

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-12
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:47
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 19, 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: [recording starts mid-sentence] let 'em suck the pup's mother but I would cook some salmon for the pups, and fed it to 'em in gold pan and this little fox got to be so much more active, they's about the same age, but that fox was so much more active that he'd stand in the door with me and he knew I protected 'em. But I was a little leery about the mother, so was he. But he'd watch them

[inaudible] be around that gold pan eatin' and he'd light out there and jump all among 'em, he'd just kick in all directions and whinin' and back [inaudible]. Well I had more fun with that fox. He'd get up on the table, he'd get everyplace. Well I got to slappin' him for gettin' up on the table. And then he'd get up on my lap and he'd reach over with this paw so he could see what there was on the table. And, as he growed he got more interesting I'd go up [recording stops then starts] and as he growed he got more interesting and I'd go out in this, on the trail, and I'd send him back, I'd make 'em go back home, I didn't want him follow me after he got bigger and I didn't want him to follow me I just afraid somethin' would happen to the little fella. But, he got so he'd sneak through the brush and maybe he'd come to me four, five miles out in the brush and he'd come to me just like a dog would that you'd whipped 'em. He knew he'd done wrong you know, but he knew if come to me way out in brush I wouldn't send him back and he'd follow me all day.

00:01:28

He just made a marvelous pet that's all there was to it. And you know that fall, we got in our boat and took off down the river and left bear, bear gots so big that one of 'em hold up under the cabin that winter and he just raised Cain all winter. The snorin' and gruntin' and groanin', the other one hold up out under the tree you didn't notice him but you'd [inaudible] hear him groanin' too. But we trapped all that winter and had to tie our fox up a lot because he'd get in a trap but anyhow in the spring I got in my boat and we sailed off down the river. The fox chased us for quite a bit, bear didn't pay any attention to us. But the bear got so big it was kinda dangerous. They had, didn't mean to be, but they was just so strong and rough that we was afraid they'd break and arm or something. But, anyhow we was through with that trottin' country anyhow and we got in our boat and went off and left 'em. The fox chased us for several miles down the river, he quit, but you know, it's a funny thing, that fall I was comin' through that country with my dogs on the ice, early in the spr... fall and a little snow come just as I was comin' to this cabin. I was drivin' to stay there all night. And I stayed all night and next morning I got up and there was a fox track all around that cabin, he was up on the edge of the roof, he just been every place. I know it was my fox but of course I didn't get to see 'em but an awful interesting [dead air from 00:03:00 to 00:03:03]

00:03:03

[Slim is too close to the microphone at first] Sushana Stampede [inaudible] worked all summer to see what there was. There was six fellas that belonged in Slate Lake and we all gathered at the river before we got there, there was about sixty miles on the Slate Lake in the [Selina River?] and we was only about ten miles below the glacier. Well we got in the two or three at a time and all those had a little something to eat but none of us had much. Some didn't have any really. But, we had to wade because it was ... the river was just a boilin' we'd been madness to go in because you'd have probably lost somebody. So we decided to wait till morning and up close to those glaciers along, oh, anytime after noon you got pretty well up, and by night their just a boilin' but about five o'clock in the morinin' when you're close to the glacier that way the nights come on and quit thawin' so bad and river will drop sometimes three, four or five feet, drop a lot and make it pretty safe. So we decided all the wading and they caught up one at a time [inaudible] come in and all of us talkin' about grub of course and we decided we'd put all of our grub together and cook something. Some had bakin' powder, some had a little raisins, some had a little rice and some had a little flour and none of 'em had enough for a good feed and all those put together, why, give us a fairly good feedin' and make the other sixty miles without any trouble. So we dumped it out and we had a can that we had to cook in and flour in one, bakin' powder and rice and everything in different cans. Sittin' around there and a couple of fellas got to arguin' about Germany. And they got in a fight. And they got in a fight right over our grub. They just scattered this all over the country I'm tellin' you it was a mess when we got through we just didn't about didn't have anything to eat for anybody.

Well that's just what people do when their irritated you know all tired, you know how it is. [dead air from 00:05:23 to 00:05:27]

00:05:27

The year or two prior to this I'd built a fish wheel on the Upper Copper, first one ever built it just at Chistochina, they'd never seen one before. They'd always stood on a little platform and dip their fish out with a basket about eighteen inches long and fish would begin to get kinda scare, the cannery was catchin' a lot of 'em. And they wasn't doin' so well. So I wanted fish for my dogs that winter and I was gonna trap again in the Wrangell's and so I put in a fishwheel. Well they was pretty skeptical about that fishwheel and they had it watch and didn't help me much but they'd all watch and chatter and comment about it and they couldn't figure out anything but a man is goin' catch fish. Well I had the best luck. When I let that thing down, the first dip that turned over, it caught two salmon. Well from that on it just fished to who [inaudible] in all but I tell ya, the man does the fishin' and the women cut the fish and dry 'em. So I had a cinch, the women would get the fish out of the fishwheel, they'd cut 'em up and dry 'em, all I had to do was just keep my fishwheel goin'. I supplied the whole camp with fish and when I got through that year I just had plenty of fish too. And so did the old chief Nicholi was his name.

00:06:47

And he decided that ... that dog teams was just altogether gettin' for his status in life and he better get a horse. So long towards fall he bought himself a horse. Well I never thought about the old fella but you know he had horse tied to a manger and had the manger full of fish. He had lots of fish. Well somehow the horse didn't eat fish every good and consequently the horse died that winter. He couldn't figure one out but we had quite a time over that fish. Well then you know they'd tell about a man goin' wild. Well here's a thing that happened to me. I knew a feller runnin' a post there very well but he hadn't seen a white man now for three or four, maybe five months and I come through there with two horses packed and just about a cabin was an old barn and his tradin' post, and you could ... good grass there, the sun was warm and he wasn't home. So I went on past the cabin and went up to the old barn, unsaddled my horses and turned 'em loose, and one of them had a little bell on and it was about a hundred yards from there over to the river and a trail run down the river. And I was leaning up against the barn about half asleep and I see this fella's legs as he's walkin' lookin' under the brush, comin' down and he's heard this bell and he stopped.

00:08:26

And he kind squatted down and looked, I was sittin' right still. And he looked for just about a two seconds and he started to run. And just run like the devil I could see his legs goin' peggin' down the road. But you know that man was just really wild that was all there was to it. Now I went down to his cabin and about a half hour later he's plumb alright, never said a word about runnin' but it might surprise you in civilized life how easy a man can go wild. Now I've been wild. I've been in a cabin and I see a man coming and I've just felt like running. I knew I was wild, I ... just a man knows that that lives like that. He's just get wild and that's all there is to it. He, most of us has the presence of mind to control it but that fella didn't. He just had to run that's all there was to it. [dead air from 00:09:22 to 00:09:26]

00:09:26

You know sometimes there was things doin' life ain't exactly fair. But, there was a man by the name Curry [?] at Copper Center my first trip into the Wrangell Mountains. I was goin' in after some sheep he said ah, Slim he said, pretty tough in there he said, I've been in there, pretty tough to get them sheep he says, I don't think you'll make it but he said go ahead. Well, it was spring before I got back out and I killed a nice big ram and laid 'im out on the ... took his antlers off, laid out like you do to let 'em drain,

and belly down and when I went back I ... went down the glacier to camp, when I went back next morning he's froze, just as stiff as you please you know. And he was froze in a perfect position. His hind legs stretched straight out behind him, one foot stickin' up and the other one a little bit bent. So I just cut some holes in the ice and put a rope on him and got him up on this hind legs and my partner took my picture standin' there with that ... it looked like I'd roped the sheep and he'd took a run and he just rared up and just about to fall over backwards. Well I never said a word about that picture. I just took it over and I left it on the desk at McCleary's [?]. And he must have found it because several times after that why I've had fellas say to me Slim, I heard you're roped a big ram over in the Wrangell's one time, tell us about it. Well I never told 'em about it but that old fella he always thinks that I roped that ram I believe.

00:11:02

Now the Indians, about that Wrangell country, you know that ... I think I told ya about three men goin' up there and seeing the ghost and dyin' well, there's something strange, now they used to tell about a snake in there along with a Bush Engine and a Little Man there was a terrific big snake. To hear 'em describe him by he looked like a boa constrictor or something. I just makes you wonder if they ... those tales hasn't come down since Alaska was tropical, if they wasn't there when Alaska was tropical and those things just come down from generation to generation but they describe a snake, there's no snakes in Alaska, and they'd never seen one I know that so how the devil could they describe a snake? They even described him about gettin' up in the tree and catchin' a man. And then chokin' him to death. They had the idea exactly of a boa constrictor, can't figure it out. Another thing about 'em the big flat country. Now they're always talkin' about the big flat country, that's the home of the Little Man. He hangs around Wrangell a lot but when he goes home he goes to the big flat country. Now the only big flat country I know of Dick, this is where you is, over in Canada, and that's about two thousand miles across two mighty tough ranges. I imagine that two or three months, maybe more to get there would be awful good goin' yet they talk about that big flat country over there all the time. You know it's most decidedly mountainous where I was. But they still seem to have some idea, or know something, about that big flat country. It's the same thing about the Eskimo. You know he's never seen a mastodon. Yet, he carves perfect mastodon on ivory.

00:13:07

I ... there's just some things to think about that always has interested me and I just wonder why, how much is really dream or how much is what they remember or been told from generations back. [dead air from 00:13:25 to 00:13:27]

00:13:27

You know how they'll help a man if he's sick up there, well I come into Gulkana one spring. The road was open, you go kinda down to the coast and but from Gulkana north, it wasn't. It had thawed and [end of recording]