

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-17
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:	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:	February 9, 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: Well you know some other direction he had tracks scattered all around there and we see where he fell in the snow all around too. But when we got there later, why he had froze to death, it was just, that excitement everything was just too much for him, that was all. [dead air from 00:00:17 to 00:00:20]

00:00:20

But it always amuses me when fellas thinks trappin' and just all you gotta go ahead and set a trap or huntin' as either as far as that's concerned. You just gotta know what you're doin' and know what your animals are doin' too. In other words, you gotta be just smarter than an animal and your animal is just pretty smart until it ... a few men ... they gotta study a lot before they get as smart as him. But the wolf was the boy that always interested in. Boy, he's a clever devil, cleverer than a fox I believe. Now a lot of people laugh at me when I say that I think a wolf has the largest vocabulary of any animal. Well, they think that's just nuts of course but they're also a ventriloquist which is interesting. Now the first wolves I got I went up on the mountain and found a wolf den. Well they don't dig down deep, this was a ... generally they dig in a squirrel hole, and ... where a squirrel has burrowed you know. And they will dig down maybe 6 feet or 7, a great big hole so you can crawl right in, plenty of room you, and they're big devils and ... but if anything bothers 'em, why they'll ... the little puppy it'll sneak off into these squirrel holes, that's how they protect themselves.

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But we got these a little early. I don't know how that female come to leavin' so early. She left 'em before she should of I think, I don't what is the matter. The male may have not been on the job, she mighta lost her male, I don't know what is the matter. But she had left those pups and they just barely had their eyes open was all. Well that's unusual, she generally stays in the den and watches the pups and takes care of 'em until they get pretty good size. The male will bring the food and lay it at the hole, he never goes in but he'll lay at the mouth of the whole and then she'll come out and get it. But something was wrong I think that this female was ... had left the den. But I found it and I could tell there was nothin' in there and so I just crawled down in and I grabbed three puppies. That's all I could find and I believe that's all there was. And I took 'em home, they just barely had the eyes open, they didn't spit but little but quarrel with a little and I got 'em down to the cabin and that night, after it got dark, why that wolf come. Now I don't believe there was but one 'cuz I could shine my light and see her eyes. She wasn't over 50 yards.

00:03:01

Little timber. But she would call those puppies and the puppies would look at one way all the time, now mind you these fellas just had their eyes open that was all. And they would look towards that mother and then noise would come from some other direction but the puppies would still look towards the mother. It just seemed to me that she was a ventriloquist and just throw her voice any place. I dunno if that was a fact or not but it certainly did sound like it. But she kept that up all night and then the next night she come back again for a little while. She just won't give up that was all there was to it. But now I can understand those things a calling, the different calls they have. Now, for instance, they'll go out and kill something and they'll call their puppies to it, it may be pretty close when they're young and if they're calling their puppies I'll know it. And at times when there was good bounty on wolves why I've got in between 'em and had the puppies from the kill and get some of the puppies before they get there.

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Then they have another call that just seems to be for fun, I dunno, just to get 'em altogether and that call is after they get to be al little older but I really believe that the wolf has the largest vocabulary. [dead air with some background voices from 00:04:20 to 00:04:30]

00:04:30

Dick you know in that country when somebody gets sick, the medicine man will go and see 'em and put on his medicine gear and yell and squawk and raise the devil to scare the ... the bad spirit away. And, if they find they can't run the bad spirit away, why they'll ... now they used to do this, they don't know, they used to do ... they'd build a coffin and had it right beside the bed so when the Indian died all they had to do was rolled off into the coffin. Well I never knew but one par ... one Indian to beat that and that was an old squaw. The medicine man told her she's gonna die and they got her coffin built and sit down ... put it beside of the bed, she laid and looked into that for about a week and then got up and walked off. I dunno what the devil.

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I've told you about this wolf too. Now one day there was a fella come along there with a baby, man and his wife, and just a little thing and you know he'd kinda whimper and cry and that wolf, oh, he just wanted to get to that baby so bad, I took it and I'd show it to 'im, I didn't let him get close enough. You heard about a wolf takin' a baby off and raisin' it, well all bunk of course I think but nevertheless they do love young ones, anything young they love it. They're like an Indian that way. And so this baby, I'd hold it and he had a whimper and the wolf would caulk his ears and come up just as close as he could for his chain and you know and he'd whine for it, he wanted that baby so bad, he just was havin' a fit over it. Well the next time I was down at the Trading Post I saw a great big doll there and so I got it and I brought it home and give it to that wolf. And you know that darn wolf carried that doll around for ... well 'till he just wore it out that was all. You'd see 'em ... I've seen pretty near anytime of day to carryin' that doll around. But they do love the young. Now when his first litter of puppies come, why he'd try and coax 'em to 'im you know, just do everything he could to coax 'em to 'im and of course after they got big enough, he did.

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The litter was ... it was awfully interesting to watch him how he would teach those things to kill and he'd get 'em down and you'd think maybe he's goin' kill 'em or something but he never hurt 'em and there was quite a few mosquitos and he dug a big hole in the ground, like one of their dens they have puppies in you now and you know them there was about a dozen of 'em and them puppies would go down in that den then there wouldn't be room for him and he'd just lay up on top and fight mosquitoes and let the puppies be down in his den. [dead air from 00:07:17 to 00:07:20]

00:07:20

Now one time I come into Fairbanks and I was just starved for ... I thought I wanted potatoes and eggs. When I was a kid why we used to get boiled potatoes and boiled eggs. Well, I always liked mine fairly soft boiled, I'd mash them potatoes all up then I'd break my eggs on top of 'em and I'd mix 'em all up together. It made a quite a mess but I like it yet. Well I come into Fairbanks one time and I just wanted that worse than anything I knew. So I got lookin' around for potatoes. Well I found some old withered up potatoes, it wasn't oh bigger than hens eggs and withered a lot at that and didn't amount to much and I get about a half a dozen of them and I looked around ... they cost me a dollar ... and I lookin' around for eggs and I gotta ... I paid a dollar apiece for eggs. And boy was they strong, they musta been in there a year because you read that poem of Service's you know those Yukon eggs of ours, some green, some pink, some blue. Assorted tints, a dollar per, assorted flavors too.¹

¹ Transcriber's note: This line is from Service's *The Ballad of Hard-Luck Henry* "You know these Yukon eggs of ours — some pink, some green, some blue — A dollar per, assorted tints, assorted flavors too."

00:08:29

Well they were beyond a doubt had plenty of flavor. One time there was a friend of mine in Fairbanks and she got some chickens. And she didn't know a darn thing about chickens, she took a notion she wanted some fresh eggs. And so she had a dozen or [inaudible] a dozen hens shipped in. She thought she liked birds I guess, had to have 'em mate with each on, one but anyhow she got some eggs and she invited three of us fellas down to have eggs, fresh eggs you know. Well we all went down but I kinda like 'em but when was comin' home that evening one of the fellas was with me he said you know, he says, I just didn't care so much for them eggs. He said they just don't have the flavor that our eggs have here [laughs].

00:09:18

You know you hear so many fellas talkin' about human nature. One time I was on the Copper River Railroad, they had it pretty much finished then and they was two coaches and an engine with a bit snow plow on. Give you an idea how that wind can blow up there sometimes and the front coach was, oh, there was about a dozen women in it and the rest of it was kinda white collared stiffs and the rear coach was ... had all workin' stiffs and I was just dressed rough and I kinda liked the rough part of it anyhow but the Doctor on the railroad was the same way. So we wound up in the back coach. Well in that back coach the stove wasn't workin'. I don't know how it ever happened that they ever sent it out in that condition because it was really disastrous. And so there this back coach was, colder than the devil and oh boy the wind was blowin'. And so we head out on the Cooper River flats and of course you couldn't see anything, that snow plow plowin' throwin' snow and the wind a blowin' a blowin' snow and you look the window and it would just blind ya that's all, you just couldn't see anything.

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And, oh, we gotta talkin', a fella was crabbin' because there was no fire in the stove but it was darned uncomfortable, you had to go up in the front coach once in a while to get warm. But I said to this Doctor, I said Doc, I said ... I'll just you know ... I bet I can make those men kill that brakeman. Oh, no, he didn't think it was that bad and he didn't believe I could and all that. Well I would just smart aleck like I always was you know and they was about 25 of them fellas. And you know I got up and give them fellas a good fast talk. Ah, by this time now the train had stuck, it had just got so tough that it couldn't go and the train had got stuck and of course the brakeman was out doin' everything possible to get word back to ... where he'd get another train out back to Cordova. He was tryin' to get a train out to pick us up before we froze to death, it was really, just kinda close quarters that's all there was to it. But nothin' to eat. So I said to this Doc I said I just bet I can make them go kill that brakey, oh, he didn't think so, no, and he said try. And he just young fella too.

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You know I got up and give fellas a good talk about the idea of a brakeman takin' that coach out in that condition without a fire and we might be all there an froze to death and probably would wind up a pie faced corpse in a snow drift before morinin' because there wasn't much chances of gettin' and I just thought we better kill that brakey and you know, them fellas started and I just talked up to beat the band and talk 'em outta it they had just goin' up to kill that brakey that's all there was to it. And just show ya how people will get when they're kinda stampede and don't know just what's gonna happen. Well, train got out, we was there 3 or 4 hours but was about 40 miles out and so they got 2 snow plows, 2 coaches and 2 engines. One engine was runnin' backwards with the snow plow in front of it and the other was runnin' forward. Well, when that engine got in sight and we could see it why the brakey warned us all, now he said don't lose any time, get in there just as quick as you can because if that stops and it drifts under the train why were not gonna be able to start back. So he had us all a rarin' to go.

Well a friend of mine wife was on there and she had two little kids one a little bitty baby, I don't think it was over six months old and well, gallant me know, I had to take one of the babies and she of course was glad to have somebody take it too because she wasn't [end of recording]