

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-22
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:45
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 5, 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: [Slim starts mid-sentence] ... tied up on the ball, ready to, ready to help, ready to do anything and about ten to one they'd lose his wife before he got in. Now there was also a place for the really decent girl. If a man was around a restaurant there ... and I know several occasions where they was just mediocre res .. restaurants, doin' a mediocre business, and some gal would hit town that was

plumb on the up and up, plumb decent girl and he'd hire 'er, well right then he had business. Everybody in town was in there and the nicer the girl was the more men come, all kinds, all classes, didn't make any difference they all loved to see that nice girl and talk to 'er and if she's really nice, why, she got along in a big way and 90% of the men would ... in town, would pull off their coats and fight for 'er if anybody made a off remark to 'er, get 'er just a marvelous place for the plumb descent woman that come and ... work, get along, and most of 'em eventually married, some of 'em made good women, some of 'em divorced, some of 'em married another one. You just couldn't tell.

00:01:16

Now some of them old gals up there, that was up there when I first went there, I met some of 'em a few years ago that [inaudible – had six husbands?] Ah, Klondike Kate. Now I met her, I knew her, not well but knew her and her husband, last one died, I believe she's alive yet and I believe her husband was the sixth that she had. Sometimes they stuck, sometimes they didn't, it was awfully interesting but some woman get in them [inaudible] some old bachelor and boy how they would go to town. They'd really do fine. [few seconds of dead air]

00:01:57

Now there was another man and I'll just give ya, tell ya this story, this man was a very close friend of mine now I think he had college, fairly well educated, I seemed to kinda throw in with them kind of men, I liked a man that talked well. Well anyhow, this fella was so very clean, he was known all over that country as always havin' a white handkerchief around his neck and he had to sleep by a campfire maybe all night, side washed as we called it, next morning, he'd get up and shave. Well now the average man that went out trading if he got up on the morning and it was gone a week or 10 days or 2 weeks or a month, he just let his whiskers go. He didn't bother about shavin' but this fella always shaved, every morning, always put a clean handkerchief around his neck and he was an awfully good trader, we was out together on a lot, and he made just a lot of money. I would say he was worth \$60-75,000 maybe a hundred when I last knew 'em. But he come past my camp one day and said Slim he said I'm goin' to marry Nell. That was a little Indian girl. I said Lawrence, it won't work. I said I had my experience I says go out and see a white woman. No Slim he said, she's alright, he said she's different. Says in a year I says I can teach that girl so I can take her out and introduce to my mother and she'll be proud of her.

00:03:30

I said Lawrence, it won't work, your religion is different, your ways of life is different, she was 17 he was about 35. Well she'd been raised the typical Indian way, the best religion in the world in my estimation, the best life in the world but it is so far fetched from his that you just knew it wouldn't work. Now they've got to go her life or she's got to come to his life and she just won't come to his life, I never knew but one woman that really could made what I'd call a fairly good woman for a white man. They just don't do it because their ways different, their so far apart in everything that it just won't work. Well I talked 'em out of it for a while but a month he come back, down the river again he said Slim ... she's just different that's all. Well, it went on and on until along towards spring here he come with a gal. He's says we're gonna out to get married. Well, I couldn't say anymore then. That was ... it was done and I'd talked all I could. But anyhow, they went out and got married and of course about year, here come along a baby, a boy and boy was he proud of that boy. He was just so proud of it and he got it up and I went up to see it. And ... about a hundred miles, and he got it out and showed it me and he said Slim, this is the last one. He said there's gonna be no more but he said this boy is gonna get just everything. He said in twenty years you'll look at this boy and say, gee, I'm proud of him.

00:05:16

Well, I had my doubts, I knew different in my own mind but he was so convinced. Now they raise a family to raise a family, they just love it and they love children and that's all they want is a family [dead air from 00:05:31 to 00:05:38]

00:05:38

Well he was just so in love with that woman that he just couldn't see, told me she isn't learning as fast as I expected her to, but he said she's learning, she's gonna be alright and he was still very much in love with her. Well of course he said now just so as this boy's old enough he's goin' to school outside. He said I'll send him out to my mother and said she will give him a good education and he just went on about that baby. Well, of course now all they want well for is to potlatch. They wanna give it away. Now in case one of them had a died or would died, and they was Indians, anything she had she'd give it away. Everything, just down, they put on the worst clothes they have and when then got to potlatching why that is a year after the death, they'd just give everything they had away and stand as near as they could without any clothes and then they start all over again and they forget. They must forget then, they mourn for year then they forget. Well that's all she knew. That was her life. Well there was so darn much stuff in the trading post [inaudible] and how the devil could they give that all away, it'd be pretty near impossible. So, she took a notion that she'd just give it away she pleased and when he was out on a trap line, why she'd just invite all of her friends in and all of her relatives and she'd feed 'em and she'd just give 'em everything.

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Well, he just wasn't able to stop her and by the time he'd come back off of a tradin' trip why she'd have so much given away that he was in the red and he was havin' an awful time. Well it went on for five or six years and by that time there was five young ones. You know she don't believe in doin' anything to prevent havin' young ones and he would try but she wouldn't listen to 'em and so it wasn't right to her to do that so he she didn't do it that's all there was to it. So, by the time the other boy before he was old enough to go to school, why there was five of 'em and she was then just givin' everything away, he just couldn't get out of her sight and no way to lock it up ... beca ... he finally did kinda lock up, try to lock it up but it didn't do no good. She'd get in there and get into it anyhow and he was just havin' a terrible time and a very much disappointed, discouraged man. And, one day he come up missin'. Well nobody knows for sure what become of 'em. But his 6 shooter was gone and they tracked him to the river. Well that's the Copper River, it's a plenty big river. And nearest they could figure out, he'd waded out into that river. Well his gun bein' gone and his tracks followed to the river, nobody ever head of him since, and of course we just take it for granted that he was so discouraged, despondent over everything, that he just waded out into that river and shot himself. We don't know of course. But a mighty fine fella, one of the finest I ever knew I believe. [a few seconds of dead air]

00:09:03

Now Dick I never really had a name but they used to call me States Injin. Now, if I was around a camp where other fellas wouldn't know, other Indians wouldn't know me why I could hear 'em saying States Injin, they thought I was an Indian come from the states. I think there is one ... that in my younger life I played a lot with the Indians and Mexican kids and they thought different than I did. My mother taught me that everybody had right to their own thought, their own ideas, their own religions and that I stick to mine and let them stick to yours ... theirs. And I think that was the reason, and then of course I knew a lot about trappin', a lot about the woods and I could up a lean-to just as quick as they could or sleep by a fire just as good as they could and ... so, they just figured out that I was States Injin.

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And, lots of 'em would ask me, tell me about states Injin and your poppa states Injin and I was always looked on by them as a states Injin and I think it was my respect for their religion and their ways that I knew quite a bit about 'em. That is about as near as I come I have a name. Now about that fella floatin' on the river, we was trappin' on Mankomen Lake and right to the north of us was the Alaska Range well for nearly a hundred miles along there it was so steep. They went up to as high as about 15,000 and all snow capped of course and that kinda broke the northern wind from us for a little, but it was very steep, there was only two places to cross the range and about a hundred miles so you can get an idea of how steep they were. Well this fella was trappin' about 20 miles towards Mentasta Pass. Right back of us was the glacier you went over, Guilty Glacier, where you go into the Robinson River. Well he was toward Mentasta Pass and only about 20 miles from us. Well that's too close to you a trappin' altogether but we didn't mind, he just wasn't a trapper that's all. He just didn't know, but he thought he was a trapper. Any ya know, so many people get that into their heads that all they got to do is set a trap and they're trappers but that's so far fetched it just takes a man a lifetime to learn how to be a trapper and then he only knows about half of it.

00:11:46

Now, for instance, if I'm settin' a trap high in the mountains where there's gonna be lots of blow and the snow is blown away, I'll have some really loam or soft dirt like you find on the uproot of a tree, very dry, and I'll cut a hole in the ground and deep enough to put my trap in, bury it about a half inch below the surface. Then I'll put a piece of paper over it, toilet paper, somethin' like that, and spread that dirt over it until it pretty near comes to the top and then I'll pick out the moss that's around ... the native moss that's right around close on the rocks, and I'll crumble that and spread it on there 'til it looks just like the rest of the soil. Well then when the wind comes it just blows right over the top of it and don't blow it away. Well that's a trap that will set for all whole winter, you don't know need to reset that at all unless somethin' gets in it. And [inaudible] the ground is frozen of course so you'd take about a 20 penny nail and put it in the ring ... or in a little [inaudible] go through and drive it in the ground plumb in. Well the friction of it drivin' in heats it a little and then it glazes so you got an anchor for your trap that's just ... em, well, not movable that's all it takes it trouble to get it up with ... even with an axe. So, anything you catch is alright in the high country. Now when you're settin' on snowdrift why you gotta set it the height of your snowdrift and cover the snow that's not frozen. Settin' under a tree is a different thing.

00:13:24

Well this fella didn't know any of that stuff at of course but he had a cabin there and he moved in. That along about before Christmas why here he come, little pack on his back, he didn't have much grub anyhow, his outfit wasn't worth anything hardly, 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 [end of recording].