

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-24
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:48
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 6, 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] ... they think your goin' into that big flat country. They don't quite understand the map but there's a big flat country over there someplace and it's a tough one. The Little White Little Man lives there and he's goin' eat ya up. And, there ... well, kinda afraid of it. And so then the young fellas would come to, and the young fellas of course wouldn't do it. But the old fellas,

the old friends of mine, they'd come to me and they'd say Slim are you goin' through big flat country? Oh yes, I'm goin' through bit flat country. Here you take this and they'd give me something that they had wore or carried in their pocket. They'd give me a purse, they'd give me a belt, they'd give me anything that they had worn and you see the Little Man, you tell 'em I sent it see? And you see a Little Man, he know, he knows me, uh, he know you good man I give it to ya you see? And one fella give me a pair of gloves. Further out as I was goin' all the way till I got clear as far as I knew Indians, clear to Tanana Crossin' they would give me things and one fella had a pair of mittens, oh, they was a pair of mittens that would cost ya ten dollars is all, solid beads, beautiful pair of mittens but he'd wore 'em quite a bit probably a year or two.

00:01:15

And tied them on the handlebars of my sled. He said you leave it here. You don't take it off. Now he said you see Little Man, he see this. He know I sent it. He don't bother you. Ah, he said, look out, he eat you, you don't go this stuff he says you keep it. And so I kept it and I brought that stuff all the way out. Well of course I didn't come through the big flat county at all, I come way west of that, oh, a thousand miles west I guess but we can look that up on the map. But anyhow it ... the snow wasn't good yet when I started it was .. I'd run into quite a bit of gravel and I had nine dogs and I had one three-quarter wolf. My leader was dog, a Husky, and the rest were half wolves. Well, they ... we got into overflows and a few things, now I come through the Alaska Range at Mentasta Pass, that put me in to between the Coast Range and the Rockies. And that's where I wanted to come was between the Coast Range and the Rockies. So, I come through Chicken and Forty-Mile. Well when I left Fortymile, startin' down the Fortymile River, there was just of lots of wolves and lots of caribou and I had one pup that I'd just started to break and, oh, he was pretty near a year old, I'd worked 'im a little the winter before but he was the hardest workin' pup I ever hooked up. I just couldn't do anything with 'im, he just worked himself to death.

00:03:00

Well you work a dog too much when he's a pup and it'll slow him up when he's older I always think that and so I would work this pup for two or three hours and then I'd turn 'im loose and let him run, drive my eight dogs. And hook 'im up again maybe in the afternoon and drive 'im a couple of hours and unhook 'im again and let him rest. Well I was coming down the Fortymile, now mind you these pups had been raised with the wolf and there's no question in my mind but what the wolf taught 'im, taught 'im their language because a dog you know is afraid of wolf. When the wolf starts to howlin' around your camp, why a dog he'll kinda curl up and be awful quiet, you just know that he's afraid. The wolf is the dog's natural enemy. We all know that. But, and the dogs are afraid of 'em but these wolves they're different. Anytime that a wolf would howl, these ... any of these wolves that I had raised would wanna go to them. Now that is strictly out because they'll kill 'em that's all there is to it. A wolf pack is simply a mother and father and the young and they will not allow anything in the pack, that's all, they'll kill 'em. Well this was a pack of their own.

00:04:17

But they didn't seem to savvy that this wild pack would kill 'em. So comin' down the Fortymile about 300 yards ahead of me, this pup was runnin' ahead, maybe 50 yards, and about a dozen wolves come out ... no there wasn't about six or eight wolves come out on the river and one of 'em let a little groan out of 'im. Well that pup he just hailed out right towards 'im, just as hard as he could run. Well I know what was goin' happen, they'd kill 'im the minute they got into 'im. Now I spoke to my leader and [inaudible] all the rest, all of 'em was ready to go but the leader. But I spoke to him and he headed out towards 'em. I kidded him a little bit and hit a run but he was unwilling. That two dogs behind him was

both half wolves and his ... their neck rope was pushin' on his tail all the time. He just didn't want to go, he wasn't free that's all there was to it. But I ... by the time wolves got to ... or the pup got to the wolves, I wasn't over 200 yards from 'em and goin' like the devil. Well I had my rifle out and the wolves had my pup. I thought maybe I could save 'im but I got within about 50 yards, maybe closer, of them wolves I hollered haw to that leader and Lord did he haul. He just whipped that sled around like you'd jerked it around, you know, I tipped it over.

00:05:48

Well I lost my balance but soon go onto my feet again and I got three of the wolves before they got away. But, they got my pup, they tore 'im all to pieces. Well, I went on to Dawson of course and hit the Yukon then and travelled up the Yukon. There's a sled trail up the Yukon, it was, an old winter trail when they couldn't go on the Yukon between Dawson and Whitehorse. You cross the Yukon once in a while but there used to be a roadhouses along ... well when I go to the Pelly River, I run into a fella there, married to an Indian woman, about the only one that I ever got into where the Indian woman was 99%. His house was just a clean any house you ever walked into. She was an excellent cook, she was ... he was from Kentucky and I had this ... only had eight dogs. And, he had a nice lookin' dog there and I thought well, he offered 'im to me cheap, he said I'll let ya have 'im he said. So, I bought 'im. Well it turned the next morning, it was cold, really cold, boy, you better lay over, them fellas always want company. And of course Moccasin Telegraph ahead of me, everybody knows ... knowed who I was, he knew me anyhow, but, just from hearsay, and so he just insisted I stayed the next day and I did and the next day and the next day.

00_07:25

And it was four days I was there before he took ... it was warm enough so ... its against the law to take your dogs out at 40 below in Canada so I just didn't do it. Well it warmed up but ... until it was about 35 and I put this dog into my team and left. Well I had 'im up near the lead because he was quite free and he was a Pelly River Husky, ah, kinda a yellow little fella. And, the dogs all ... my dogs all wanted to get to 'im you know. I knew they'd kill 'im. Finally I put him back on the wheel and I would [inaudible] beside of 'im to make 'im behave but they'd wanna get to 'im and I crack 'im once in a while with the whip and ah, it was a quite a job. Well, I got outta there that night and I stopped in an old roadhouse, oh, I imagine I made 40 miles, fairly good trail. And I stopped in an old roadhouse, been abandoned of course, there's a big drum stove in there and it was still cold, 30, 35, I don't know what it was I didn't have a thermometer with me but, wood was kinda scarce but I gotta quite a bit in and I'd figured plenty to last me and built up a fire in the old stove, put out my dogs and got somethin' to eat and went to bed and ...

00:08:50

About midnight that night I woke up and I was awfully sick. I got up and I vomited a little and I tried to go back to bed and I was sick and by morning I was just awful sick, I just figured by golly I was goin' die that's all there was it and it come daylight, and I was gettin' pretty short of wood, and so I just decided I'd go on, there was no use in me dying there alone, I didn't wanna and I didn't know how far it was to another place and don't know yet. But I don't imagine over ten miles. But I'd go out and I'd hook up a couple of dogs and I'd be cold and sick, that cold just struck in on me ... in that condition and I was still, just, oh, I'd just get dizzy, I just couldn't stand it and I'd go back curl up with the stove a little while, then I'd go out and hook up another two or three dogs and they dogs seemed to understand. They'd ... I hook 'im up and they'd just sit there. They wouldn't act anxious or anything and finally I got my dogs hooked up, they never bothered this one, never controlled 'im and they would just acted like they knew there was something wrong and they wasn't gettin' into devilment, that's all there was to it. Well anyhow I finally got my dogs all hooked up and untied my rope and spoke to 'em and they just walked off, that's

all there was to it. Never run at all, never give a jerk, good thing I mighta ... I stood on the runners and leaned over on the sled. Well I know at times I just about went out because I was in a terrible shape and I just didn't know. If I'd a fall off of that sled I don't imagine I'd ever got back on again, I don't know but it was pretty close anyhow.

00:10:38

Well I was goin' along and I raised up my head and looked and if I remember around ten miles. Right down below the trail there was a cabin and I could see smoke comin' outta the cabin door, cabin's stovepipe and I just didn't say a word to my dogs. They just turned off on that trail and went down to the cabin, pulled up and I was still plenty sick and I went to the door and nobody there and opened the door and nobody home. Well, I went and unhooked my dogs. I just ... unsnapped 'em and tied 'em up, that's all there was to it and went in, laid down, went to bed. Well I don't know what time I got there but was fairly early in the morning. Well this is a trapper and he's out on his trap line and then along towards the evening before he got back and I was still plenty sick I'm tellin' ya and I hadn't had anything to eat and just laid there asleep or out for all that time, I imagine five or six hours. But when he got in, why, he come in the house and course he'd heard about me, knew who I was, Moccasin Telegraph again, I told him what was up and he got some milk and poured down me and made me feel a little better.

00:12:02

Along eight, nine o'clock I got so I could sit up and take a little nourishment and next morning I was feelin' plenty tough yet but ... and he insisted that I stayed, so I did, I laid over that day and I had dog feed with me. But that was one of the worst days I think I ever put in in all my life. Well, when I ... I got to Whitehorse of course everybody knew me there. I laid over there a couple of days and stocked up a little bit and when on to [dead air from 00:12:35 to 00:12:44]

00:12:44

From there on they used toboggans and their dogs single and here I had double dogs and a toboggan about 16 inches wide, but here I had double dogs and a 22 inch sled. Well all I could do is make a toboggan out of my sled. So, I got hardwood and had a fella plane it down for me and we lashed it and bolted it on to my runners. The outside was flush, it was about 10 inches wide, both of 'em, that'd give me about a 20-inch bearing and then I made braces, or we did from a bed of the sled down to the toboggan affair. It was a quite a mess but it run pretty good.

00:13:28

Well I fought trail from there on for a long ways and finally [inaudible] up my dogs and had 'em all workin' single. They got on that narrow trail, they'd get to pushin' each other and push each other off of the snow and it was wearing themselves out pushin' each other off the snow and still [end of recording].