

## Ep. 3: Taking on Water Through the Windows

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**ADAM**

Welcome, this episode is actually part 2 of Captain William Morgan's experience, but it's ok, you don't need to go hear part 1 first, I just wanted to let you know that if it feels a little jarring to be dropped into the middle of this story, his introduction and earlier history can be found elsewhere on the tour.

The Preston made waves wherever it...wheeled? Is "wheeled" the right verb? Sure, "wheeled". It made waves wherever wheeled, but usually it was less explosive than what happened with the police boat.

**WILLIAM MORGAN**

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 11)*

Public reaction was always very, very enthusiastic. You'd hear things like hoot and holler, scream at us to blow the whistle or ring the bell. Most of the time that's what happened. Particularly children would run and scream and holler. They just thought it was the greatest thing in the world, just to even see the boat. On our open houses, we got nothing but praise for the Corp for keeping the Preston going. The public just plain liked the Preston. Doing these open houses, I talked to some really interesting people.

**ADAM**

I would imagine you guys got asked a lot of the same questions over and over.

**WILLIAM MORGAN**

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 11)*

It reached a point where you had the same answers to every question. You knew what you were going to get asked to begin with, and you knew what you were going to answer.

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 12)*

"Oh, that paddlewheel back there is just a dummy isn't it? You have other different power didn't you?" Then you tell them, "No, that's all we have," and they look at you with amazement.

I would get quite a kick because the parents know less about the vessel than their kids. The children were more well-versed about the boat than the parents.

**ADAM**

During my residency I spent quite a bit of time working in the Captain's Office on the Preston, and this was my experience as well. Kids would be soaking up what the docents were saying, having in-depth conversations, and their parents would have this look on their face, something halfway between confusion and paternal pride. Though many of the adults that came through did have an in-depth knowledge of sternwheelers, as well.

**WILLIAM MORGAN**

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 12)*

I had quite a conversation with a lady from Alaska. Her husband had been chief mate on one of the sternwheelers that worked the Yukon. She worked on the vessel as cook. She was about 85 years old when I talked to her. Of course she knew quite a bit about sternwheelers, I didn't have to explain anything to her.

**ADAM**

Had we met, Bill Morgan would have had to explain quite a bit to me, unfortunately. For instance, I had no ideas that that when building boats they would try and make each one's whistle unique.

**WILLIAM MORGAN**

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 13)*

Oh yes, definitely. Every time they would built a vessel, they would try and design a whistle that sounded totally different to any other whistle. When that whistle was blown in the fog or at night, the other vessels would be able to identify which vessel that was. I could tell the difference between the Skagit Belle and the Skagit Chief, and the Preston.

**ADAM**

The Preston had three whistles, correct?

**WILLIAM MORGAN**

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 12)*

Originally there was 3 whistles. One came off the old Skagit, the first sternwheeler. One came off the Swinomish, and the other one was made by Captain Murch, he made it himself. The three whistles were all hooked up together. We would have trouble with the whistles, and it got to be such a terrible chore to lift all the whistles off the stack to work on them. So we finally just left one whistle up. Then Captain Sandy, he got a "whoop whoop" was what they call it from the Navy that had been on a Navy destroyer. We put that on and some of the Public liked it and some didn't. It was just a wee bit too modern for some people.

**ADAM**

Do I understand correctly that sometimes you'd use the whistle for navigation?

**WILLIAM MORGAN**

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 13)*

Yes, a few times, not too often. The one time came out of the Skagit River and it was real foggy. We used it coming down Saratoga Passage. We knew what course to take but that doesn't mean that's the course you're on. If the tides running or the winds blowing a little bit, you could be off course. Just bounce your whistle off a hill or whatever was there, and you'd have a pretty good idea where you were and if you were off.

**ADAM**

Why didn't you use radar?

**WILLIAM MORGAN**

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 13)*

The Preston has no electronic gear at all.

**ADAM**

Wow, that's incredible, how else would you navigate without modern electronics?

**WILLIAM MORGAN**

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 13)*

Primarily you used your aides to navigation and your knowledge, which you had to have to get your license to begin with. You had to have a certain amount of knowledge in order to pass the examination.

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 14)*

Naturally, we never tried to operate in the fog but there were times when we got caught in it. There was never much we could do about it once you were on your way. That was it.

**ADAM**

Being born in the early 80s, I grew up with electronics all around me: VCRs and Walkmen, my mom loves to tell the story about two-year-old Adam and his Fisher-Price tape player. It was this huge chunk of colorful plastic, a tape deck dead center, with five huge buttons: rewind, stop, play, fast-forward, and eject, all different, bright colors. I would sit in my carseat listening to music or story tapes, rapt by the sound. My mom says she loved it when the tape would reach the end of a side, I would smash stop, smash eject, grab, flip, and smash the tape back in, punch play, and be back under it's spell in no time.

I know that doesn't relate directly to the Preston, but I think it illustrates how for my entire life, electronics have surrounded us. I was in high school when I got my first cell phone, in college when I got my first GPS, and now, my phone is my GPS, my email device, and so much more. The crew on the Preston were navigating by sight, sound, and instinct-level know-how. How cool is that?!?

The last story I wanted share on this episode is probably the scariest stories I've come across in these interviews. I'll let Bill Morgan tell the tale:

**WILLIAM MORGAN**

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 14)*

We were working in the Everett area, and we had an open house in Port Townsend coming up. I was master at the time. So I tried one day to get out of Everett, and I couldn't make it. It was

just too rough. So we were going to make it the next day or we weren't going to make it at all. So we took off with the PRESTON out of Everett, and everything was going pretty good. It was blowing up a little bit, but it really wasn't too bad, until I rounded Possession Head heading for Point No Point trying to get on the other side of the Sound, and go up through Indian Island Passage to Port Townsend. All of a sudden the wind came up, probably going a good 40-45 knots. We were running in what you call a trough. The wind was blowing straight out of the south and it was rough. We were doing an awful lot of rolling around and taking water clear to the windows. In fact it was coming through the windows. But once you were committed that was it. You couldn't turn her around or nothing. I called down to the chief engineer and told him, "Give me everything you got. We're going to have to do her." Well, I started at Point No Point and ended up at Foul Weather Bluff. That's about 5 miles north. I cut the buoy at Skagit Head. I went on the wrong side but I couldn't do anything about it. It's a helpless feeling when you have a hard left rudder, you're using all the steam you possibly can and you're losing ground. You got no steerage at all. You're through. You keep your fingers crossed and hope you make it. When we finally did get over the bluff, we did pretty good then. It was still blowing, but we had it right on the stern. I've been through Indian Island Passage quite a few times, and I think that's the fastest we've ever been through there. The funny thing is that when we got to Port Townsend, the only main dock there is a dock with a cannery on it. We had permission to lay-in there. The way it was blowing, it was just off the port beam coming into the dock, and we wanted to make a starboard landing. The wind really came up then. Well, I come in about 20' off the dock, kind of at an angle, trying to hold myself into the wind. But once I stopped the engines she started going sideways faster than she was going ahead. She kind of hit the dock hard, but she hit the dock square. It didn't damage the dock, but it sure shook up the people working in the cannery. They came roaring out of the cannery just sure that the dock was falling down. I didn't realize

the Preston would take that much. And she really rode it out good considering I did have one worry though. The office looked like a shambles when I got through and into Port Townsend. Everything was tipped topsy turvy, the typewriter, the adding machine. I was afraid the safe was going to go right out the side of the house. I think we were pretty well shook up. The paint locker was a shambles. Everything was pretty banged up. But we straightened it all around and everything was okay. No damage at all really besides what we could clean up in a day.

#### **ADAM**

I can't imagine the fear of crossing the sound in that weather. The helplessness and terror of knowing you were in it and going back was just as bad as going forward. The closest I think I've come is crossing Snoqualmie Pass in the winter.

Let's wrap up this episode on a happier note. Captain William Morgan ended his interview by stating that he could not have been happier with his career on the Preston:

#### **WILLIAM MORGAN**

*(WMorgan\_01.pdf, page 9)*

Really it was a very good time for me, and if I had my life to do over, I wouldn't change a thing. I'd have done exactly as I've done. I've worked with a lot of nice people, very good people. My job was a rather unusual job, for which I'm thankful.

#### **ADAM**

Something to aspire to for sure! This podcast was created by Adam Farnsworth and Sonic Bazaar, with sponsorship by the Anacortes Museum Foundation, in conjunction with the Anacortes Museum and The Maritime Heritage Center. Our theme song is Dill Pickles by Heftone Banjo Orchestra, and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike License. The W. T. Preston is an active museum boat and can be visited and toured. To find out more about the Preston, please visit: [www dot Anacortes W A dot gov slash 379 slash W T hyphen Preston hyphen Maritime hyphen Center](http://www.dotAnacortesWA.gov/379/WTHyphenPrestonHyphenMaritimeHyphenCenter) Thank you.