

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-32
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:47
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 9, 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 speaking mid-sentence] [inaudible] the crackpot that I was ... how I was cracked and what about it and I think he thought it was whiskey but he found out I didn't drink and then he got ... kinda got it into his head that it must be women. Well, I didn't seem to go for the women very strong and so he kinda give that up. But I could see he kept watchin' me and so this day he said to me he

said why is it that those dogs make so much racket at times and you pay no attention 'em and then sometimes they'll make just a little yip and you're right on your feet. Well, I says it's what they say. Well sir I could just see that fella's little face light up. He ... he had found out was the matter with me and I was ... and that them dogs talk to me, I understood what they said. Well sir, that was really funny but we went on and when we got to in about 50 ... about 25 miles of Washington D.C. I kept away from the reporters all I could and ... we had a rig fixed up that I'd get ... kinda tent fixed and I'd get into it and, of course I could hear everything goes on, we got within about 20, 25 miles of Washington D.C. and this three reporters come out there and of course I hid from 'em I got in my tent and he was talkin' to 'em.

00:01:22

And he says you know those ... this brother of mine understands what them dogs said and they ... I guess looked kinda funny. Well he said now I'll tell ya what I'll do, he says I'll betcha a hundred dollars that I can blindfold him and leave him there was he is and you can bring a drunk up here, he'll tell ya what's there, you can bring a woman up, he'll tell ya what's there. He said ... or you can turn one of the dogs loose, he'll tell ya what's goin' on. He says I'll bet you a hundred dollars that there's at least a half of dozen things that he can tell ya that happened just by what them dogs said. Well, they didn't take him up but by that time he was plumb convinced I guess that I wasn't crazy. Well anyhow, we couldn't travel very well in the day time, the cars would bunch up on us, they'd stop to see the dogs and another car would get behind and first thing you know we'd have a traffic jam. And after you kill off the trail and so we gotta gettin' up at around two o'clock in the morning, it's cooler then too.

00:027

And about 30 miles was about all my dogs' feet would stand, they commenced to getting' a little sore and I see I had to ... swollen up. Now I tried moccasins in Canada for a long ways and the women would make the moccasins for me. And that was good. They're just a little sack you know and they would telephone ahead and when I'd get there that ... the women would have a whole bundle of moccasins for my dogs. Well, they'd only last about six or eight, ten miles would be the limit for 'em. Made outta canvas of course. [Slim has a coughing fit] Well by the time you pulled off four moccasins off of eight dogs each and moccasined 'em again, why you'd just spend a devil of a lotta time. So, I figured it was easy just drive 'em slower so I just slowed up bug [he coughs again and then dead air from 00:03:25 to 00:03:30].

00:03:30

Well you know one place I got into, I forget the name of it, was out west and drove over the trail about a mile to a little town, off of the highway, and next morning I got up and, two o'clock mind ya, and drove out to the highway and I turned right square back ... my down my own tracks and I found out after I'd ... some rocks, a lot of rocks along the trail that I recognized I said, gee, I see them rocks yesterday. And so then I turned around and started back and met my brother of course about half way back and he was scared to death, he wondered what was comin' but I stayed all night in the same town again. Next morning, believe me, I headed right. Well we got into Chicago and of course the Mayor give me the key to Chicago and I was quite a guy. Cops met me way outta Chicago and brought me in and then they took me on to the fair.¹ Well that leader of mine, I'll tell ya, you just can't believe it. He was scared stiff. Everybody ... I knew he was scared stiff, he scared about a lotta things well I was too. But I would talk to him and he would straighten out, he could believe what I said but it was awful hard for him too. But a thing that was the most interesting to me was ... coming through the west, was I'd hear a car comin' mind you, two o'clock in the morning, it quiet, and you could hear a car comin' just a buzzin' you know.

¹ Transcriber's note: Slim was attending the Century of Progress Chicago's World's Fair in 1933.

Boy, I dunno how fast was comin' but I'd think holy gee, I'd better off the road I guess because maybe they'll run into me not bein' able to see my dogs and I'd got me a flashlight so I could ... fact is I'd put ... I gotta battery in my sled and put some lights on my sled, both the rear and back so I could turn them on and have a light, not for me but for anybody comin'.

00:05:28

And I also had a flashlight and I think gee, they'll ... won't see the dogs and hit them, they might see my lights and I worried a lot about it. Them cars comin' just a buzzin' ya know. So, but when they'd get ... when I'd see them lights why I could just hear that engine quit runnin' ... that ... brakes would squeak and that car would slow up and by the time it got to me as rule is wasn't goin' 20 miles an hour and go on by and there she'd go hummin' again and I wondered what the devil it was and I talked to my brother about it and so one night he come back to meet me and he Lordy, he said, if you want to see something he said take this car and drive out and come back. Well, I couldn't drive a car. So, well I could but I didn't know much about it. But said them looks like a thousand flashlights lookin' right square at ya. Them was the wolves eyes shinin' in those lights. He said he just never seen anything like it and no wonder they slowed up. Well anyhow, after I got my key to the Chicago and went out to the Century of Progress, the first man I met there was Harry S. New, that was the Postmaster General under Hoover and he'd been to Alaska and I'd got acquainted with him. And know that devil knew who I was.

00:07:01

Remembered me. And well I felt right at home I'm tellin' ya. Well of course he introduced me to everybody and they ... dogs of course he wanted to know now where do you wanna stop and how and well I said I want to get close to the exh ... Alaska exhibit and no dogs allowed in the fairground, no fire to be built and nobody stay all night and one of the guards and so they took me over to the Alaska exhibit. Well they had a quite a lawn there and so I set up camp and I was privileged to build a fire and cook my meals and sleep in my tent there and fixed up my dogs and boy I was just in a big way and everybody there I think come to see me, ah, [few seconds of dead air]

00:07:58

Well New just brought everybody there was over there to introduce 'em and always a surprise. And she ... he brought over Mrs. Roosevelt, quite a stew over that, and introduced me to her and she invited me to come on to Washington D.C. and see ... meet the President. Well of course, I ... in the north when you want to see anybody you just walk in and see 'em, that's was all there was to it. And I'd never give it a thought but what ... that's the way I'd do with the President when I got there I'd just walk in and see 'im that would be all there'd be to it. And so when she asked me to come and see the president, why, everybody congratulated me and all of that, well I didn't quite know what but New was awful fond of my dogs. He and his wife was there all the time during the fair.

00:08:52

And both '33 and '34 and he got pretty well acquainted with my leader especially in '33. Well I went on to Washington D.C. and the same old grind, had to drive in the morning because people would ball up on me on the streets ... on the highway they'd just ... cars would keep stoppin' I got balled up down in Indiana and the cops come along and it was an hour straighten things out. So I went to drivin' again at two in the morning. Well I get into Washington D.C. Now I hadn't thought much about it. I knew I was invited to the White House but I hadn't thought about clothes. I got in about ten o'clock in the morning and they had a place there in the park for me to camp, all picked out, and about an hour after I got here there come a runner from Mrs. Roosevelt, wanted me to come to the White House. Well then I woke up. I had on a long shirt, a pair of overalls and a pair of moccasins. And I just didn't have time enough to

do anything else that was all there was to it. So, I just went up as is. And, well, I felt kinda awkward goin' in there all of them fellas dressed up to beat the band you know and me with overalls on but I wasn't there only just a few minutes until somebody come to me and Mrs. Roosevelt will see you.

00:10:23

Drugged [dragged] me out in another room someplace and there she was with, oh I dunno, three or four women. She introduced me all of 'em but I don't remember who they was. But she wanted to know if I would come up next day and meet the President and bring my dogs. Well, certainly I would and I was about 5 blocks from the White House. Well I forget what hour I was to be up there but anyhow, about an hour before I was to be at the White House here come three motorcycle cops and they was to escort me to the White House. Well there was a quarrellin' and arguin' and right close to me and I heard one of say well damned if I'll do it, I'll quit my job first and so I went over to find out what was all about and I said what's the matter? Well, he said, nobody will ride in front of your dogs. I said why? Well they said those wolves, and they'll eat ya up. And well I said they won't hurt ya, I'd talk to 'em but that didn't make any difference, they wasn't gonna ride in front of them dogs and wolves and get eat up that's all there was to it. By that time of course the dogs had ... the papers had played up the wolf idea that he would thought they was a bad bunch. And so I said to this fella that was supposed to ride in front I said I'll tell ya what do, I said, just get out there about a half a block and I said I'll hook up my dogs and when I get ready to go I'll just holler and you can go on and I said stay a half a block ahead of 'em I said you can out run 'em.

00:12:07

And, well, he finally agreed to that and he went up to ... about halfway up the block and stopped there on the curb and was kinda lollin' on his motorcycle and I got my dogs all hooked up and I yelled to him I says all ready and I jerked the loop on my ... slip knot on my tree and the dogs lit out. Boy they hadn't done anything in the things just looked good to 'em and they seemed to feel awful good and away we went you know. And we passed that motor cop before he got started. And of course I had to go on up to the White House alone, which I did, easy enough and lucky didn't catch nobody crossin' the street but I got up there and the motorcycle cops they come trailin' along behind, lookin' kinda cheap and drove up to the White House. Well everybody was there and President out there and I met him and talked to him a while and then the kids was all out there and they all wanted to for a ride on the dog sled and so I'd ... a woman would get on and hold a kid on and I'd drive around on my wheels ... hopin' to have snow but we didn't, drive around the White House grounds on wheels. Oh, I was probably there an hour, maybe longer and President seemed to get a big kick out of it and everybody did in fact and so we ready to go back one of these cops said to me he said how fast do them darn things go? And that's the first time I every really knew how fast a dog team did go. Now mind you they drove up the White House and drove around the [end of recording].