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HSTA 471

Dr. Anya Jabour

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Kim Williams: Professionalizing Domesticity in Montana and Abroad, 1923-1986.

“A door was ajar- I cautiously put one foot through the door. I looked around. Signs were favorable so I went on full ahead.”¹ This is how Kim Williams reflected on her creation of a course on edible plants at the University of Montana. The quote also speaks to Williams’s tenacious spirit. In the United States, the domestic housewife was a bastion of the hegemonic feminine ideal for centuries. Women were expected to stay at home and run the household, and this role was intimately tied to the meaning of femininity. The role, and the expectations attached to it, shifted drastically over time.² By the start of World War II, consumer culture had relegated the American housewife to little more than a caretaker and grocery shopper. Many women felt driven to pursue meaningful careers and reject the restrictive gender roles placed upon them. In doing so, American women had to define a balance for themselves between the professional and domestic spheres.

Williams struggled with a crisis of identity throughout her life. She crafted her own field in sustainable home economics in an attempt to balance her aspirations for a professional career with the tremendous social pressure to live as a housewife and

¹ “My Frugal Life,” Box 4, Folder 8, Kim Williams Papers, Archives and Special Collections, The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, Missoula, MT.

² Glenna Matthews, *“Just A Housewife”: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (Oxford University Press, 1987), pg. 5.

homemaker. As a child, Williams was ingrained with the values of frugality and domesticity, yet she aspired towards higher education and a professional career. The conflict continued in early adulthood; even as she struggled to achieve professional success in the sexist field of advertising, she also longed to achieve the contemporary ideal of domestic bliss. After marrying and living as a housewife, Williams found that the lifestyle came with unique challenges of its own, and she battled with isolation. Even after she apparently reconciled the impulses toward professionalism and domesticity as a professional domestic advice-giver, Williams struggled with feelings of inadequacy as a wife and daughter. She ultimately was never able to balance her conflicts of identity.

The secondary source material directly related to Williams is remarkably scant. Save a collection of book reviews, interviews, and obituaries, little work has been done to analyze the impact of her life and work. That being said, it is possible to place Williams' experiences within the broader context of American women engaged in similar pursuits. In this way, secondary scholarly analysis of women bridging the professional-domestic divide becomes relevant. There is also the issue of the evolution of Second Wave Feminism in the US, and examining how the concept of "a woman's place" shifted from the 1950s to the 1970s. Williams lived much of her adult life abroad, and investigating the experiences of other expatriate American housewives situates the significance of Williams' experiences.

Williams entered adulthood in the aftermath of World War II. In the United States, this period witnessed a revitalization of the hegemonic feminine ideal of the docile housewife. Elaine Tyler May delves into the social and economic factors that influenced this development in her book *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*

Era.³ May utilizes statistics and personal testimonials to paint a picture of the tremendous social pressure placed on women of the era to remain a fixture of the household. Yet, similar to Williams, many women were conflicted in this stringent restriction, and attempted to have both a career and domestic bliss.

There is a wealth of scholarly analysis concerned with American women's balance of domesticity and professional careers in the mid twentieth century. Diana Trilling's article "Professionalism and the Educated Woman" credits the post war period in America as "a glorification of domesticity."⁴ She analyzes the ways in which social and economic factors influence American society's view of the feminist movement, and how second wave feminism specifically protested the expectation that women were destined to be homemakers. Williams herself protested the expectation to be a housewife by pursuing a career in advertising.

Jeanie Wills specifically focuses on the advertising field in her case study, "Dorothy Dignam's advocacy for women's careers in advertising: 1920-1950." The piece, which follows the experiences of Dignam, examines the sexism women faced in the field through the 1940s, the time in which Kim Williams was working. Wills shows how women resisted and at times encouraged stereotypes about femininity in order to craft a professional career.⁵ The time Williams spent in advertising involved her leaning into her femininity to secure some semblance of job security in a sexist field.

³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

⁴ Diana Trilling, "Professionalism and the Educated Woman: A Personal Viewpoint," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Fall 1972), pg. 5.

⁵ Jeanie Wills, "Dorothy Dignam's Advocacy for Women's Careers in Advertising: 1920-1950," *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Fall 2018), 21-36.

The time Williams spent in Santiago, Chile was an experience of isolation. Williams was confined to the corporate environment and social sphere that was attached to her husband's job. In "Desperate Housewives- Social and Professional Isolation of German Expatriated Spouses," Bernd Kupka and Virginia Cathro outline the stresses placed on spouses who move abroad in service of a corporation. The text is relevant as it legitimizes the difficulties and the isolation of moving abroad as the spouse of a traveling professional. The experiences of the women outlined in the article can usefully be compared to the experience of Williams. Despite their differences from Williams as German expatriates, these women's experiences of isolation resonate with hers.⁶

Anne- Meike Fetcher takes a broader, more analytical approach in her article "Gender, Empire, Global Capitalism: Colonial and Corporate Expatriate Wives." The piece explores the ways in which corporate expatriate wives aid and uphold systems of neocolonialism. Fetcher thus argues against the popular association of global capitalism with masculinity. While interesting in itself, this article is particularly fascinating when compared to Williams' own critiques of consumer society and environmental destruction.⁷ Unlike the wives in Fetcher's article, Williams emerged as a sharp critic of consumerism and capitalism, causing tension within her relationship.

⁶ Bernd Kupka and Virginia Cathro, "Desperate Housewives: Social and Professional Isolation of German Expatriated Spouses," *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 18, No. 6 (Summer 2007), 951-68.

⁷ Anne-Meike Fetcher, "Gender, Empire, Global Capitalism: Colonial and Corporate Expatriate Wives," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 36, no. 8 (Fall 2010), 1279-297.

The final facet of Kim Williams' life that this paper aims to examine is her contributions to domestic science. In this pursuit, it is important to understand the history of the field, as well as the ways in which it has shifted over time. Megan J. Elias's book *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* examines the inextricable link between domesticity and femininity. She chronicles the radical ideology around the founding of domestic sciences, seeking to legitimize "women's work" as a technical skillset. This analysis can be compared with Williams' work professionalizing her domestic skill sets, including frugality, subsistence, and urban foraging.⁸ Williams worked to distance home economics from consumer culture, and legitimize the field for its modern potential in practical sustainability.

Glenna Matthews' book *Just A Housewife: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* is a broad monograph of the history of domesticity in America. The book offers a narrative of domesticity as the center of life in the beginning of the nation. As technology progressed, the definition of domesticity moved away from producing goods and more towards a culture of consumption. Kim Williams is a more modern example of an intentional shift towards moving the home back to a seat of production.⁹

In short, there are unlimited ways in which the individual of Kim Williams connects to broader human themes. This project aims to focus in on her contributions to domestic science, and the conflict she faced in crafting a personal identity between domesticity and a professional career. Towards this end, collecting scholarly literature regarding professional women, Second Wave feminism, expatriate wives, and home

⁸ Megan J. Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

⁹ Matthews, "*Just A Housewife*," Chap. 7.

economics all prove relevant in gaining a scope as to how Kim Williams fits in the broader context of American women living and working in the mid twentieth century.

This paper will investigate the life of Kim Williams (September 23, 1923 – August 6, 1986), and analyze the way in which she personally balanced career and domesticity. Williams lived in New York and Los Angeles before spending 1951 through 1971 in Santiago, Chile. When Williams returned to the U.S., she settled in Missoula, Montana. A folklorist herself, Williams has become a local legend in western Montana, exemplifying the neighborly, creative and resourceful spirit many attribute to the region.

Williams appears to be an insightful resource towards analyzing the intersection between domesticity and a professional career, as she spent separate extended periods pursuing both in stark contrast. Williams is also an interesting character in appreciating the impact of Second-Wave Feminism, due to her conspicuous absence from the United States through the 1950s and 1960s. Her writings upon her return reflect on the drastic culture shift that took place in this nation's conceptions of womanhood, and the "separate spheres" in which men and women had been expected to respect.

While the secondary source material on Williams is lacking, the primary materials related to her are a treasure trove, chock-full of audio recordings, interviews, personal correspondence and writings. The majority of the primary sources consulted for this project were readily available in the Archives and Special Collections of the Mike and Maureen Mansfield Library at the University of Montana. The Kim Williams Papers offer twelve linear feet of documents from Williams herself, including an unpublished manuscript for an autobiography, written between 1980 and 1982.¹⁰ This text details

¹⁰ "Autobiography Manuscript- Original (Redone)," 1982, Box 12, Folder 16, Williams Papers.

Williams's forays into the professional world of advertising and publishing, chronicling the rapid turnover and sexual discrimination endemic to these fields in that era (1930s and 1940s). The manuscript comes complete with rejection letters from multiple publishing houses, a testament to Williams's own commitments to telling her story, and the lack of coverage her life has received.

This text is very useful to my topic as it explores Williams' professional career in her own words. The text is undeniably biased, as she has every incentive to paint herself in a positive light, recalling stories in a way that coheres with her own personal narrative. In this way the text is limited to analyses of her perspectives on womanhood, professionalism, and early adulthood, and is less useful as a resource for constructing a timeline of her life on its own. To offset this challenge, it was important to find documents Williams wrote at the times of the experiences she chronicles, in order to confirm her recollections.

Conveniently, the collection has her speeches and writings, dating from 1944 to her death. Williams offers short prose and poetry style glimpses into a host of topics, ranging from botany to religion, health, aging, family, politics, and on and on. Williams's unique personality and perspective are most evident in these writings. She uses her own past experiences to justify her outlook on life. In her personal reflections, Williams lays out the conflicts she faced in forming her personal identity.¹¹

Also within the collection are diaries from 1958 to 1970, detailing Williams's travels through Chile and Latin America.¹² These texts are interesting, as they explore the stringent social setting she lived in, living with a small group of American families

¹¹ See for example, "My Frugal Life," Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

¹² See for example, "Travels in South America," 1962-1963, [Box 1, Folder 5,] Williams Papers.

employed by an American mining company. In this era, she details few experiences that aren't directly related to her husband. These documents also give invaluable insight into how Williams constructed her personal identity. These diaries can be combined with her autobiography and personal writings to construct a timeline of Williams's life, from childhood to retirement.

This project also consulted Williams's three published works. *High Heels in the Andes* (1959) details a semi-fictionalized account of Williams's time in South America. *Kim Williams' Book of Uncommon Sense* (1986) is an advice book full of insight into the mind of Williams and her personal values. *Kim Williams' Cookbook & Commentary* (1987) is a recipe book along with ruminations on nature and domesticity. These books are well written and entertaining, yet their fictionalized nature and mass market appeal makes them less useful as cornerstone documents towards my analysis of Williams's personal life.¹³

These sources serve the purpose of this project by offering the personal perspectives of Williams herself. Her writings work in concert with one another to offer a clear timeline of her life, and the events and experiences that shaped it. These texts show the diversity of Williams's writing styles, as she writes in professional prose, creative poetry, and vulnerable personal letters. Her reflections on her own experiences, and how she translates those to her writing, highlight the ongoing conflict she faced between wishing to live a homegrown life of quaint proportion, and wanting to legitimize herself as a media personality.

¹³ Kim Williams, *High Heels in the Andes: Or My Life on a High Plane* (New York: Literary Licensing, 1959); Kim Williams, *Kim Williams' Book of Uncommon Sense: A Practical Guide With 10 Rules for Nearly Everything* (Tucson, Ariz.: HP Books, 1986); Kim Williams, *Kim Williams' Cookbook and Commentary* (Tucson, Ariz.: Knight-Ridder Press, 1987).

* * *

From an early age, Williams grew to appreciate the value of frugality. She was born Elizabeth Ardea Kandiko on September 21, 1923, coming from a humble upbringing. Her parents, Joseph and Veronika Kandiko, were Hungarian immigrants. The family lived on a small farm in Gallatin, New York.¹⁴ Williams had six siblings, and the family had to be conservative with their resources. Williams grew to appreciate this, reflecting, “I was lucky. I went straight from the Great Depression into the sugarless, butterless, eggless days of World War II.”¹⁵

For William’s growing up, the intersection between domesticity and sustainability was a fact of life. Her exposure to domestic duty early on was centered around her mother. Veronika Kandiko was an ideal picture of the 20th century housewife. She cooked and cleaned for a family of nine, and kept the house in neat order. In her diaries, Williams recalled, “My mother washed up the kitchen floor every day.”¹⁶ In her later years, Williams reflected that she had internalized the pressure of perfection placed upon her by her mother, writing, “I never knew enough to forgive you. I fought with you to the end. You ran away in Hungary. You left home, came to America. You swam

¹⁴ 1940 U.S. Census, Gallatin, Columbia, New York, Population Schedule, Civil Division, Sheet 5A, Dwelling 106, Elizabeth A. Kandiks (*sic.*); Digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed November 3rd, 2019, https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/2442/m-t0627-02518-00409?pid=11623343&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc%3DEnB1%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26qh%3DvXh%252BoqfWalG20SS4GpRXmQ%253D%253D%26gss%3Dangs-g%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msT%3D1%26gsfn%3DElizabeth%2520Ardea%26gsfn_x%3D0%26gsln%3DKandiko%26gsln_x%3D0%26msypn_ftp%3DGallatin.%2520Columbia.%2520New%2520York.%2520USA%26msypn%3D10388%26msbdy%3D1923%26catbucket%3Drstp%26MSAV%3D0%26uidh%3Ddu4%26pcat%3DROOT_CATEGOR%26h%3D11623343%26dbid%3D2442%26indiv%3D1%26ml_rpos%3D2&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=EnB1&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true.

¹⁵ “My Frugal Life,” Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

¹⁶ “Women,” 1966-1985, [Box 23, Folder 16.] The Kim Williams Papers, Archives and Special Collections, The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, Missoula, MT.

upstream all your life.”¹⁷ Williams constantly felt she was not living up to her parents’ expectations, and she carried that burden long after their deaths.

Williams’s experience in higher education was in an early attempt to overcome these pressures. Williams attended Cornell University, an Ivy League school in her home state of New York. She took a degree in Human Ecology-- an interdisciplinary course combining elements of Home Economics, nutrition, and health. Home Economics, or Domestic Science, was an interdisciplinary field that emerged along with women’s entry into co-educational, land-grant universities such as Cornell. The field sought to legitimize domestic labor as a skilled profession. Williams sought to affirm her passions for domesticity with the legitimacy of higher education.¹⁸

Nevertheless, Williams had aspirations beyond the proverbial family hearth. After moving to New York City, Williams decided to pursue a professional career. Wide-eyed and open minded, she had little vision of any specifics. In an unpublished memoir, she gushed, “Perhaps I would be a copywriter for J. Walter Thompson, or an account executive for Ruthrauff & Ryan. Or a reporter in Hollywood.”¹⁹ Williams soon decided her interests were best served in Los Angeles, and she moved there in 1946. Williams sought to take the next step in furthering her career.

Williams’s move to Los Angeles was her first major step towards becoming a working woman. She quickly fell in love with the city of angels, viewing the move as a

¹⁷ “Marriage/Sex/Aging/Death/Religion,” [Box 7, Folder 10,] The Kim Williams Papers, Archives and Special Collections, The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, Missoula, MT, pg. 152.

¹⁸ “What Was Home Economics?,” *Cornell University*, (2001): <https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/homeEc/masterlabel.html>. (accessed November 14, 2019).

¹⁹ “Autobiography Manuscript- Original (Redone),” 1982, Box 12, Folder 16, Williams Papers, pg. 4.

great step toward a life of her own. She mused, "I was content. I was out in the wide wide world on my very own. All sorts of wonderful things were going to happen to me ... Oh, there were endless opportunities in Los Angeles." Williams confirmed this sentiment in her first week in the city. After brashly requesting interviews at some of the most notable advertising agencies in town, Williams was kindly recommended to an interview at the fashion magazine *Milady of California*.²⁰

The professional world did not offer Williams the relief from social pressure that she imagined it would. Although she aspired to be a writer, Williams found herself offered a job on commission selling advertising space. She was instructed, "Go straight up Wilshire Boulevard. Visit every merchant on the street. Here are the rates. Wear stockings."²¹ Williams noted that she was displeased with this sexually suggestive comment, yet it was reflective of the workplace climate of the late 1940s and 1950s. Historian Jeanie Wills authored a case-study analysis of Dorothy Dignam, an Advertising woman working in New York through the post-war period. Dignam was a successful professional, and her advice to young women in advertising reflects the stringent expectations placed uniquely upon women staff members. She advised, "In advertising work, you will probably be with men most of your business day and it pays to look your Sunday best straight through the week ... You have to make time - it may *make your career*."²² Williams herself reckoned with this emphasis on appearance, relegated to a status below her male coworkers. A strong gender divide existed in the advertising profession, with women and men occupying "separate spheres" within

²⁰ "Autobiography Manuscript- Original (Redone)," 1982, Box 12, Folder 16, Williams Papers, pg. 4.

²¹ "Autobiography Manuscript- Original (Redone)," 1982, Box 12, Folder 16, Williams Papers, pg. 48.

²² Dignam as quoted in Wills, "Dorothy Dignam's advocacy for women's careers in advertising: 1920-1950," pg. 216.

companies.²³ Kim Williams found that her employment at Milady of California was limited based on her gender.

Williams soon found that there was little opportunity to climb the corporate ladder. After struggling to sell ad space, she left Milady in a little over a month. She secured a secretarial job at Adolphe Wendland, another advertising agency, but she never made enough money to consider herself a success.²⁴ Within five years, Williams would work thirteen different jobs within advertising, writing, and publishing. She struggled to find a clear career path, writing, "I'd been a working woman ... Not much of a one. My secretarial sisters always reminded me of that. 'You went to four years of college to make that little bit of money?' my sister Marge said. 'You ought to have your name on a glass door.'"²⁵ Financially struggling, Williams moved back to New York to live with her two sisters, Marge and Anna. In poverty and living communally, frugality was the only lifestyle Kim Williams had ever known. Williams sought a professional career as a way to assert her independence as an adult, yet the failure to succeed in the advertising profession was a continuation of Williams's identity conflict.

* * *

Even as she pursued a professional career, Williams continually battled her priorities as either a career woman or homemaker. While she valued earning money and asserting independence, Williams lived with the expectation that eventually she

²³ Wills, "Dorothy Dignam's advocacy for women's careers in advertising: 1920-1950," pg. 3.

²⁴ "Autobiography Manuscript- Original (Redone)," 1982, [Box 12, Folder 16,] Williams Papers, pg. 6.

²⁵ "My Frugal Life," Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

would marry and live as a housewife.²⁶ In 1951, Kim Williams married Mel Williams in New York. Mel Williams was a native of Montana, and was employed as a mining engineer at Joy Manufacturing Company. Mel's duties as an engineer sent the newlyweds to Santiago, Chile.²⁷

While she clamored for professional success, she never idolized a lifestyle of opulence and consumerism. As the United States entered the 1950s, Kim Williams noted a drastic shift in consumer culture. The country's economy was booming in the wake of World War II. She later reflected, "just as the whole country exploded into a volcano of affluence I was snatched up by a Montana mining engineer and taken to South America."²⁸ Williams was transitioning her lifestyle, experimenting with full-fledged domesticity apart from her professional aspirations.

The life of a housewife turned out to be not as reassuring as Williams imagined it to be. When the couple arrived in Chile, the trip seemed like the adventure of a lifetime. They were able to travel throughout much of the South American continent, including Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay, and the Patagonia region. These travels thrilled and inspired Williams, though they did not define her years in South America.²⁹ As Mel settled into working life, Kim found herself as the docile housewife she had always expected herself to become. She quipped, "I was a housewife in Chile. My husband was a mining engineer. He traveled to all the mines in Chile, doing business. I stayed home

²⁶ "Interview: KUTV Salt Lake City Utah," 1980, [Box 8, Folder 9,] The Kim Williams Papers, Archives and Special Collections, The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, Missoula, MT, pg. 8.

²⁷ "Interview: KUTV Salt Lake City Utah," 1980, Box 8, Folder 9, Williams Papers, pg. 16.

²⁸ "My Frugal Life," Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

²⁹ For example, see "Travels in South America," 1962-1963, [Box 1, Folder 5,] The Kim Williams Papers, Archives and Special Collections, The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, Missoula, MT.

and joined the other expatriate's wives." Williams found herself playing a supporting role in a life largely defined by her husband. She spent most of her days playing bridge and attending the country club.³⁰

This cloistered existence was not an anomaly among expatriate corporate wives. In their article "Desperate Housewives: Social and Professional Isolation of German Expatriated Spouses," Business and Communications professors Berd Kupka and Virginia Cathro identify the stress placed upon wives of international corporate representatives. They identify three factors that aid in a successful experience for expatriate wives on international assignment: integration into host culture, family support, and maintenance of personal identity.³¹ Unfortunately for Williams, she lacked all three of these benefits.

Although Williams ended up spending the better part of two decades living in Santiago, Chile, she remained largely associated with the American community of mining families. The group had a very social atmosphere, but it existed as an isolated enclave of American society in a very different country. Williams wrote, "One year during the month of December I kept track and my husband and I went to 25 parties. I was ready to break out of that routine or maybe I never really felt I was in it."³² This small social club kept Williams from properly engaging with Chilean culture, and she remained an outsider in a foreign land.

The second component of a healthy international experience Williams lacked was a family support network. Williams grew up in a large family, and being across the

³⁰ "My Frugal Life," Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

³¹ Kupka et al., "Desperate Housewives," pg. 3.

³² "My Frugal Life," Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

world from them was undoubtedly a stark change. Mel and Kim also never birthed children of their own, and Kim was essentially alone while Mel traveled for work.³³ Kupka et al. asserts, “Children give non-working spouses a source of stability and provide an opportunity to get acquainted and involved with the local community through the daily, social activities of children.”³⁴ Although Williams never specifically sought after motherhood, the lack of a clear social role as an expatriated housewife exacerbated her crisis of identity.³⁵

As noted, this transition had a large impact on how Williams viewed her own identity. She found herself questioning her path in life. In an attempt to assert her individuality, Williams began writing. She wrote a column for the local English language newspaper, titled “Under the Lemon Tree.” She quipped, “My husband’s boss called my column ‘Under the Bunion Tree’ but he didn’t mind my doing it. Company wives could dabble in things in foreign countries as long as they didn’t dabble seriously.”³⁶ It seemed that no matter what she did while living in Chile, Williams would continually be relegated to a position in the shadow of her husband. This subservient position was a marked shift from her days as an independent professional, and Williams felt marooned from her past.

In 1959, Williams successfully published her first novel, *High Heels in the Andes*. The book humorously traces her experiences accompanying her husband on a slew of hunting and fishing trips, sports she herself did not enjoy. The book reflected her sense of isolation; its reception also highlighted the challenges facing the would-be-

³³ “My Frugal Life,” Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

³⁴ Kupka et al., “Desperate Housewives,” pg. 5.

³⁵ “Interview: KUTV: Salt Lake City Utah,” 1980, Box 8, Folder 9, Williams Papers, pg. 9.

³⁶ “My Frugal Life,” Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

professional, with *Kirkus Reviews* writing, “Recognizable as the transported but not transplanted American, Kim may interest undemanding female readers.”³⁷

As time progressed, Williams became increasingly disillusioned with the enterprise of American business in Chile, which exacerbated her marital woes. She wondered, “What was I doing in Chile, married to a colonial? How was I seduced into country club life?”³⁸ Williams was forced to reconcile her own critiques of consumer culture and environmental destruction with her complicity in the extraction of resources by a multinational company she was intimately associated with. In “Gender, Empire, Global Capitalism: Colonial and Corporate Expatriate Wives,” Anne Meike-Fetcher analyzes the direct ways in which corporate wives aided in the emotional and ideological strength of global capitalism.³⁹ Whether Williams recognized her role in her husband’s colonial exploits or not, her husband’s career in mining began to contribute to a strained relationship. She reflected in her unpublished memoir, “[I needed to] examine why I built up a tremendous resentment toward my husband and his colonial mentality.”⁴⁰ Interestingly, the couple left Chile in 1971 in response to the election of Marxist president Salvador Allende. Allende nationalized large-scale industries, including mining. The United States would go on to directly support a right-wing coup d’état against Allende on behalf of US business interests in Chile, installing infamous dictator

³⁷ “*High Heels in the Andes* by Kim Williams,” *Kirkus Reviews*.
<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/kim-williams/high-heels-in-the-andes/>.
(accessed November 27, 2019).

³⁸ Novel Criticism, “Autobiography Manuscript- Original (Redone),” 1982, Box 12, Folder 16, Williams Papers.

³⁹ Fetcher, “Gender, Empire, Global Capitalism.”

⁴⁰ Novel Criticism, “Autobiography Manuscript- Original (Redone),” 1982, Box 12, Folder 16, Williams Papers.

Augusto Pinochet.⁴¹ Williams's marriage led to conflicts in how she conceptualized her place within the world.

* * *

When the couple returned to the United States in 1971, they came to Mel's home state, Montana. Williams wrote, "We retired to MT because my husband couldn't live any place else. We settled for Missoula because it was a university town; it had a university for me and hunting and fishing for my husband."⁴² Williams had not lived in the United States for twenty years, and was struck by many of the cultural shifts that had happened through the 1950s and 1960s. She was surprised by the rapid onset of consumerism, especially the prevalence of single use items. She scolded her relatives for throwing away empty pickle jars and was shocked to find that the culture of reuse had all but dissipated in the country. She joked, "I fainted dead away. That's what you call culture shock. When you've been away from home for a long time and you come back you have to go through culture shock. Nevertheless, I didn't change my ways."⁴³

Glenna Matthews' book *Just A Housewife: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* makes the point that as this consumer society took over, the role of women in the home, indeed the very definition of "domesticity," shifted as well. Previously, the house was seen as a seat of production. It was within the home that home goods such as clothing and furniture were fashioned, mended, and maintained. Matthews asserts that the head of this home economy was the housewife. As the country exited World War II, American production skyrocketed, and women were encouraged to shift from

⁴¹ Susan Ware, *Notable American Woman: A Biographical Dictionary Completing the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pg. 689.

⁴² "My Frugal Life," Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

⁴³ "My Frugal Life," Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

experts in home goods production to experts in home goods consumption.⁴⁴ Williams consciously rejected this shift, and continued to champion frugality and sustainability.

Besides consumer culture, Williams was especially fascinated by the rapid shift in the role of women in American society. “A powerful feminist movement came into being in the late sixties and early seventies and mobilized women to affect change,” Glenna Matthews notes in her book *Just A Housewife*.⁴⁵ Previously, American women were expected to be homemakers, and women in the workplace (especially white middle class women) were seen as an anomaly.⁴⁶ Women were still socially expected to be homemakers as the 1970s progressed, but there was an additional pressure to obtain a meaningful career as well.⁴⁷ Williams created an archetypal ideal of a modern woman, called Paula. She wrote, “Bear with the Paulas, dear husbands. They are baking fruitcake or piecing a quilt-- but they’re not, because today is 1978. So, Paula is off at the University getting her Master’s in economics. Without a Master’s in the field of Economics, who are you?”⁴⁸

As sarcastic as these comments were, Williams took them to heart. She enrolled at the University of Montana, and graduated with an interdisciplinary Master’s degree in environmental studies, creative writing, and journalism in 1981. She continued teaching classes on botany, edible plants, and wildflowers. Through her local presence-- hosting a radio show on KUFM, authoring a column in the *Missoulian*, etc.-- Williams was able to cultivate a local fame. She successfully translated this likable persona onto the

⁴⁴ Matthews, “*Just A Housewife*,” pg. 173.

⁴⁵ Matthews, “*Just A Housewife*,” pg. 223.

⁴⁶ Matthews, “*Just A Housewife*,” pg. 208.

⁴⁷ Trilling, “Professionalism and the Educated Woman,” pg. 4.

⁴⁸ “Women,” 1966-1985, Box 23, Folder 16, Williams Papers, pg. 3.

national stage, becoming a guest commentator for National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* in 1976. Williams entertained listeners with stories of her life, offering folksy advice on how to live a happy life without spending money.⁴⁹

Williams was directly responding to the cultural differences she witnessed between South America and the post-war, consumerist United States. Williams aspired to reignite the American passion for sustainability and sensible production. She observed that in the United States "production was high, employment was high. Had to have high consumption. Political leaders urged people to buy. Consumption was construed almost as a patriotic duty. But now the need is here, and the frugal spirit is still here too, we must only reawaken it."⁵⁰ This realization pushed Williams to codify a modern approach to hyper-frugality.

Williams developed her own brand of frugal Home Economics, which she fondly referred to as "urban foraging."⁵¹ This lifestyle took advantage of the post industrialized consumer society of America, whilst consciously working around it. Williams championed buying goods secondhand, or even sifting through the trash outside of businesses. She recognized that the rapid onset of the modern economy left many feeling unattached from their consumption habits and impact on the world. She argued, "Social responsibility is the word. We are getting away from 'higher standard of living' as the goal. Get away from getting joy out of material things. Instead of cleaning up

⁴⁹ Ware, *Notable American Woman*, pg. 689.

⁵⁰ "My Frugal Life," Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

⁵¹ "My Frugal Life," Box 4, Folder 8, Williams Papers.

pollution, avoid it ... Do not convert luxuries into necessities. Respect the natural world.”⁵²

Williams crafted her public persona as a docile and content woman, living a simple life in the face of the fast pace of twentieth-century America. She reflected, ““My aim should be: to present this ‘crazy lady’ from Missoula as really ‘together’. Now people could say, ‘Well of course she is together; She has simplified her life to dandelions and nature walks. She does not deal with the complex life that is what most people face.’”⁵³ This perception, however, was an intentional construction. Williams dealt with personal demons throughout her life; Her mother placed strong expectations upon her; Her marriage was often a source of serious strain. “It’s lovely to have a wife. I’d like one too,” she wrote as her husband often complained when the house was not tidy.⁵⁴ Even as Williams presented to the world an image of domestic bliss, she failed to live up to its expectations.

Kim Williams used the public sphere as a way to reconcile her struggles with her own personal identity. While considering edits for her unpublished memoir, she vulnerably wrote, “I suppose I must let people understand that NPR’s KW persona is impossible to achieve ... and despite myself I am striving-- why??-- who knows-- toward that ideal. Maybe it is the only thing that will bring my husband and me together and understand my family and deal with my sister and my being my father-- the rage.”⁵⁵

⁵² “Voluntary Simplicity,” 1977-1978, Box 23, Folder 11, The Kim Williams Papers, Archives and Special Collections, The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, Missoula, MT.

⁵³ Novel Criticism, “Autobiography Manuscript- Original (Redone),” 1982, Box 12, Folder 16, Williams Papers.

⁵⁴ “Women,” 1966-1985, Box 23, Folder 16, Williams Papers.

⁵⁵ Novel Criticism, “Autobiography Manuscript- Original (Redone),” 1982, Box 12, Folder 16, Williams Papers.

Williams saw her public persona as a reflection of the kind of woman she aspired to be, yet continually failed to live up to.

By trial and error, Williams eventually learned to balance her unique domestic skill sets and her passion for a career. Williams carved out her own niche as a media personality, offering folksy advice gleaned from a life of stark contrasts. She reinvigorated the field of home economics by turning away from the consumerist standards of the post war period. Williams championed sustainability through frugality, maintenance and repair, and self-sufficiency. Although her life was complicated and full of conflicting ideals, Williams remained steadfastly committed to championing sustainable living.

Williams lived large portions of her life as both a single professional and as a married housewife. She wrote extensively over her lifetime, and her personal papers offer an intimate glimpse of a mid-century white, American woman struggling to define herself amongst the expectations placed on her from her family, the women around her, and the greater society. As a child, she faced pressure to be a sturdy and reliable homemaker like her mother. She took these lessons to college, studying Home Economics in an attempt to legitimize domestic labor in an academic setting. She moved to Los Angeles in a youthful attempt to run away from her past and establish herself as a working woman, yet she could not ignore her aspirations for marriage. After marrying and leaving the US, Williams realized that domestic life was not engaging enough for her tenacious spirit, and she worked to hold onto her individual identity by writing.

Instead of finding a profession or lifestyle that matched her aspirations, Williams ventured to create her own using her experiences to offer advice to others. She began teaching and writing about sustainability, frugality, and womanhood. Returning to the U.S., Kim Williams attempted to find balance in her conflict between career and domesticity by fashioning herself as a public authority on sustainable home economics. By carving out her own unique niche in the field, Williams exercised her skills in Domestic Science while satisfying her drive to be regarded as a professional. Despite this, Williams was never able to truly reconcile her own personal conflicts with her identity as a woman, a homemaker, and a professional.

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