is a good question). They were found later frozen to death in a sitting position on a creek bank. They had gone about four miles. The Air Force sent a medical team (at midnight with the wind blowing) but that team missed the crash scene by miles and were frozen to death, too.

Frank and Munz managed to land on the 20 degree slope and picked up the men...six survivors. For this daring act the two men were awarded a Special commendation from Gen Carl Spatts of the Air Force.

They also were awarded an Air Medal from President Harry Truman. The awards were made in ceremonies in Nome.

in his neck
In this rescue attempt, Frank froze his neck and nerves, ..caused by looking out of the plane window in the crash area. He had to quit flying for about a year while this condition improved. He and the family went out side finally for treatment. He recovered.

Frank became the managing director of the Alaska Visitors Association when it was first formed. He held that position for two years, but he found that it was taking him away from his family too much so he went back to work for Wien. He became station manager for Wien in Kotzebue in 1957. He began developing ~~Wien's~~ Wien's tour program. He and his brother Jack and Chuck West went to Barrow in 1956 or 1957 ~~xxx~~ to look over the possibilities. Frank developed the Eskimo dancing and ivory carving for the Nome and Kotzebue visitors. Then the program grew so Frank was put in charge of the airline's promotional programs. He spent 15 years in Fairbanks (rather, based in Fairbanks) building this program to what it is today. He and Neva represented ~~Wien's~~ Wien on many promotional trips and programs. He and Neva had begun to take pictures in 1935 so they had a good selection of Arctic scenes, Eskimo life pictures, etc.

Frank served in the Alaska Territorial legislature, first in the House and then in the Senate. A total of 6 years. His service was when Ernest Gruening was governor of Alaska.

Frank retired officialy in September 1971.

In his life in the Arctic he filmed a total of 16 movies on life in the far north. One of those films has been made into a feature length movied called the "Legened of Amoluk", narrated by Loren Green. Will be in Seattle Sept. 25. Couple of other films that have had wide use are "Keepers of Santa's Reindeer" and Nomads of the North". Both of these are about reindeer herding in western Alaska.

Last winter Neva and Frank helped compile a book by Chester Seevik. It is titled "Longest Reindeer Herder". It is written by Chester in his own words. Sixty of the Whaley's pictures (some taken bakc as far as ~~1935~~ 1935) illustrate the book.

Chester is now 83 years old. He and his wife Helen traveled extensively with Whaleys in promotional work for Wien. Chester and Helen have (as of this writing) 137 grandchildren and 34 great grandchildren. Chester is a tour guild in Kotzebue this summer.

Nina Whaley was elected Miss Alaska in 1963. She is now married to Chris vonEmenoff, manager of Alyeska Ski Resort. She is the mother of two little boys.