



Dear Fellow Alaskans

I lived in a remote part of Interior Alaska with my family until I was eight years old, when I contracted tuberculosis in my knee and was sent away to a hospital. At that time the only known way to keep use of my leg was to be put in traction, so I was forced to stay in bed and be totally constricted for over a month. My body became very weak from the inactivity.

While stuck in a hospital bed I was pestered by many kids. When I was finally allowed to get up, I was so mad that I went after the biggest kid. I was shocked to be so easily beat up. From that time on, I vowed never to let myself get out of shape. I started working to strengthen my upper body by doing pull ups, push ups and sit ups.

After this first attempt to straighten my leg, I went back to the bush and swung a 10 lb. birch hammer

every morning. In helping my family live off the land, I did many necessary chores like packing wood.

By the next year my leg was bent again. I went back in the hospital for more traction and this time I made friends with a janitor who kept in tremendous shape by using a spring bar and weights. Once again confined to bed, I used his bar and weights daily, while continuing to do pulls ups, sit ups, and push ups.

When I was 15, after an operation to permanently fuse my knee, I was out of the hospital. I stayed in a boarding school for two years where I learned how to box and play basketball to stay fit. When I went back home, I kept in shape in winter by setting beaver traps – which entailed cutting and chopping ice – snowshoeing, running a trap-line and hauling wood using dogs. By spring I felt in such good shape that I thought I could whip the world. In summer, I hauled fish nets, cut 400-500 salmon a day, rowed boats and used a sledge hammers to pound stakes. Wintertime, my diet was mostly beaver, moose, caribou and bear; summertime, it was mostly salmon.

My father gave me my first two pups when I was 10 years old. I trained six more and used them to haul ice. Everyday I fed and cared for many dogs. I helped my father use dogs for trapping and dreamed of sprint racing. After being away at the hospital and boarding school, I spent the next eight years racing my Dad's and other's dogs in the villages. In 1958 I figured I was good enough to compete in the major races so I entered and won the Fur Rondy World Championship race in Anchorage. It was the beginning of my professional sprint dog racing career.

I have been fit for life by the training and running dogs for 50 years. I am now back in the bush and happily doing all the chores associated with living off the land. I turn 75 years old in August and would like to breed and train one more world champion sprint dog team.

For the rest of my life I want to encourage all young people to work to be the best they can be in all that they do. I also think young people should be physically fit and stay that way as I believe it will give them a healthy and better life. Taking good care of oneself and staying in good physical shape gives one a better mental and emotional attitude.

George Attla

Ten-time world champion sprint dog musher and Alaska Sports Hall of Fame Inductee