

## Transcript Summary

<b>UAF Oral History Call No:</b>	2016-15-29
<b>Date of Recording:</b>	1955
<b>Length of Recording:</b>	00:13:48
<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 8 & 9, 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: Hello he said how are ya and what are you doin' back, wanted to know all about it. Well I told him my troubles and he said well he said why don't you come on ... why don't you wait and go in with me. Well, what he was doin', he was goin' to the top of the glacier and a bunch of men would get there and they'd pay 'im a dollar a piece and he'd show 'em the way back down the glacier you know, it

had thawed and blowed and changed and places caved in and since the ... ah, outfit had got over it and so it was a quite dangerous and so I done that. Well he carried the biggest gun I think ever I seen on one man's hip. He was a big man himself but boy that gun looked as twice as big as any gun I never seen. Where that's where I learned most about quitters. My first big lesson about quitters he taught me. When we'd come to a crevasse, why he'd send me one way and he'd go the other lookin' for a way to get across. Some ways you'd ... sometimes you'd go clear across the glacier there wouldn't be [inaudible] find it and then we'd all go and cross the glacier.

00:01:13

Well we'd figured we make the thirty miles by night pretty easy, just plenty of daylight, and goin' along at a pretty good clip and so I come back ... I'd found a place to cross and got back at ... my whiskered friend hadn't got back yet. And there was a big husky kid, he was 23 or 4 I guess and ... weighed a 190 pound I'd say, great big fella, and he was layin' down and he was actually cryin'. And, well, I didn't know much quitters so I said what's the matter. Well, he said I'm juts give out he says I'm just sick, I just can't go anymore that's all there was to it. Well, he was just one of those quitters. When things don't happen right, why they just quit and lay down. You can't explain it there's ... it's mental of course but this boy had had experience with them kinda people and pretty soon he come back and he was a gruff devil, he says what in hell's the matter? Why he said this fella's sick and tired I said he can't do no more. Well, he said that's damn bad. He said you know, he said I get them fellas once in a while and ... he talk a little broke ... he said I get them fellas once in a while and he said I just wouldn't let a dog die on this glacier, he said that would be an awful death and he says we can't pack 'em out so he said I just shoot 'em.

00:02:27

And he started pullin' that gun out. Well by golly I thought he was gonna shoot 'em. I get ... it scared me, I was just a stunned for a minute you know. And the fella that was sick is too because he got on his feet, he says I'm alright, I'll go on he said don't shoot he said I'm alright and by golly he was. He got up and he was the first man into Valdez. Now that just gives you an idea what fright will do to a ... to a quitter. Well anyhow, I got back to Valdez and I had money this time. I had five dollars and my thirty cents after ... and I'd been 90 miles and back. I'd been 90 miles into the interior and back to Valdez. And, I'd drowned three outfits, three dogs, and made it back over the glacier and there was still lots of snow in Valdez. And you know Valdez will have 20-25 foot of snow and just 90 miles over the range on the other side, they'll only have 18 inches and that 18 inches is a very light snow. What falls on the Valdez side is awfully heavy. You can just hardly go over it in snowshoes 'cuz it stick to your snowshoes.

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But that's the difference in just 90 miles. So that's why everything was so much like spring on the Copper Center side. Cooper Center was just a ... a bunch of men, there was two cabins was all. And, didn't much to anything at all. Everybody was wonderin' where to go and not knowin' just which way to start. Well anyhow, Valdez was a boomin' and everybody was buildin' something and there was buildin' a wharf, it was buildin' everything and they just ... anybody that would work could get a dollar an hour for as long as they'd work. Well, my long suit was an axe, I liked to use an axe and I could use one and so I went to helpin' build log cabins and worked all summer. Made a just nice piece of jack and bought me some dogs. When spring come ... or when fall come, I had 13 dogs and a 12-foot sled. I had a few dogs in the bunch that didn't amount to very much. I got rid of them as soon as I could but ... the snow had just fell and I says there's talk now about another trail. A trail around the glacier, you could hear some fellas say oh, that trails the best and another say oh the glacier's the best and it was quite uncertain but a boat come in one day, and two or three days afterward there was a fella come to me and wanted me to take 'em to Fairbanks. Well, the boat hadn't left yet. I figured, well gee now, I'm really somebody. A guy

come in and want to go to Fairbanks and want me to take 'em, I must be some dog musher and I must have some team.

00:05:56

Of course I all puffed up. He told me what he wanted and he ... there's mail he told me. Well, I don't know what, there was something a little screwy about that fella and the whole set up, I never did know what it was. Really none of my business. But I made up my mind sense that I would get a nice dumb kid and had some dogs and that it wouldn't make any difference what he'd done, it would be alright but they took me on the boat and swore me in as a mail carrier. Well he had two bags of mail. I'd been a thinkin' that was ... there was just a lot of money in that mail for some reason, I dunno why, just from his actions afterwards. But we started out and he went over the Thompson Pass one of the early ones. It was 103 miles that way to Valdez and 90 over the glacier. But I believed the Thompson was the best ... turned out to be the best because there are now crevasses and it wasn't so dangerous but there some awful winds there. But anyhow we ... the mail then, the first mail was startin' to Fortymile on the Yukon.

00:07:09

Well you went through the Pass and down onto the Tanana, crossed the Tanana and went on to Fortymile on the Yukon. Well this fella knew that country or he a map he ... he knew somethin'. I don't think he'd ever been there before but I think he had instructions, I don't know. But it's always been a kinda a mystery. When we come to the Tanana, now Tanana is what Fairbanks is on, and Fairbanks was a ... a just started, you just begin to hear about Fairbanks then, and when we come to the Tanana he said we'll go down this. Well that was alright with me he was payin' me and payin' me darn good. And so we went down the Tanana and he just had no trouble to gettin' to Tanana at all. Of course we run into a ... a ... Indian tracks, village tracks before we got to the slough and he took them and went to the Indian village, and it was only about 20 miles from there to Fairbanks, down the slough.

00:08:12

Well they was a man by the name of Barnette come in there with a boat and anchored and he was really the one that started the stampede into Fairbanks. And, this fella went right square to his boat. He knew him when he got there and I didn't hear much of their conversation only I knew it was ... that they was friends when he got there. Well, I've often wondered about that guy [dead air from 00:08:37 to 00:08:41]

00:08:41

I keep forgettin' that darned description. Well over Thompson, that is rugged I'm tellin' ya. You got up what they call Flat River I think, I'll think of it, up to about 20 miles then you start up on the mountain. Switch backs and what have you. Plenty straight up. You go up to about 7500 feet and then it's more gradual comin' down on the other side but all high mountains. Every place you look is just rugged high mountains and when you get down a little bit out of the high mountains, you've got fast white water. It's um ... you can just about describe Alaska with rugged mountains, green forests of spruce for miles, you've seen that of course. But rugged mountains, just unbelievable rugged mountains for Alaska just about any time. Well, of course on this trip, we passed through Copper Center again and there was my Wrangell Mountains off in the east and boy I did love them mountains. I fell in love with 'em. And, fact is I'm in love with 'em yet, I think they are the most beautiful things I ever looked at. Then of course we went on and went through the Alaska Range.

00:10:10

Now the Copper River runs ... ah, west, oh God, I dunno know, we'll have to look that up on a map. But anyhow the Tanana runs right the other way and runs into the Yukon so really one runs north and the other runs south, or so to speak, and ... so why he hit that river and went down it I'll never know. Now when you get into the Tanana Valley, why you've got flat country, not flat, but rolling country. What I mean you might see a peak that would take ya a couple of hours to climb to the top of the little mountain but no really rugged mountains in the valley itself. It's very wide flats, 50-60 miles wide in places. Down around Fairbanks where it is why there's mountain maybe around up several hundred feet, about 500 maybe up and down but rollin' country, no really rough rugged mountains until you get directly into the ranges [dead air from 00:11:18 to 00:11:24]

00:11:24

Well if I was gonna describe the scenery in Alaska, that's just how it ... now of course in the fall of the year when the frost hits it, there's lots of poplar there and the spruce still stays as green ya know and that poplar turn yellow and boy is that a picture that you just never forget. A lotta underbrush that just firey red some of it and well it's just got anything beat yet for color in the spring of the year. But later years I've flew over that a quite a bit after the planes got in there. We used to get in our planes to go sheep huntin' and things like that. It made it a lot easier but I just never got through admirin' the rugged country. Now the Coast Mountains I believe is steeper than the interior mountains. The Coast Mountains you started to climb on them and you'll just reach above ya and catch hold of a brush or somethin' or a rock, and you're feet will be on the ground and you won't be leanin' too far over in a lot of places. You'll just be climbin' almost straight up.

00:12:27

There I've shot goats in the Coast Range and I have 'em fall, I believe a quarter of a mile right out of them ... off the mountain. When you get up to 'em why they'd be bruised, fat on 'em would be all broke loose from the flash. And they just fall for, it looks like times eternity that's all you think they never are gonna quit [dead air from 00:12:58 to 00:13:02]

00:13:02

Well Dick I think I've just about got her done. If there is anything more you can think of, why, let me know. I've really just enjoyed this a lot of goin' back and travelin' some of the old trails I'm tellin' ya. It's ... but so many things it just surprise ya the things that you have forgot. I know there's lots of things that I've overlooked but ... to just ... for instance, a little while ago Gladys and I started to think of the dogs' names. There's one that we not thought of yet, its just surprise ya how much water goes under the bridge and how that mind of yours will just kinda ... a ... slip away with ya. You'll just forget things like that and I'm satisfied I've left out a lot of detail and [end of recording].