

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-14
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:13
Original Media:	Dictabelts (red)
Digitized By:	Northeast Document Conservation Centre using IRENE method
Digitization Date:	February 14, 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: [starts mid-sentence] I'm just gonna try to gab a little while and maybe it'll be worthwhile to ya. But ya know when I was a kid and got old enough to go to school, a lotta Indian kids around and I was in was interested in them kids because they were different from me, I didn't know why and they know all about wildlife and I wanted to. So if I could get my bow and arrow and sneak out in the woods

with them instead of goin' to school I'd always do it. And that I guess is the reason that I've lived like I did all my life. Now when I went north of course wildlife and Indians was still interesting to me. And, I'm goin' tell ya about the dogs there but I wanna tell ya a lot first. Now, course when we first went there why you'd readin' the books and a fella say oh, that Eskimo dog is part wolf because he don't bark. Well, at the same time I'd heard wolves bark and never heard the Husky bark and not like a Pomeranian he don't yap yap like that but he barks when there's an occasion. So I knew that is wrong and as I found out things was wrong I wanted to find out what right.

00:01:11

Now about the Eskimo, all of his legends and everything that you'd learn about 'im he's going south. Now, for instance, the Nebesnas, their ... they've got a legend where they come all one winter up the Tanana from the Yukon way up into the mountain there and then they crossed over. And, from that tribe why the whole Copper River is populated. Now, that's their legend. Well now, among those Indians clear to the lower Copper, you'll find kids that you know are or think is Eskimo. Now you get among those Eskimos around Point Barrow and see them kids a playin' you'd say well, they're Japanese or Chinese, your just sure of it. The grown-ups don't show it so much but the kids do. Well now you get away down on the Cooper River and you'll see kids there and you'll say well by gee, they like Chinese or Japanese. So that is one indication that makes me believe like I do.

00:02:15

Another one is that jade that I told you about, that Craft got up Prince Edward Island and my jade from Point Barrow is just the same according to his idea. And his idea is good enough for me. And then along in 1900, there was a bunch of Eskimos left north of Nome and started out and they mushed all winter and wound up in the big bend in the Yukon, oh, I dunno, close to 1000 miles I think. But all of 'em seemed to be, everything that ya know and learn about 'em, their traveling south. Well, that's what I've got ... how I've got the dog figured out. Now, you'll go, they call the ones that the Eskimos have the Siberian Husky. Well now science I believe has decided that the Siberian Husky come from Siberia 2000 years ago as a domestic dog. Well, I ... we'll just take a look at those Siberian Huskies, most of 'em are blue eyed. Sometimes you'll see one with a blue eye and black eye. And once in a while two black eyes but so many of 'em of blue eyed. But they'll be a grey, and a brown, and a black, and a white, spotted or [inaudible] or what have you. And I've seen ... there's a bunch on a ... above Nome at a village mind you and they and look like they have spectacles on. Funny lookin' bunch, brown, but every village had what I'd call a strain of dogs, all over the country was a strain of dogs. And in different Indian villages there would be different marked dogs but all actin' the same. All with that curly tail, curled up over their back, the big shoulders, everything that the Husky is.

00:04:15

Now we'll travel down to the Yukon. There they call them Malamutes or Huskies and they was a grey, pretty much a grey, there was some white on 'em, yes, some black on 'em occasionally a but mostly grey and the most had a grey eye. Well now the Siberian Husky, the early days, 50 pound, was a big one. He was a dandy. When you to the Malamute or lower Yukon Husky, why he'd weight as much a 65-70 pound. Now when you got over on the Mackenzie, he was a big bruter. I had Mackenzie Husky that weighed 125 pound, well that's a terrifically big dog. But, they was also a grey dog but still all of 'em with that big shoulders, curly tail, spiked ears, all of 'em built and act and everything just the same. Now I run across a strange thing, talk about migration, at Telegraph Creek. When I was comin' out of the dogs. They have a dog there, typical Husky, the spike ears, the curly tail, the big shoulders, everything, but he won't weight over 15-20 pound. Funny little fella. They call 'em hunt dogs. And they use 'em to

hunt with. And they'll stop the biggest moose or bear that comes along. Little bitty fellas though. Where they come from I don't know but I believe from the Husky but I'm not sure.

00:05:51

Another thing I wanta tell you Dick before.. in case I might forget it, while I was coming into Telegraph Creek, I'd run into an Indian camp and stop and there was a white woman there. Now she was typical Indian every way you could imagine except she had red hair and a freckled face. And of course her hands was white and body I supposed she was married to an Indian, had a family. And I couldn't help but notice her, I just couldn't get my eyes offa that woman. She was so different in looks from the others. Her accent was just exactly the same. She was sittin', tanning a moose hide, just the same as any of 'em, squattin' on the ground. Well, when I got into Telegraph Creek I got to inquire about her and they told me there that during the '98 stampede that there was a woman come through there and she had a baby about the same time an Indian woman had a baby there and the Indian woman's baby died. So this white woman gave her baby to the Indian woman. [short pause in recording]

00:06:57

Now every Indian village in the north had a dog that you could understand, they were different 'cuz up in here where ever and there's the Tanana and a dozen different, every village just had a different dog. But most of our dogs were got either, well from the ... all the lower Yukon and north or from the Mackenzie. And, during our mail driving, dog ... the first early mail was just haphazard but when really got down to really carrying mail, really into business, the mail would come from Valdez, over the Richardson Highway to Fairbanks by horses and man and what have you. I think I told ya about that. But there the dogs would pick them up, and it is about 750 miles if I remember right to Nome from Fairbanks, and we'd make that in about a week, makin' close to 100 miles a day. Now we'd have 25 dogs, well at times ... time we'd only have 12, 10, 9, what have you, up to 50, but when we had the big teams we had a ... well it was a ski, a ouija board, or what have you, it was a hardwood board turned up at the ends, and it was the wickedest thing that any man ever stepped on. That think was shod, had 3 strips as a rule of brass, sled runner, on the bottom about a inch wide, inch and a half and about an eighth of an inch thick. That is to keep it from wearin; on the ice. Now that had a thong on it about six feet and a buckle or a snap and you snapped that into your second dog ring. Your wheel dog run six foot ahead of the sled, you run between 'em, then your next team was six foot ahead of them and you snapped that into second dog's ring where there [inaudible], tore up the snap and your, the ouija board rope lift ... lifted back to about even with the end of the G pole or a little back of that. Well, when you dog is goin' so darn fast that you couldn't do anything else, why you'd jumped on your ouija board and rode. A lotta them used that, I never cared much for it for two or three reasons, there's a lot too wicked for me and then we had, oh, what they called a guide pole on the front of our sled. It fastened down close to the runners, come up over the nose in a bow and that was from 24 to 30 inches high. The nose of that guide pole. Well I got all this when my dogs was goin' too fast. I get all this, wait 'til that guy go just about caught up with me, sit down on it and guide my sled with my feet. I found that that was a lot easier way to do it. [short pause in recording]

00:10:13

Well anyhow in case this ouija board throwed your in case that you lost your G pole, that G pole was a sturdy thing, you could put your whole weight on it, you didn't need to worry about that. Made out of hardwood and fastened on to the sled, there was just no danger of breakin' that. But, in case you did break loose from your dogs and G pole, why we generally drug a rope behind, about 30 feet so in case that you fell and that your sled come by, you could maybe grab the rope, and tangle yourself up in it. That a rope was tied to one of the handlebars so if you was draggin' behind it, it'd tip the sled over so

you got one sled tipped over why you was alright. Another precaution we had was a break. We had three big spikes on the ... for the break on the back end of the hind sled so if they got away from us, why, we was just ... used the break if nothing else. Anyway, it's just precaution that was all because in those big teams we had five dependable leaders all the time. And that is so we can handle our dogs and they could handle the team in case we run into a caribou and the rest of our dogs wanna chase it.

00:11:32

Why the leaders could keep the bunch in line because they'd neck rope on all of 'em. There's single [inaudible] come right up close to their hips, and a rope around from there to the tow line and then we had a neck line running right opposite their neck into the tow line too so we had them pretty well underway. Now, 60 miles was supposed to be a run and we supposed to do that in 6 hours. If it was ... somebody wasn't there, why we took it on a 100. If we went out ... sometimes we'd change dogs, sometimes we'd only change half of them, depend on conditions and dogs and everything. But I have went as far as 300 hundred miles in 3 days. Now a lot of people down here will say ah, bunk, that's ... that just don't go, don't sound good to me or you can just see it that's what their thinkin' but we just look at the race last winter in Anchorage I believe I sent ya that book where that man made 100 miles in 555 minutes and 26 ... 36 seconds. Well now I'll gamble that that man never rode 10 miles on that whole hundred miles and he had a scale on his sled that those dogs pulled on, I don't know how many dogs he had, probably seven or nine. If he had nine dogs when that scale said nine pound, that boy was all a pushin' or kickin' or doin' [end of recording].