

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-20
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:50
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 13, 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: [Slid starts talking mid-sentence] ... wasn't worth anything hardy, but he but here he come with a pack on his back, about all he had, and he was goin' out, he hadn't caught anything and I think he had caught a fox or somethin' like that, didn't amount to anything, he hadn't done anything with it, about half stretched and just wasn't skinned at all hardy. But anyhow, he was goin' out. Well our

trap line runs south over a ridge. Now, in the Copper River Valley there's lots of just rolling country and this was just that rollin' country and there was a long ridge, run I'd say 20 miles from our cabin south and ... we was down in the creek of course, so we run a trap line over that ridge to the river 20 miles away. Then we went down river about 10 miles to cabin trapping all the way of course, some places settin' traps, some places set a snare, just whatever was necessary. Well the ... want a good snow and we'd go over our hill route, it blowed pretty clear, where our tracks would still show. You know how they do. And ... so when this fella come in ... was goin' out we thought nothing of it, while he wasn't a woodsman we had no idea that he was so ... quite so bad as it was.

00:01:17

Well where we hit the river, we hit it right square, so we put him on our trail goin' over the ridge and when he hit the river he couldn't tell which way was up and which way was down. And he had a little snow and a little blow so they just no tracks at all on the river, that was all. Well, when he hit the river there he was, didn't know where to go, and mind you, only 10 miles to the cabin but he was lost. And he started upriver and he went a little ways and he started downriver and he started the cross river and you could see where he just run and he'd fall, and run again, and fall, get up and run. And of course, finally he was there frozen dead. We found 'im about 3 or 4 days afterwards but we'd of saved 'im of course if we'd just had any idea that he was ... that is ... people as you know, when they lost they get excited and when they get excited they want to run. When they run why they get hot and then of course when they get tired and can't run no more why they just chill and freeze to death right quick. So he didn't last long after he quit runnin' I don't image, but it's just one of those things and that you see everyday and that you just can't get away from. [dead air from 00:02:35 to 00:02:39]

00:02:39

Yes, I've made several sleds. And made 'em like the Indians make theirs. Someone would buy their sleds from the Indians and some fella just made it a business makin' sleds. They was ... there only bolts were 'em was where the runners was bolted on. That was done with light stove bolts. Now the runner was fastened to the uprights with rawhide lashed with a eye in the runner. The front was ... oh, a good-sized piece with bolts through it that bolted the handlebar and the runner in this cross piece in front together. The runners ... the hind stanchions come up, oh, about 3 feet, 3feet and half, just so you could hang onto 'em nicely, and then they run from there to the nose with the kinda of sag and by the time you got to the nose your stanchion wasn't over 3 inches high, the stanchion about every, oh, couple of feet, and they was 22 inches wide and between the stanchions was a cross piece to run with from one to the other and that was mitered through the upright and then lashed in there with rawhide. Everything was lashed and for that reason it was ... pliable so you could turn it so it would wiggle so it would worm its way down. That's what made a sled run like it did. Some made 'em, some bought 'em but they was all like the Indians. [dead air from 00:04:21 to 00:04:26]

00:04:26

And how about the dogs, now the first wolves I caught I got four. I ... I shot the ... old ones, they come to close and was kinda worryin' me a little and I shot 'em. You know they just did a hole, oh, 5 or 6 feet and you can crawl right into it, the big things, they weigh a couple of hundred pound and so you have no trouble of crawlin' right down into 'em and I got these early in the spring. The first four had their eyes open pretty well. But the next time I got three or may of just begin to get their eyes open. Well I just took 'em home and they was little things and fed 'em and took care of 'em but as they grew up, they was an awful lot of difference in their disposition. Some of 'em was snarly, and snappy and just didn't wanna be petted. And, one of 'em especially, a male, was just a natural pet, that's all there was to it. So I

get rid of the three and kept the pet. Well now you can't do anything about their mating because they do that themselves.

00:05:34

But I had all female that were good and ... huskies, nice ones ... I just never had anything else and you gotta let 'em pick their own mate because they're not polygamous and they only mate with one female, that's all. So, after he got to be 3 years old, of course I wondered, I could see that he wasn't matured but I wondered if that was natural and I found out afterwards of course that it was and so finally he mated with this female. I done my best to get 'im to mate some others but he just wouldn't do it. Well she had 9 puppies anyhow and they was just the same as the wolves, some of was very nice and some of 'em was just kinda snarly and snappy. They was more wolf than dog. Some of 'em looked like dogs some of 'em looked like wolves but it was their disposition. So, I just got rid of the ones with the bum disposition after they got to be oh, big enough to find out which was a couple of months old and then I went on tryin' to mate those others. Well I was about 7 years altogether workin' at it. Well I wanted to breed these half breeds. So, I saved 3 females and ... so I crossed some of them to my dogs and then I got another wolf and of course that took me another 3 years.

00:07:13

Well, I managed to breed that to one of the half wolves but she only had two puppies and they seemed to be a great deal like the others, part ... mostly wolf but they would look like dogs or look like wolves, it was kinda a strange set up. You just couldn't do much choosing in breeding because they'd done their own choosing, that's all there was to it. It ... after they mated and picked their mate why then you was done that's all there was to it they'd just nothin' to do about it, but anyhow I found the dogs, I think the half, was the best dog while they broke and you'd train them just the same as you did the others, some of 'em would just kill themselves a workin', some of 'em just wouldn't work that's all there was to it. Now the wolves both worked ... pretty good ... not ... tear at it like the dogs do but they'd start out in the mornin' and maybe run a 100 yards, they'd do a quarter of a mile, maybe a mile, then they'd slow down to a good fast trot, they was excellent on a trot. They'd do 8, 10 miles an hour on a trot but they just didn't get excited like the dog did. And ... I tried to break one of the halves to ... for a leader, well he broke to leader alright and done pretty good only when he come to something that interested him on the trail where another dog had been or something like that you know. If he was kinda puzzled, he would just simply stop and smell. Well you could just yell your head off to anything you wanted to, he'd just smell until he got plumb contented and satisfied, found out what he wanted to then you'd go on about his business and be a leader again.

00:09:04

So, they didn't work out good for a leader but one a long trip, a steady grind like I had comin' out, I just wondered if any other dog would have made it because they take care of themselves in great shape I'm tellin' ya they just don't kill themselves. They'll go along, they'll work but they just don't get excited, they seem to have the same idea that the man has to live in the brush all the time. When he gets snarly just sit down and wait until his hurt is over. And, he gets along. But you just couldn't use much judgement only in getting rid of the one that was ... snarly and snappy, its just about all you could do about 'em. Of course, now the team that I drove out was from one-quarter to three-quarter wolves. I give you that later on. [dead air from 00:09:57 to 00:10:03]

00:10:03

Now about the same period [inaudible] no at that point about Nome across to Siberia it's supposed to be 62 miles is all and I think that's all it is because you can see Siberia it's ... there's high mountains over

there not like on the Nome side. Nome side is very flat but Siberia's very rugged mountains. Well this little boat we had I believe it was made right down on the Yukon someplace, I don't know, probably out of whipsawed lumber. You could see at the knees were spruce and hewed so, my opinion is it was just a homemade affair, fact is I'm sure it was. We never got information from the guy that we got 'er from at all, fact is ... I was sometimes wonder if it was his boat or just he just found there.

00:10:56

But anyhow, it would ... didn't draw much water, it was pretty near a flat-bottom, it wasn't ... looked a lot like a river boat, nose of course like the river boats and about the same on the bottom. They'd had a ... a good cabin on it, it was not high, you'd have to crawl down into it but ... fairly solid and outta good lumber but not seaworthy, Lord [inaudible] seaworthy. You really got caught out there in some of them winds I've seem we just won't a had chance that's all. But, they say God protects the simple ones and I guess that's what he's doin' to us. Well, for our trade goods we had flour, sugar, tea, tobacco, that was the biggest part. But we had a dozen pair of overalls and about a dozen shirts but I think that is our downfall, I think if we'd of left them home we mighta been better off. But when we got over there, now I don't know where we was, we was straight across as we could go. No name over there that I know of and we really didn't have any name that I could understand. They'd ... they'd tell us their name but you couldn't understand it and so ... just no town, no nothin' it was just this Indian village about 10 miles below us was the only thing we knew of right at the time and we didn't know then when we first landed.

00:12:23

Well I think I told ya that we build a rock house about 4 feet high, now there was a big rock, flat rock and it leaned right towards us. When we got up about 6 and half feet we gained about 4 feet on the roof and we laid that up with mud, lots a mud ... this glacier clay ... it makes awful good stuff to build with ... when we got up oh, 4 or 5 feet with rock and rock and rock had begin to get scarce so we'd just pick up an old rotten log, there was some cottonwood there, not much, and quite a bit of driftwood. So, we'd pick up these old cottonwood logs that wouldn't make anything in the way of burnin' and just cover 'em with mud, we got up about 6 feet and half tall. Then we found a piece of driftwood to put across and stuff to make a roof so we could hold our mud up then we covered it of course with moss and then mud, about oh, about 6 or 8 inches. It was so darn tight that when we got in, no windows, no nothin' you know just a door and that was on the same side of that flat rock was so on the side so we didn't get any breeze and we had a little Yukon stove, just a little thing and when we built a fire in there just as soon as we got a fire started just so darn hot we just have to get out that's all there was to it. So, we had to cut a hole through the [end of recording]