

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-13
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:	January 29, 2025
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: [he starts talking mid-sentence] went down to the coast and ... but from Gulkana north it wasn't, it had thawed enough so they were spots on. Well, I'd got in four or five hours before and I got a call from Sourdough, that's twenty miles up the trail from a man by the name of Norwood, he was in trouble. It was an Indian, now there was a man trapping up above Sourdough about twenty miles, he

hadn't caught much of anything but he had ... he was trappin'. I think he was from the Balkans states, he talked quite broken, but a big man weighed I'd say 180 pound, heavy set, and real dodge, I've always guessed he was Balkan but I had a phone, been phoned down and Norwood wants somebody to come and help 'em. They had an Indian come in from this fella's camp and told him at Sourdough that this fella had shot himself in belly with a .22 rifle. Well, Norwood, good hearted devil, he's always doin' somethin', he only had three little dogs, but he dug out and he went and get that fella.

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Got twenty miles up there and twenty miles back and he hadn't stopped. He had just bulled things through and when he got to ... back to Sourdough he was just in and so was his dogs so he phoned down to Gulkana, was anybody there that could come and help 'em. We couldn't get a [inaudible] but I was there with my dogs. I had mine ... dandy dogs, wild devils or when you got 'em on the trail and lots of rabbits. But, yes, I'd come up and get 'em. Well, he says I'll go on, come on as best I can and meet ya. Well there was bare spots, maybe twenty feet on the road and then you'd maybe have a quarter of a mile of snow and hit a bare spot again. I was goin' out, the rabbits along, dog would see 'em and they'd run. I made pretty good time, got to Norwood about a mile out of Sourdough stuck on a snow drift, dogs tied. Well, this fella shot in the belly, it was pretty bad. Norwood had been awful careful get in on the sled and get things all stirred up inside but when I met 'em he said now Slim he said I think that if you can hook onto my sled behind yours, 'cuz you got lots of power, and he said we won't have to move this man, he said I'm just afraid to move 'em 'cuz he said he'd just mix things all up inside and I was quite agreed with him. So, I went a rope from my handlebars back to the front of his sled. He said my dogs will keep up if yours will pull the load.

00:02:46

So I tied my sled onto him, I had a rope onto his sled and tied the rope onto my sled so I had about six or eight feet between me and his dogs. And we started back. Well of course we wanted to hurry all we could, didn't want to be delay things, man shot like that and he was groanin', he was in awful bad fix, we figured he might kick all before we got 'em in. But anyhow, goin' back, sometimes I ride and sometimes I wouldn't, well hit them good places where there's snow and my dogs would pick up speed. Boy, we'd bet goin' twenty miles an hour and hit one of them bare places. We'd slow up but boy, fire would fly from out from under them runners I'm tellin' ya. Well we got him on the Gulkana alright. They had a truck there, a little light truck all fixed up ready to take 'em when we got there and we just loaded this 'L' sled right into the truck because we didn't want to move him, we're just afraid to, and the truck pulled out with him. Well he got into the same doctor that took care of me when I frosted my lungs and he was gone about a week and he come back. Well the doctor told him that if that bullet had just got under the skin that was about all and when he got there well he just picked it out with a pair of tweezers and put a little iodine on it, he sent him back. It had been a so dang careful not to jar things up and here he wasn't jarred at. But, what he had done, he'd shot a cari ... a spruce hen and broke its wing. And he didn't want to waste another shot so he just took his rifle by the barrel mind you and tried to catch the spruce hen and the gun went off and just shot 'em in the belly, that's all there was to it. [dead air from 00:04:38 to 00:04:46]

00:04:46

Somebody called Little Bear and the fourth of July come along and they decided they'd drive the bear and [inaudible] oh he's just this tame little black bear, climb a tree like a rabbit, you heard it, like a squirrel and they had two dogs in the parade and this bear in the lead and a fella of course walkin' along in the front and bear was followin' 'em. Just a joke for a parade that's all. Well this darn bear got scared of somethin' and he started up a telegraph pole. Well he got the two dogs off the ground and by that

time it's just too much for 'em and he had to slip and come back. But they got a picture of that bear up the a tree and dogs hangin' after him. Well, that ... the one of the dance hall bear took the bear as a pet and they had it on the chain out back of the dance hall. And that bear made more money for the saloon than the men did. He loved beer. Oh boy he just liked beer. And fellas would buy a beer and take it out and give him well he'd drink five gallons I believe but that bear would get just drunk as man. Oh boy, he'd get drunk. He's gets a drunk he couldn't get up. Good natured thing, never bothered anybody, just have the best time when he was drunk, he'd just play and kick up his heels until he got too much.

00:06:06

And when he got too much and got off his feet why he'd lay on his back and reach out his hands or anybody comin' graaa graaa graaa and he'd just groan and grunt and holler want more beer. But that was the drunkenest bear I think I ever seen. [dead air from 00:06:22 to 00:06:30]

00:06:30

Here is just some scrapes I'm getting' off to ya Dick. There was a man by the name of Johnston, now there's the dirtiest pig that ever landed and played on a medicine man but he had some oats in 'em. And the oats wasn't doin' good, it was awful dry. And said to this medicine man he said I'll give you five dollars if you'll make it rain. Well sir you know that old fella put on his gear and he went out on them mountains, around the hills or high bluffs round the place and he's mourned and he howled and wailed and in about three days it rained like the devil. But ya know that fella just never did give 'em that five dollars, I thought that was the dirtiest trick ever I seen play on an Indian.

00:07:13

Well there was a little Frenchman up there too, he did manage to read and write but that was about all but his idea of weather was really good. And you see we had ... gulf stream on the coast, Japanese current, and we had the high mountains that was all snow and for some reason the wind blew upriver all summer like the devil. Then when winter come it'd blowed all the well this little Frenchman come by my place one time and he said Slim, you better look out she's goin' be a tough winter. I said how do you figure that out Frenchy? Well he said this wind all blowing upriver he says she's gotta come back. [dead air from 00:07:57 to 00:08:02]

00:08:02

[Slim starts again with is mouth too close to the microphone] Here's something that is interesting I was over in the Robinson River one time and I was prospecting and I went high in the mountains and I see some sheep and I ... easy to crawl, big rocks, and I crawled up behind them rocks 'til I got within about a hundred yards of these sheep. They was all ewes and shoulda had lambs. But they didn't and ... so one of 'em turned and walked right straight towards me for about half the distance, it wasn't over twenty-five yards from me and laid down and had a lamb. Well, I watched it until I was tired of watchin' and I said well, guess I'll go home so I got up and this ewe's close enough so I heard her let a little grunt out of her. That lamb got up and he was just a wild as a deer, tried to catch 'em but I couldn't. Well I thought then now the others had lambs just below on the bluff, I'll go down and look at it and I went down and looked around and sure enough, I run on two little lambs. Well they jumped up, now they didn't have no mother to warn them you see, they jumped up and they was around my feet and legs just a gruntin' and a tryin' to find something to nurse on you know and I monkeyed around with 'em for a little while and finally decided I wanted to get rid of 'em and you know I had to climb over a rock so high that they couldn't get over and go down a [dead air from 00:09:30 to 00:09:33]

00:09:33 [Slim is very far away from the microphone and hard to hear at the start then he moves closer to the microphone]

You know the Wrangell's is an active volcano. One winter we was up there and the darn thing blew up. Smoke poured out of it and went it cleared off why, about oh, musta been a couple of thousand feet down the mountain, was just black. So I and my partner went up to see it, kinda lookin' for the Little Man too but no, it looked kinda like a dust bore than anything else but it was really dark and thing never blew up in a big way while we was there but we kinda expected to sometimes. [dead air from 00:10:10 to 00:10:14]

00:10:14

[Radio music then Slim comes back but again starts far away from the microphone making it hard to hear him]. I tell you [inaudible] just don't forget. I run across a man [inaudible] he was about twenty-five had black and kinda wavy hair. He had a pair of gray eyes that looked right through you. Above the right eye he was [inaudible] kinda looked cockeyed. He looked like he was gonna burst into a smile any minute but he seldom did. When he did, he had a sort of a crooked smile. He given a [inaudible] you just couldn't forget that look. Best thing about him was his actions, he was just like a cat, I'd never seen anybody act more like a cat [inaudible]. Just when he walked and every muscle was [inaudible]. Nothing to see him down hand springs or cartwheels or [inaudible]. [dead air from 00:11:15 to 00:11:32]

00:11:32

[Slim has the microphone closer now]. He didn't talk much but I did learn that he was a lumberjack and a river rat. Just didn't see him anymore after I got outta the boat. I come into Fairbanks and not many cabins so I put out my dogs and pitched my tent. It was Graehl at that time, a part of Fairbanks now. Well I was a foolin' around thought I just as well go downtown and see some bright lights. The places there was a gamblin' hall, a saloon and a dance hall, it was a regular honkytonk. And as I opened the door and walked in, right in front of me was my cockeyed friend. He was crouched for a fight, bent over, looked more like a panther than ever, and they was three pimps tryin' to get at 'em. Well now we used to consider two pimps and white man was a fair fight and ... but three was just too many. We generally butted in then. Well those fellas was standin' with their back to me or rather sideways. They didn't look around because you just don't look around when a panther's in front you about to spring. Well I swung right and hit one in the jaw and just turned and hit the other one and they went down just like a bunch grease drop in a hot fryin' pan. My cockeyed partner stepped over one of 'em and out the door and we closed it. I don't think it was over three seconds from the time I open the door until we had it closed and out and gone again. [dead air from 00:13:17 to 00:13:26]

00:13:26

[Slim starts out again very far away from the microphone and is hard to hear and sounds like he is mid-sentence]. ... done the same thing to be under the same circumstances but my cockeye partner and I we headed into the brush and he had a cabin. It wasn't over a hundred yards more from where my camp was. He invited me to move and I did [inaudible]. Boy, there I was lucky kid again and [end of recording].