

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-11
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:12:41
Original Media:	Dictabelts (red)
Digitized By:	Northeast Document Conservation Centre using IRENE method
Digitization Date:	December 17, 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 18, 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.

(00:00:00)

Slim Williams: I didn't know this for six or seven years afterwards what had happened but it seemed to me like all the bullies around town picked on me. I didn't know why, I didn't know why I was picked on. I didn't wanna fight, I was convinced I wasn't gonna be a prize fighter but one day one of 'em went just too far and I landed on 'em. And I done a swell job, I had just licks hit and I hit him and he hit the ground

and that was that and I thought, well now, I guess I won't be bothered again but the more prominent bully he got ta pickin' on me and well, finally I had to fight him and that fight didn't last much longer and I won. Gee, I was just lucky, that's all. But I learned about, oh, a long time after that, fella told me that I gotta [inaudible] so they thoughts you were that guy inside that had such a reputation for bein' a bad man and that was the reason. And he wanted to know really, he said ain't you the man? Well I wasn't of course and I never even knew 'em but I got the blame for it. [dead air from 00:01:05 until 00:01:22]

00:01:22

A lot of people might wonder why there isn't more dates in this but I'll just give ya a little idea. A friend and I was way up on the Chitina one year and while I got up and we had horses and we was waitin' for the boat to come up. And then save our horses a lot and save us a lot and we knew that was the best way out into the trail get you through rough country, you had to go over a big mountain. So we decided to wait for the boat. Well, we was away there about three or four days waitin' for the boat to come along, we knew it was comin' eventually but I ... one thing I got up and I carved my initials on a birch tree, nice big white birch and I cut my initials and cut the date 1907 and my partner looked up and he said, Slim you're wrong, he said 1908. Oh no, it's 1907 don't you know this happened, and this happened and so on. I like ... golly he said I guess you're right, it is 1907 he said I think it's 1908 but, so he got up and he carved his initials too. Well when the boat come along why the captain told us, yes, it was 1908, there's no question about it. [dead air from 00:02:33 to 00:02:36]

00:02:36

That fall there was ... I got a letter from a man in Cordova and it was to the effect that I was to hire sixteen men to go in on the Copper and cut wood. Well that was all right, I was to be foreman. At one camp I was to be in charge of the outfit goin' over the summit headed over the [inaudible], tough one at that, nobody ever went over there much and one outfit I believe before and then was givin' up for a long time and we tackled it. Well we had thirteen horses and twenty-one of us in the outfit and we started. We had double enders for light work and then we had sets of bobs to take over to haul wood out onto the lake, onto the river. It was a tough one they was bettin' that we wouldn't make it but we did. And we had plenty of trouble too.

00:03:34

But the boss, he had written me in his letter he said hire a couple if you can for your cooks. He said I've got a woman hired for my cook and he said she might be nice for her to have company well I never thought anything about it so I hired a young couple, nice young couple, they was perfectly able to do the cookin' and but got out on the trail and the old lady got to havin' dreams. She was somewhat of a fortune teller, a spiritualist, I don't know what she was but she had dreams about things happenin'. Well now I'm kinda neutral on that. You know, I used to drive into a Indian camp one time, used to go there a lot to trade and there was an old fella there he called himself Cheese John. He couldn't say Chief so he said Cheese John. Well, I've come into that camp and the fellas say oh yes, we knew you was comin' well how did you know I was comin'? Oh, Chief John told us. He had those kinda spells and he was ... and if someone was kinda outta luck huntin' why he'd tell 'em where they'd go find something to shoot, moose, caribou, sheep or somethin'. And about nine times out of ten he was right and if a man didn't get it, why he raised the devil of them. He knew it was there and he was just a poor hunter if he got it that's all there was to it. Well I got so interested in ... now of course John got a quarter if you went out and gotta a moose where he told you was ... well you owed him a quarter of it which is alright. He was about eighty I think, he old fella, he didn't hunt much. But anyhow I got so interested in his way of life that I ask him one day, I said John, where can I go get a moose? Well by golly he told me and I went and I got a moose. And another time I was in there I ask him for a sheep. He told me, I went and got sheep. Of

course I give 'em a quarter, that's alright with me. But he had something, I didn't know what it was and that's all there was to it.

00:05:39

So I can't deny that old lady had somethin' and she did it right too whereas we got on the [inaudible] one night and well, two different times, we used to dig her a hole, that snow was deep, and we'd dig a hole down, we had long poles lay across that hole in the snow of course and then we'd put canvas over it and our horses would really be underground. And we'd be in that place a week or ten days while we relayed ahead. One night the wind come up and blowed our sleepin' tent away. Well all us fellas had to go down and stand up around the horses but didn't dig a hole in the back end and crawl in there but we put in one miserable night and next day about noon we got ... wind kinda let up and we fixed our tent up but the old lady had a dream about that, that somethin' was gonna happen, the tent's gonna blow away. Another time we was startin' out to break trail ahead and she just raised Cain. Oh, she said I see water, I see a horse with his leg broke, she said don't go. Well, we couldn't pay much attention to it so we went on and sure enough, we broke a horse's leg and right beside 'em was some water. Isn't that kinda an odd setup I tell ya it was, but anyhow we got into the [inaudible] and made fun of her. There was one fella kinda hung around her and listened to her dreams but he wanted to be foreman, he woulda been I guess if it hadn't a been that the boss knew that all the boys had left if I did 'cuz they didn't like this dude, but anyhow, we got into where we supposed to and train was supposed to have all of our provisions for summer and horse feed, everything there, and when we got to it there wasn't a thing.

00:07:22

I dunno know whether the railroad's fault or the old gals fault or the boss or who it was but anyhow there was nothin' there. We had to break out. Well I would shoot a horse, boy that hurt me. Well, I decided I'd go up river. I had three dogs and we took them along to go back and get mail things like that. Well, I started upriver, all the rest of 'em started down [inaudible] the boss, he was goin' downriver hauling the old lady on a sled by the neck. But we started out when they was five of us, made quite a load. And had this young couple with us and the first night we got into a tent, and of course we knew all knew where it was, so we went in there and the wind blowed to beat the devil for two, three days and we couldn't get out and oh boy did we get lousy [louse bugs] when there's no place to get rid of 'em that's all there was to it. We had to take 'em right along with us. There is a way to kinda protect yourself a little when it's really cold why just pull off your shirt and ... or underwear, and lay it out in the cold and let 'em freeze and then shake 'em and they just shake out of your underclothes like rice. So that helped a little bit but it didn't get rid of 'em. Bit we got out alright one [inaudible] dogs blowed away and was gone overnight and have to dig 'em up the next day but we got out after a lot of trouble and decided that we'd straight sued for our wages, we had a quiet a bit of money comin' all of us. And, so we started a suit, got a lawyer and of course the boss is right along with us and it went along fine until the boss come up missing, he was just gone, nobody knew anything about him nobody knew where he was, nobody knew a thing about 'em. Well, we decided that the other railroad company had just paid him off and got rid of him and he's left and left all us in a lurch.

00:09:24

Well some of the fellas sure swore they'd kill 'em if they'd ever seen him and others swore they'd beat him to death, I never said anything but I'm glad I didn't meet 'em for the next ten years because I mighta done something I was sorry for because I ... shootin' those horses and the way those men worked for me and the way we got along it was ... pretty hard to take for a man to just sell out on ya and leave ya a foot, that's all there was to it. Well, I run across that fella about ten years afterwards, I didn't recognize him at all, he come up to me on a pair of crutches and he said Slim, do ya know me? I said no you look

familiar but I can't place ya. Well, when I knew him he was a man about a 6'2", weighted about 225, he was just a bull moose that's all there was to it. Well this day I don't think he weight 120, he had arthritis, and on crutches and boy he was the most pitiful thing I ever seen in all of my days.

00:10:31

His toes was turned up, and his leg was crooked, he couldn't hold onto his crutches with his hands hardly and he was broke. Well, I give him a twenty dollar bill. I figured that he just been punished a plenty and I figured that just didn't want to [inaudible] [00:10:49 until 00:10:57]

00:10:57 (this next story appears on pages 97-98 of the book)

He just don't learn everything in that country at once but of course I was just lucky and didn't get caught in a lot of things but I was trappin' one winter with a little fella, nice little guy, good trapper and clean, he was just fine and we decided that some moose come along. We needed meat. Now we didn't make any difference how much meat you had because when spring come we'd dry it and get along with it fine. So, at least two moose we decided to go after 'em and we hiked out. Well we runna about, tracked 'em about ten, fifteen miles, run into 'em long towards the evening and shot 'em. Well, we had skinned them and got part of the meat hanging up and we retired and had a good fire built and then come time to go to bed he said geez, I'm gonna use this skin so he just wrapped it around him, laid down and rolled over and over and over and it dropped down on both ends, he was a small man. And, I kinda curled up on the oven and slept by the fire and kept the fire up that night and next morning he was a hollerin'. And I went over to him and what's the matter? He says I can't get out.

00:12:09

There he was frozen in that moose skin just as stiff as board. I had to roll it up to the fire and got it thaw it out and pull on it and kick on it and finally got 'em out. But if I hadn't a been there that fella woulda just froze to death that's all there was to it. He couldn't have done anything else because, well those are the kinda things that you learn and accidently get out of. If he'd been alone he'd have never got out but I just happened to be there made a difference. [end of recording]