

## Transcript Summary

<b>UAF Oral History Call No:</b>	2016-15-30
<b>Date of Recording:</b>	1955
<b>Length of Recording:</b>	00:13:13
<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 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: [Slim starts speaking mid-sentence] runners, handlebars right went through but my handlebars caught on the ... the other side of the crevasse and I went through. Well I hit on the other side of the glacier and knocked all the breath outta me and I ... I guess I was out for a little while because when I come to, I looked up and there was the bushiest head I ever seen lookin' down at me and just a

cussin'. Boy he was just callin' me all the damn fools and everything else I could think of ... you could think of and well I just woke up mad that's all there was to it. And got on my feet and I got hold of my glacier ... um, my sled of course and then he come stalkin' he said look kid he said I was cursin' you to keep you from makin' a fool of yourself. He said if you'd have stepped six foot either way he said he would've went into that crevasse and he said I didn't want to roll and make a mistake. And, well, we got to be good friends afterwards but they reached down and pulled me out and I went to camp but I was plenty sore next morning but I got into camp, my camp was only about a mile down and I got to thinkin' about that after I got to camp. Now by gee that ... after all there was a cut off and it wasn't over six foot down or seven, and so I just took my shovel and went back up and I filled that darn thing up with snow, and, tested it with my shovel handle and walked clear up to the trail and back and boy, I found a name for myself, Slim's Cutoff.

00:01:36

I was somebody. Well, with my three little dogs and I got ... it was gettin' pretty well known on the trail I'm tellin' ya and I got to the top of the glacier. I think it was about 7000 feet, now, I don't know but when I ... it was the glacier at the top was just like a box canyon. You went through the high bluffs and you just didn't see anything for about 50 or 100 yards but when I come out on the other side there was the most beautiful sight I ever looked at in my life. About 7 or 8 miles below was a lake. It was about 15 miles long and about 5-mile-wide and timber on it ... all around it. Well the timber was all green, oh, 30-40 miles away was a river which is the Copper River I found out afterwards, you could see it every once in a while, show up through that green timber. It was beautiful. And a way off, it was close to 100 miles from me, 75 anyhow, was the Wrangell Mountains and now they're 4 to 12, 14 and 16 thousand feet and some ... some feet besides, I don't remember exactly but, Drum was the lowest, Wrangell was next and that's an active volcano. And smoke was rollin' out of the top of that volcano and it right in the middle of the three mountains. Well sir I fell in love with that mountain, I fell in love with the whole country as far as that is concerned.

00:03:23

Boy, I did like it. I just felt gee, this is all my world. I own it all. I knew it ain't mine to just explore and I never got such a thrill I think in my life. Of course, up north you could see the Alaska Range and south you could see the Coast Range and boy that was a sight to behold. There I'm standin' in a kinda a box canyon and to the south of me that bluff was, I dunno, maybe a thousand feet high, it looked like it. But down to that lake was my big ... first big jump. Well I got myself ... you know in this outfit the old fella had a left me a 45-70 rifle and 4 boxes of ammunition. I didn't have any rifle, didn't have any gun at all in fact but the old man had left me this rifle. Well I got myself all ... stuff all down to the lake and the lake had begin to thaw. It was getting towards May then. The lake had begin to thaw and they quit the trail ... quit the lake ... quit haulin' on the lake and the camp, the main camp ... they'd built some cabins down there and they was, oh, a couple of hundred men and ... just all camp down ... that's where the river ... the river left the lake and went on to Copper Center.

00:05:03

Well, I wanted to get to the foot of that lake so I loaded me up a ... a ... one of my tents and a little outfit and some dog feed and my rifle but when I got to the foot of that lake my first trip, there was rabbits there and that the first snowshoe rabbits I'd seen and gee, I was hungry from eatin' [inaudible] I would get me a rabbit. Well, this big 45, a rabbit was sittin' not over 75 feet from me and so I pulled down on 'im and turned loose and I got 'im but about all I got it was two hind legs. I'd shot all the rest away. And, but I had rabbit anyhow. But the next day the trail was awful bad. It was brush to cross through and ... some places you run on the bare ground and oh, it was a tough one and I got to thinkin' gee, all that

outfit is gonna be a terrible job drivin' ... draggin' that 15 miles to the lower end of the lake where you got ... left by boat then and went to Copper Center. That was what I found out afterwards. But I went back to camp and I'd never seen the moonlight there like it was ... or like it was in the morning.

00:06:19

I went to bed that night, tired of course, and next morning I woke up and gee it was daylight, everything looked as light my camp and I got outta bed and my dogs was asleep alright, they wasn't bothered, they looked at me kinda disgusted like why did I get up? And so I looked at my time and it's two o'clock in the mornin'. Well that moon was just as bright as any day you ever seen. And I said well, bein' some up, it was cold, darn cold, and that's the way it does up there you know, some nights you get some awful cold nights after it begins to thaw and I went down to the lake to get me some water to make myself some coffee and by gee, the water was froze. And those little pieces of ice there ... the old ice that come out of the lake, why, I stepped on them, they was solid and I went back and got myself ... well I tested it, walked it out onto the lake, boy it was just a hard as could be. Well, dumb kid you know again, I says gee here's what I make that 50 miles without any trouble and by this time I had three sleds, I'd picked up another on the glacier and by havin' one load down there I just figured I could put all of my stuff on three sleds, hook up my dogs and go down that glacier just a kitin' at 15 miles and there'd be nothin' to it.

00:07:47

So I just got busier than a cranberry mushin' getting' those sleds loaded and as I got my three sleds loaded and all set up, why the sun had just beginin' to come over the Wrangell Mountains and I started down the glacier ... well down the ice. Well it was just as hard as ice ever was until, oh, maybe 6 or 7 miles and the sun had begin to warm it up a little bit and it begin to give away with me. You seen the ice when it's thawin' and it seems like a million little candles standin' on end. Well these little candles by the time I got opposite the camp, was about 6 or 8 inches long and I began to worry. Well there was a quite a string of ice, I would say 30 feet wide and probably 100 feet or 150 from the main ice to shore. I'd noticed that when I was down there. And there was nothin' to it now, I was right at camp and another couple of hundred feet and I had it and that lake had a bluff there, about 3 feet high, rocks, that places you could walk down between it and so I hollered haul to Brownie and he started for shore. He was all tickled as I was to start ashore and that load was comin' along a little heavy then.

00:09:11

But I musta had 1200 pound on all together, thousand anyhow. Well, as I started ashore and got onto this little nick of ice the water commenced to come up on me a little more and a little more and pretty soon I was in water to my knees and I wasn't lookin' anywheres I was just yellin' at my dogs and hurryin' and all at once, bing, and everything happened, clickin' of ice and I was in the water, my dogs was in the water, everything had happened at once. I was pawin' for a piece of ice to keep on top and I see my dog, my leader go down. Fats went down right beside of me and then Brownie went and then Blue, no Blue then Brownie. They all went under. And about that time my rope lit right beside of me. And boy I knew what that meant, I grabbed that rope and I wrapped it around me and those fellas on the bank they was a dozen there for that time, and they pulled me ashore and boy if you think I wasn't a sick kid lookin' back at that outfit all gone.

00:10:21

Well, I climb up the bank and somebody had went into my tent and got me some dry clothes. I was cold, boy, that water was cold. Just ice cold that's all there was to it. Somebody went into the tent and got me some clothes, they was all buildin' a fire and nobody sayin' one word. That's the side of men that would

do things and that's when I got the best example of it I ever had in my life. I don't think there was three words spoke but everything was done. And the first thing you know I was alone and everybody was gone and I just crawled in my tent. Well, the sun had warmed my tent up, it was bad in there at all, I'd changed my clothes of course by the fire and I imagine I'd been a half hour from the time I'd dumped into the water until I'd got my clothes changed and everybody had left and I just crawled into my tent and well, I don't think I cried but I could have awful easy I'll tell ya that because I was the worst cut up kid that ever you would run across.

00:11:33

Well there I was, no outfit, I was plumb outta outfit, just what was the next move I didn't ... couldn't imagine but I got to thinkin' about my dogs and my outfit. Now maybe I could make a grappling hook and find 'em but it was only about a quarter of mile from there to where the river took out of the lake. But an old Indian, when I was a kid, taught me how to make a canvas boat by tying willows together you know and all of that. Well, I had plenty of canvas so I got busy and the next day, awful busy on the canvas boat. Well I got in the canvas boat made and I had a big can of lard for dog feed and well, it was about half full I'd say ... ten pound anyhow, and so I melted that and I rubbed it on the bottom of the this boat and just saturated it [inaudible] to be sure it wouldn't leak because I didn't know goin' on and what to do about that boat ... and then I made me a grappling hook. I got some iron and some rocks and I fixed me up a kinda grappling hook. Well, I spent three or four days tryin' to catch onto them dogs but I never did. The water was 20 foot deep right up close to the lake and out it was forty feet deep so I think the river leaving as it was so close that there was a kinda of a current and that's what took my dogs and outfit away.

00:13:04

That they didn't sink entirely, that is heavy on the ground and I had flour of course and a lotta stuff in the sled [end of recording]