

## Transcript Summary

<b>UAF Oral History Call No:</b>	2016-15-16
<b>Date of Recording:</b>	1955
<b>Length of Recording:</b>	00:13:44
<b>Original Media:</b>	Dictabelts (red)
<b>Digitized By:</b>	Northeast Document Conservation Centre using IRENE method
<b>Digitization Date:</b>	December 2024
<b>Narrator:</b>	Clyde 'Slim' Williams
<b>Interviewer:</b>	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.
<b>Others Present:</b>	N/A
<b>Recording Location:</b>	Chicago, Illinois
<b>Transcriber:</b>	Leslie McCartney
<b>Transcription Date:</b>	February 1, 2025
<b>Access:</b>	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.
<b>Where to Find this in Text:</b>	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 <a href="https://archive.org/details/alaskasourdoughs0000rich/mode/2up">https://archive.org/details/alaskasourdoughs0000rich/mode/2up</a> 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: [Slim starts mid-sentence] why I had to take one of the babies and she of course ... she of course was glad to somebody take it too because she wasn't too good on the snow. Well I took this baby, had it all wrapped up, it's face all wrapped up and everything and kinda held it up and put it over my shoulder and of course wind was a blowin' towards the head of the train so when I stepped off and

this baby over my shoulder it's face was right to the wind. Well the shawl blew off of the little thing's face and a man tapped me on the shoulder he said better take that baby down he says it's lost it's breath. That wind's blowin' so hard that the baby just black in the face when I took it down. Lord, boy, that scared me. But we got back ... to Cordova alright about a dead condition and I felt pretty good then. I never tried that kinda a stunt again I'll tell ya that. [dead air from 00:00:51 to 00:00:55]

00:00:55

I think of all the crazy things I ever done in my long days and somewhat dissipated career was the along the Robertson River. It's about 200 miles to a trading post and goin' in I lost my tobacco or part of it, I just had one carton and a carton last me about a month. So I lost it in the river. Well I went on and a month got up and I got my trap line all in nice shape but I was out of tobacco. And boy I was just nuts, no smoke ya know. So I said well the devil with it I'll just go get me some. So I put on the snowshoes and I high tailed it outta there over the glacier and cleared down to Gulkana and got my tobacco and snowshoed back and ... by the time I got back why I'd caught a lotta fur but a wolverine had also got on my trap line. And it had just tore fur all up. I had one silver and all there was left in the trap was a leg of the silver. Well that was worth money them days. Well I did finally follow the trail of the wolverine and found the silver but it was tore up pretty bad.

00:02:13

But I stitched it up and made a pretty good skin out of it but I just had ... oh there was just a mess that trap line and when I got back into camp that night I certainly was some disgusted and you know I just laid that tobacco up on the shelf and I never did smoke it. I quit smokin' for four years. I never touched it. But, you know it is just didn't worry me a bit. I didn't wanna smoke. I didn't care for a smoke, that's the funny thing. Now if I have 15 minutes without a smoke now I'm all fuzzed out but for that 4 years I just didn't care whether I smoked or not. Fact is I didn't crave it, didn't want it but then somebody send me a carton of cigarettes from the states, I forget who it was, probably a sister, I don't know. But I laid them up on the shelf too and one day I thought well maybe I just will have a smoke so I smoked one well didn't taste too good 'cuz I'd always smoked Bull Durham anyhow. Those are the tailor made kind and dare do I smoked another one and I just kep' on until I smoked them up and then went down and got me a lotta Bull Durham and went smokin' again so I'm just not gonna quit smokin' anymore.

00:03:31

Know those Indians have a way of takin' care of their health. Know there's a lake they call Big Charlie Lake. Well that lake is supposed to have a big fish in it. Oh, it's an awful big fish. Sometimes it'll break up through the ice and you can see the ice swell up. Well, long time ago my grandpoppa, his grandpoppa, the long time ago, they was crossin' that lake with what they call a stick canoe or ram [?] and three caribou and five Indians and they started to cross there. They got about half way across and that big fish come up and he swallowed the whole bunch. Now that mighta been a ... I don't know what, but something like that musta happened or they wouldn't be scared to death of that lake.

00:04:19

One time there was young Indians they liked to believe a White Man's ways and I was fishin' on it, we was ... this young Indian was over there and a big rock stuck out over it and we was fishin' for some trout and he couldn't see his hook and I could and there was a great big lingcod on it, them things will get the way of 50 pound up there, oh, they're their awful big things. And I see this big lingcod comin', never thought about the big fish in the lake, but I see this lingcod come up to take his bait you know and about the time the lingcod took hold of the bait I said big fish and he just jerked on that hook once and it didn't come and so he just broke and run right back off the rock. He afraid that fish would come right up over

that rock and get 'em. But they come to that lake and fish for those lingcod. I don't know if you got 'em over in your country or not, they look like a cat fish only their spotted and they've got a long slender trail ... tail.

00:05:24

Well in the spring and fall there just a little stream runs outta that big lake, it ... oh, you can step across it, probably 3 foot wide and maybe a foot deep, two foot deep sometimes. Well those lingcod will be in there just by the thousands and all you got to do just pick 'em out that's all. I don't know what they gettin' in there, grub of some kind, maybe spawnin' I don't know but they have the biggest liver you ever seen. One that'll weigh 10 pound, have a liver a big as your fist. Well that's 'cuz of their liver oil of course. Well now those fellas will make a trip over there and just feast on those livers. They'll catch the lingcod, they won't eat the lingcod at all, don't want nothin' to do them, they won't eat 'em, they'll just throw them away, dogs can eat 'em if they wanna but they won't. But they'll get those liver out and they'll fry 'em. They'll sometimes roll 'em in flour in fry 'em. They're not bad, their just pretty good eatin' I'm tellin' ya. But they'll just lay around there and feast on that cod liver oil or those ling cod livers and just get fat and greasy I'm a tellin' ya.

00:06:37

Well about a medicine man. There was a medicine man we had there along the Copper River. He called him Doc Bellamy, he was a different Indian from any 'em in there. There was a story that he come from someplace, nobody knew where, he didn't even seem to know himself. But he looked more like a Cherokee or he had that long nose, high forehead, his ... a big man and oh, a very deep voice, and they called him Doc Bellamy, he was a medicine man of course. And the first year we freighted up the Copper River, of course now he didn't know a ton from a pound, well he know how to pound but he had no idea what ton was, so I was comin' up the river and he come out and met me and said Slim, you're gonna freight up river this winter? I said yeah. He said Slim you bring me a ton of tea. Well they had givin' the old fella a stove pipe hat, high silk hat, I dunno where it come from. Somebody else had givin' him and old army jacket and he had pair of red woolen underwear. So when anybody come, he put o that red woolen underwear and his army coat and his plug hat and boy, he was ready to accept company.

00:07:55

But they ... I never see this but I knew about it. He was a quite a medicine man. You know their ... if ... now that gal that I told you that beat the medicine man that didn't die when her coffin ... well when she come outta that, if she had a been a man she'd a been a real medicine man. They doctor themselves. They talk to the spirit and the spirit gets 'em well and so that makes them quite a medicine man when they come outta anything like that. That old gal wasn't much but yet they would go to 'er. Well Doc Bellamy he was one of those smart guys you know. And he gotta be a pretty good medicine man. He wanted to be better though. So he got sick one day and he went to bed. Couple of days. They thought sure he was gonna die but he come out of it. And boy, then he was really a good medicine man. But still he wasn't satisfied and he got sick again year or two after that and boy he was awful sick. He was unconscious for 4 or 5 days. Well he had two women at that time and why his younger wife is kinda worrin' about 'im I think and him laying there unconscious you know, why, she'd sneaked in on 'in, wasn't supposed to go in there. But she sneaked in to see what's the matter and caught 'im getting' up and gettin' some grub and spilled it around camp so he'd either make much that time. He was ... kinda spoiled him. He ... he kinda tell about it himself and try to justify it but he just couldn't do it that's all.

00:09:30

And you know one time I took a Indian, just show you how little they travelled those days, I took an Indian from Chistochina to Valdez, that's about 150 miles is all. Now he'd never seen the coast, he'd never seen a ... a steamboat. So while was there a steamboat come in. So I took 'im down on the wharf and he would see the steamboat comin' a couple of miles down ... he turned around to me, he said, geez, he said, big stovepipe. Well he didn't know what a boiler was, just thought that was a stovepipe keepin' the thing warm. But anyhow there was a coast Indian there. So I said to 'em, I said Adam, there's a Indian and yes, that's right he says, and he looked like an Indian so he thought he ... I said go over and talk to 'em Adam. So he went over to talk to 'em. Pretty soon he come back and said I can't hear 'em. He meant he couldn't understand 'em. But just that 150 miles, just that much difference in their language that ... so just had of course talk English, he talk so many ... so did the fella on the coast.

00:10:33

Dick I dunno know if you ever seen those caribou runs or not but I'll tell ya they're an interesting thing. You know those in their rutting season, they'll leave way north of the Arctic Circle and start south and run clear to, oh, latitude 60, nothing uncommon. And ju ... they'll start maybe 1 or 2 or a dozen and they'll pick up momentum as the come, they travel about 10 miles an hour and by the time they begin to get into the lower country, why they're just tens of thousand of 'em. Now of course the old bulls will drop behind and the calves will belong to the younger calves, that's just the way they have of gettin' away from inner breeding. Everything wild has a way of getting away from inner breeding. I think the beaver is the most unique but those caribou they'll just come by the thousand and tens of thousands and they're kinda dangerous sometimes too you know. I got caught twice in fact. I was coming through some timber and I heard these caribou coming of course, they'd been stampedin' I was followin' right on a trail and they'd weave through that brush they may be 20 trails, maybe a quarter of a mile wide as they'd come through and they'd just come through like the devil you know. And I heard 'em comin' behind me ... I could hear their horns rattlin' and ... on the brush and I said, gee, I guess better go up trail ... tree, easy to climb there, spruce, and so I climbed this spruce just oh, my height was all, that's all I needed, and those caribou come. Well for a solid hour I could of reach down any minute and touch the caribou with my foot. They was just that thick and just on both sides, just thousands of 'em I imagine that they'd run over me if I'd a been there ... if I hadn't a been up that tree.

00:12:37

Another time I was on the Selina and I see a big herd comin' over the mountain. They way high in the mountains and well it's always interesting to watch those things what they will do. So there wasn't a tree within 200 yards of me, I never thought about a tree. It is open country just a big river bar, probably, oh half a mile wide, anyhow, I was right in the middle of it. And some driftwood there, and I just sit down on the driftwood, caribou come over the mountain, they come right straight towards me. And I got up, thought they'd run but they didn't. I was a curiosity. And they just encircled me and I'll bet there was 50 deep in the circle not over 100 yards across and them big bulls would paw the ground and shake their heads and I shot into the air a couple of times, didn't make a bit of difference they didn't seem to worry a bit and I'll tell ya, I was worried for a little while, but after a while they took a notion to go on and away they went. You know they have really no leader. They're the only animal [end of recording].