

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-03
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:49
Original Media:	Dictabelts (red)
Digitized By:	Northeast Document Conservation Centre using IRENE method
Digitization Date:	December 2024
Narrator:	Clyde 'Slim' Williams
Interviewer:	It would appear that Richard 'Dick' Morenus gave Slim Williams the Dictabelt recorder and Slim is just telling stories into the machine by himself. Dick is not on the recording at all.
Others Present:	N/A
Recording Location:	Chicago, Illinois
Transcriber:	Leslie McCartney
Transcription Date:	December 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, sounds like he is far away from the microphone at times plus he drops his volume when talking making it hard to hear what he is saying.

(00:00:00)

Slim Williams: Boy, there I was lucky to [inaudible] and rided home, perfectly warm [inaudible]. Well I went downtown the next day or so and gee a fella [inaudible]. I think at that time I got [inaudible] but I got to thinkin' that I would maybe [inaudible] Sullivan or [inaudible] something and then this little bitty fella [inaudible] but I pulled him out anyway, I just didn't like that and [inaudible] my dog [inaudible] but [inaudible] and I called him a liar. Well he seemed to resent it, he just turned around, half a dozen fellas gathered there and he says, fellas if you want to see the snow [inaudible] just come by here at five o'clock he said that's just what I'm gonna do to this kid [inaudible] come down and see 'im. He said he's been too smart. Well I ought to finish there but five o'clock I showed up, boy, he must have told his buddies 'cause there's about fifty fellas around there. Well I wanted to finish it right now little bitty guy you know. I didn't want to [inaudible], but he insisted, insisted I got my parkee and coat off and I did, finally I walked over slapped at him but he wasn't there. He was just someplace else, and then he exploded. Boy, all I seen was just fists, once in a while I'd get a glimpse of a red head that hit at 'im but it wasn't there. Never did talk, he just played a deaf doing whatever [inaudible] to his face until he'd been all beat up, that's all there was to it. When I woke up, he was sitting straddling and rubbing snow in my face and said to me, well kid, he said, don't you think you better get hold and go home now and tell your momma you just don't know anything about life.

00:02:06 [recorder goes off and then dead air]

00:02:30 (audio louder now)

[inaudible] somethin' to eat, of course everybody in town heard about our troubles and lots of 'em come down to see us but one man come down and wanted the sled. You know we had three Smiths on that dog run between Fairbanks and Nome. We had Silent Smith, Windy Smith and Foghorn Smith. Well Foghorn was just what his name sounded like, he was small man. But when he talked, his voice just, oh boy, it just roared. Well, Windy Smith just never said a word, he just said the least of any man I ever knew but Silent Smith, you'd meet him on the trail and as far as you could see 'im he was talkin'. Far as you could see him the other way, he was talkin' I don't think he ever quit, I think when he got away from a man he talked to his dogs. That [inaudible] Swell guy he had a lot of interesting stuff to talk about. That Silent Smith, er Windy Smith was the one that wanted the sled. Well he had eighteen dogs and only one sled and a ton of stuff to go to Nome. He looked good to me, he really wanted to split the team so I got the job. I took nine dogs and he took ... I had my sled and he had one of his own. It was the last male, mostly male, had a little a little frame [inaudible] too. But thousand pounds was a piece with those nine dogs which [inaudible] lug at that time of the year [inaudible]. It meant it was a tough load. Well the trail was all just all bad, next mail would come down the river, boat, after the ice went out but this one was the last one to go on the ice. Well, we'd run into an overflow, we'd get our sled clogged up. Just full underneath, just looked like nothing [inaudible]. We'd double up our dogs and pull 'em out. We'd get into water, overflow, so deep that we just had to get up on the bank, miles we'd pull through the brush. Boy, it was just a tough ... And after ten days, we just wasn't half way to Nome, that's all there was to it.

00:04:47

We're just working to lots of daylight at that time. We just worked until our dogs and us would be plumb played out and then we'd just have to rest, maybe pull through the brush again or maybe get on the river, double of our dogs to pull out, boy it was a tough one I'm tellin' ya. But the eleventh day we was camped on the banks of the river, pullin' through the brush all day, and got in late, I was kinda dark, we couldn't see what the river was like. The next morning the river looked just fine and we pulled down onto the ice, started out believe me, one of those days that only the north can have, quiet, no wind, not

a sound, just silence for [inaudible] that's all it was to it. Well, all you could hear after we'd got on that ice was our sleds chuking [inaudible] on the ice, it wasn't slippery, the dogs had good footin' but you could even hear their toe nails scratching on the ice you know and Silent [inaudible], er Windy out in front and pretty soon he'd bursted into song. I've never heard such a song from that day 'til this. He's singin' the old folks at home, we always had a suspicion that he had had a quite a background in his day, he's always flaunt that ... we knew he was a well educated man but he just never told anything about himself. We, you, just don't ask questions up that's all there is to it especially in that day. But that song, he was just [inaudible] sounded like a [inaudible]. Given the atmosphere and everything, conditions [inaudible] but it was a beauty. Well, now use me ever tellin' anybody about it because they wouldn't believe it, 'cuz he just didn't talk. Now if I'm mushin' the dog team, why, or anybody well, you'll get to kiddin' your dogs and get out on the trails and tell 'im what nice dogs they are and how pretty their tail are and just get 'em along and first thing you knew he got a [inaudible]. Well, but not Windy, he just had a little whisper, didn't amount to anything, hardly hear himself, but that's about the only command he ever gives his dog was just that little whistle. Once in a while you'd hear him singing and it was so low the dog was about the only one could hear it.

00:07:22 (This story can be found in chapter 5 – p. 67 in the book)

Well anyhow you can understand that [inaudible] I just won't want to talk to you then. Well we got into Nome alright, quite a boom town, everybody glad to get their mail. I was wonderin' what I was gonna do, dogs are awful cheap, now in the spring of the year there dogs are cheap 'cuz you got to board them all summer. You either gotta go and feed them yourself or you got to hire an employee. Well it used to cost from seven half to ten dollars a month afford the dog somebody had start up a camp, catch fish and feed your dogs for you, pretty good gain too. But always in the fall of the year why the dogs were cheap, cheap to buy a new rig [inaudible] so Windy wanted sell me his nine dogs. I really didn't want that many I had ten dogs at least. I didn't want them really but I did buy five of them, five of the best [inaudible] I just kinda got stuck with 'em. But I got to muckin' around Nome there was talk here of jade. I knew a little about jade, not much. I'd heard about it but I had an Uncle that went to China, was a missionary one time, he brought back a little piece of raw jade. Well it always remember jade seemed to me it was worth \$1000 [inaudible] I didn't know much the price but [inaudible] they was expensive. The Eskimo used to make axes outta jade. I just about [inaudible] gee, this might be something so I got me a couple of bags [inaudible] couple of pounds of tea and a little sugar and I went out to meet an old Eskimo. Well, I tried talkin' to 'im. You know how you hear about this universal Indian language well I'll say this, just don't work up there. Just, I didn't know it [inaudible] but it don't work any. After you learn their language or they learn yours, then you taught 'im a sign language you get along pretty well but otherwise I just ... it just don't work for me that's all there is to it.

00:09:35

And I thought I'd do it pretty good. Anyhow, after quite a length of time, I got me a little [inaudible] in Nome what I wanted and where it was, I wanted to know where it was for me and that map was just a pip, that's all there was to it, every crook in that river, every bend, every place that I was any trees or brush he had it drew on that map. You just couldn't go wrong, that's all there as to it. And I went lookin' for the jade. Well I wound up on the Kobuk River way up and I knew when I got there that the map told me that, that was all there was to it. The time I got there why snow had all gone and there was still some ice on the river. Well I got my sled there too. I knew ... I'd picked up a piece of jade before I got there and boy I had [inaudible]. I made a camp that night, rolled up in my little rabbit robe and thinking gee, now I'm a long ways from a human being I just wondered how far it is, five or six hundred miles anyhow. Went to sleep feelin' that way. Well I woke up the next morning and just layin' there kinda [inaudible] wasn't awake, wasn't asleep and my dogs was loose of course. I heard the dog howl. Boy I was on my

feet in just a minute. One went off [inaudible] got lost no doubt and when I got to my feet well my dogs all there and they're all looking all very much surprised to see me come out from under that rabbit robe so quick. I thought gee, maybe I'd just been dreamin' that. I couldn't quite figure it out and all the dogs are surely been [inaudible]. I stood around a few minutes feelin' foolish and I guess two dogs lookin' at me. Pretty soon I heard it again, just over the hill wasn't no distance, I guessed over two or three miles, a dog howled again. Oh boy, that was somethin' a dog mighta got lost and got up in there, a little one, [inaudible] the wolf hound. Anyhow, I got myself some breakfast right quick and told my dogs to stay home and they did and took my rifle and I started over. Well I got on top of the ridge and right down below there was a little tent, not a quarter of a mile away. And I went down and of course he had some dogs too, he had six. And his dogs are all up on their feet, waggalin' their tails and they wasn't makin' as much noise of course and was in the tent, smoke coming' [inaudible] and I walked up an hollered at 'im. He stuck his head out the door and let [inaudible] out of him, I didn't think there was another man within a thousand miles of me. What the devil you doin' here? Well, we got to be pretty good friends. He was lookin' for gold, I was lookin' for jade. He didn't want nothin' to do with jade at all but boy, there was lots of it there.

00:12:43

It was just every place, just lots of it. I don't know, thousands of tons of it. Well I knew jade was jade I didn't know how much it was worth, I didn't know. But anyhow I figured that was my fortune. He went on, he kept on lookin' for gold and me lookin' for jade and finally got interested together. So finally, I got my ready to go back home and back to Nome, I'd build me a canvas boat, I'd tore my sled to pieces 'cuz I couldn't get it down and used all the long pieces for frames in the boat, gathered up some willows for my bows, I had a dandy boat made. Put my canvas on it. I'd got a bear and I used the grease to put on the bottom on the canvas, not leak at all, just a honey. And I was a particular good river man, or I thought I was. I thought white water wouldn't matter, amount much to me I had it licked anyhow [end of recording].