

Transcript Summary

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Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:37
Original Media:	Dictabelts (red)
Digitized By:	Northeast Document Conservation Centre using IRENE method
Digitization Date:	December 2024
Narrator:	Clyde 'Slim' Williams
Interviewer:	Richard 'Dick' Morenus (although Dick apparently interviewed him, this recording sounds like Slim just talking into the recorder by himself).
Others Present:	N/A
Recording Location:	Chicago, Illinois
Transcriber:	Leslie McCartney
Transcription Date:	December 10-11, 2024
Access:	The dictabelts were donated to us by the great-nephew of Dick Morenus who inherited them from his mother (Dick's niece). Slim and his wife never had children so there is no next of kin. We have a signed Letter of Transmittal on file from Dick's great-nephew. For public/electronic use.
Where to Find this in Text:	These recordings were made by Clyde 'Slim' Williams so that Richard 'Dick' Morenus could write Slim's story in book form. It was published as <i>Alaska Sourdough, the Story of Slim Williams</i> by Richard Morenus (1956). New York: Rand McNally & Company. The book is available on Internet Archive https://archive.org/details/alaskasourdoughs0000rich/mode/2up or in the Elmer E. Ramuson Library, F909.M75 Alaska Collection. Where possible, the pages of where some of the transcribed stories appear in the book are noted.
Extra Notes:	Very scratchy audio

(00:00:00)

Slim Williams: The white man has educated him, until today he'd out malign or out steal any man you ever knew. We taught 'im that's the kinda the thing you do and so he don't worry about it, he just does it. Period. And if anyone else steals from him, why, you keep in front of him if you can but if you can't

that's alright, that's the white man's way and if kinda wants to be like the white man, so that's just the game there. But not in early days, I'm telling ya that. And those women. They'd take you in their hut, in sod house and take your parkee off and take your mukluks off, they'd strip you plumb naked if you let them. A little embarrassing sometimes. But what they wanted was to mend holes. If you had a hole in your parkee, snow would drift through they wanted to fix it for you. Anything wrong with your mukluks they wanted to fix it and that's why they took your clothes off, not for any purpose at all. They slept those days, in their naked, they just didn't wear anything. The idea was perspiration and the white man didn't know that but perspiration, was a thing they couldn't dry anything out so if there was any snow on your parkee, why they would brush it all off, and on your mukluks they'd brush it off and before they took it in because it'd thaw and that's the reason they like wolverine fur. Because it didn't gather moisture. When you'd breath, that moisture would get on it and it wouldn't settle on the wolverine furs. The only fur they knew of, or anybody knows of today I guess is the wolverine fur that will do that. Well they just didn't want anything damp and they wanted to get rid of all the damp that there was because, and then if you sweat, or got your underwear damp, sleep in it at night, why the next morning you put it on and go out and your apt to freeze to death. So that's the reason they slept without anything on so much.

00:02:09

It wasn't because they wasn't modest, wasn't because it was immoral, wasn't just ... but it was just the way to live, that's all. Another thing about them, so many white men got up there and got scurvy. Well the Eskimo never got scurvy. The reason was that when they'd kill an animal or any kind, or for instance a walrus, why the stomach was the prized thing of the walrus, that is, filled with shellfish and the like and caribou, if they got a caribou they would clean the meat, skin it out fine, just like you would kill it, clean it, then they would take the paunch and put it on top and they'd cut it open. Gotta just run down all through and around the meat while it was still warm then they'd let it freeze there. Well when they cooked it, why they just cooked that paunch and all and got the vitamins that the caribou had picked up. They done the same thing with ptarmigan. They eat the birds. When they got them, they'd clean them as you would, and then put the entrails in the bottom, the meat on top and boil 'er good and done and they had good soup and they had all the vitamins and that's the reason they didn't get the scurvy [delay as machined must have been turned off then turned on again].

00:03:36 [audio very raspy, Slim is too close to the microphone]

Now I [ever? Never] heard a white man say that they wouldn't eat any of their grub. Well you been [inaudible] civilized country you go to and [inaudible] civilized people. I never bought any, I just didn't care for it. But, well they'll say the white man washes it better than the Indian, maybe they do, I don't know, I never washed it and put it out. But [inaudible] but I was sit down way in the north some place and knew I had a year to go and had to make more livin' out the brush I kinda think I'd live like the Eskimo does. Now I come to near losing a partner one time that way because he was finicky. I was [inaudible] must have been near 25, he was just a kid and very, finicky, wouldn't even wash our frying pan, he'd wash and clean it when we cooked hot cakes in it next morning they'd stick. But I didn't mind him being clean but he liked to hunt rabbits, and birds, and we had .22 rifles was all we had. I warned him, I said save a box of shells to [inaudible] oh he would. That was alright. And he'd go out and get the birds, rabbits and we'd eat 'em and come time to go home, well he had no box of shells. He' just, had made a mistake that's all there was to it. So, we had to [inaudible] took what we had and started.

00:05:04 (part of this story can be found on p. 75-76)

We had to travel along the north side of the mountain range for about two days and half and then we went through the range to the south side where our cabin was. Well there was an Indian village about

four miles from the pass and we got there in about two days without anything to eat and had about three or four more to go and I decided I'd go by the Indian camp and maybe find some [inaudible] leads [inaudible], went by and sure enough they went out and snared rabbits and birds, had a big stew on. Well they, the Russians left copper kettles there, when they were there and we had some of them for a long time. And this was way they cooked in a copper kettle. I knew what was in the bottom of that kettle but I didn't way anything and we decided we'd eat maybe a couple of rabbit legs or something like that and rest for a hour or two, then eat some more and go on. So I'd pretty well put away my two rabbit legs and my partner had two and when we reached into the kettle and with a big horn spoon, we make a spoon out of sheep horn, straighten it out, boil it, makes up quite a spoon, but he reached in with his big spoon, when he drugged it out, why the spoon was just about two-thirds full of entrails and some hanging over the side, it was a kinda a nasty lookin' mess, this partner of mine seen it and boy he started for the door and was he sick.

00:06:34

Well I thought he was gonna die before I got him home but I was able to borrow a few shells from the Indians so we got a couple of rabbits but he'd look at the rabbits and he'd be a long time eatin' 'em. I did had quite a time getting that guy home I'm telling ya. [dead air in recording]

00:06:55

Well one day, I see my guy was about half my turn that I'd misjudged my grub for the distance and run outta grub before I got there. One day I was travelling across country with my dogs and early spring, quite a bit of snow on the ground, and it had been a year that the rabbits had died off. Well the dogs, they'd eat these rabbits under the trees, didn't seem to affect them much. And I knew, I'd been hungry enough to know how to [inaudible] it kinda sneaks up on ya after four, five, six days, why you begin to get awful weak and you just do about ten miles instead of thirty, you just don't get along that's all there is to it. And I knew I was getting to that, and I sighted up one of these rabbits layin' under a tree, still frozen of course, and I knew he'd died with a disease, I didn't know what it was but I said to myself, I'll just guess I'll eat one of them. So I got 'im and skinned 'im and got the hind quartered and the loin out, it looked alright and started cooking 'im. Well I just cooked and cooked and cooked to be sure all the germs gone and then I cooked 'im some more, just took me a quarter mile to make up my mind I was gonna eat that rabbit. But [inaudible] tasted al right and it sure did make a difference in the walkin' too I'll tell ya that. Next day or two I got a rabbit he might have been sick too for all I know but he wasn't so hard to eat as that dead one was. People just don't realize what they'll do, ratherin' than to die or get caught in a snow storm and freeze to death or something, they'll just go a long ways I'm tellin' you.

00:08:42

Now they talk about the virtue of the Indian and the Eskimo. I've heard a lot of people say ah, they got no morals at all. Well now I don't know about that. I've been among them people a lot and I find them in their own way pretty moral. One thing you don't find for a sure thing is a professional prostitute. They're just not there that's all. You might find a gal that, well, a little loose, that will have three or four boyfriends and not too particularly about her virtue but they've got a law for that too. Now, we will say that kind of a girl and she gets to the family way, why they think that she knows who done it. And she'll name the boy. Well the boy will just be tickled to death, he's the father of his own baby and a baby is what they want so he's just tickled to death to marrying the girl which is 100% alright far as I'm concerned.

Another thing, I've heard so much about the Eskimos tradin' women and givin' their women to somebody else to go on a trip, all of that kinda stuff. I've just never seen it that's all there is to it. Never

happened around where I was I'll tell ya that. They, it seems to me like it's alright for a girl to be a little loose but after a woman's married, why, it just don't go anymore as far as I've seen, as far as I've learned about 'em.

00:10:16

Now there's another thing that supposed, the Indians and Eskimos, or used to be, not today, their kinda got our ways now al little, but they used to be that if they would marry a woman and she was not pregnant, couldn't have a baby in three years, why they could take another woman. They didn't know that a man might be infertile too, they thought his woman fault if they didn't have a baby. So, well, they've quit that now of course but then that was alright too. They didn't take another woman unless they could support her, that was one of their laws.

And another thing that I've heard about the Eskimo is that they lock their old folks up in a bunch of rocks and seal them up and let them die. Well, I've never seen that either. But I'll tell ya what I have seen, I've seen a man of 30 not married because he had a mother or a father that he had to support and he couldn't support the mother and father and the wife too. So he just didn't get married that's all there was to it. It seems to me like they, the worst thing that one of them can do is what they call throw you momma or papa away. They just don't do that. When the folks get old, and they can't go hunt for themselves, why one of the boys, it don't seem make any difference which, it might be the youngest or the oldest but there seems the last one married, he's the one that's gotta take care of the old folks.
[dead air in recording]

00:11:55

Now Dick I'm gonna jump the gun on ya about six, seven years. And I had ten dogs and I was goin' up the Chitina River. I had six, er, five dogs that were about six years old and I had another five that were about eighteen months, of course I was breaking the leader and I figured on driving five dogs different lays on my trap line. I got up the Chitina and got me a cabin fixed up and all ready to go by the time the trappin' was ready. I'd come up the river on the shore ice and in some places it was frozen clear across but it wasn't good ice, I just travelled a lot on the shore. And, I figured on trappin' in the mountains so I went into the mountains and I'd always drive this young leader with my old leader because if you've got a dog drive 'im over a trail once, if he's any kind of a leader at all, why he'll go back over the same trail. So I'd drive my young leader along with my old one and guide my old one. I laid out about three good days high in the mountains for about half the time you'd be on snow and about the half the time you'd be on tundra and rocks and I just liked to trap in that high country. Well I was getting along fine and decided I would lay out another couple days up river, so I did. I laid out two days at one day up river and then above the river on a ridge I laid out another line coming back, and build the cabin, a lean to [end of recording].