



**Narrator: Dr. Kathy Clark**  
**Interviewer: Clifford Murphy**  
**Transcriber: Clifford Murphy**  
**Date of Interview: 1 June 2005**

NOTE: This transcription is as accurate and complete as possible. In any question of interpretation, the researcher is referred to the recording itself as the primary document representing this event.

**[Begin CD 0972. Begin Session I]**

**Clifford Murphy:** Alright.

**Kathy Clark:** Oh, testing one, two, three, four. Testing, one, two, three.

**Murphy:** Perfect.

**Clark:** Okay, good. It's very sensitive.

**Murphy:** Yeah, it is. I actually just bought this. I've upgraded.

**Clark:** Mm hmm. Kind of fun.

**Murphy:** So it's all new equipment for me. But. So today is the first of June, and if you wouldn't mind introducing yourself and explaining where we are.

**Clark:** Here we are in the home of Slim Clark. I'm his widow, Kathleen. People call me Doctor Kathy. I'm a chiropractor. I sang with Slim onstage. So Dr. Kathy was my moniker on stage. Okay? And we're in our home.

**Murphy:** Okay, would you mind telling me a little bit about your husband? Some basic information. Well would you mind telling me how you met and what Slim was doing at the time. And, I don't know, maybe a little bit about his career from the point that you met, forward?

**Clark:** Okay. We met in 1981. It was in the spring. And he was in the small town of Hartland – St. Albans and Hartland are side-by-side, and they're both small, Maine towns – in the spring, you run out of things to do. 'Cause it's like there's still snow on the ground, and it's

not mud season yet. So it was probably in March. We had a talent show in Hartland. And I was one of the people that was playing and singing. And Slim was the guest star. And I was backstage when he walked back, and I was reaching down to do something. And I just remember from my peripheral vision, seeing these long legs go by with cowboy boots. And there was an old, battered – very battered – guitar case that walked by. And so I looked up, and there was the cowboy hat. And so we talked backstage. And we hit it off. It was easy to talk to Slim. He was about 61 at the time, and I was about 31. And I enjoyed listening to him sing. When he went out on stage, that was his place to be. He was extremely comfortable ‘cause he’d done it since he was thirteen. And it was interesting for me to meet him. I wasn’t into cowboy music too much, although I had been a music teacher for seven years. And so I kind of placed him along folk music, which I had taught my kids, you know, in the school. And so we met at that talent show and a couple of months later he invited me up to see his etchings. His paintings. [laughter] And then we started going for hikes and walks in the woods and he took me fishing’ and he cooked me some deer steak. Eventually we went deer hunting and we got married and lived *very* happily together for eighteen years until his death in the year 2000. Yeah.

**Murphy:** Tell me a little bit about his, his day-to-day kind of living. How music fit in with what he did: as far as a sportsman, as far as an artist, and a musician.

**Clark:** Sometimes it was difficult to choose which he was gonna be that day. His first love was being a sportsman. And most of the time in his day-to-day life – his day-to-day life, first he was a very social guy. He would go to the Post Office and visit with the Postmaster and anybody who hung around down there for forty-five minutes or an hour. Then he’d come back home and he’d go in his studio and he’d work. He’d either dream up a painting, or he’d be painting. He painted some years a hundred paintings. In his last years, maybe only five or six. But he would

spend a lot of time in his studio as a general rule. And he would also in the spring and early summer, he'd spend a lot of time fishing. We'd go usually once a week. Twice a week was better, but I was working. [laughs] He was his own boss, so he could go fishing more often if he wanted to. So his day-to-day existence as far as music was concerned, he never practiced. He began playing when he was about thirteen. And began singing about thirteen. It was probably a few years before he learned to pluck a few chords on the guitar. And he used to say that he would sound like a lumberman chopping' wood, playing guitar. Because he was a rough player. Very strong player. He used a thumb pick. And he had, I think it was a Martin L-100. Might have been a Gibson. His daughter Jewel now has that guitar. And she performs his music. She learned to yodel, and she does a *great* job. So it's very appropriate that she have his guitar. But Slim never practiced. He'd just go onstage and do his music. He wrote a lot of his songs, some of which he wrote in conjunction with Pete Roy, from Massachusetts. Pete has since died. They wrote a lot of songs together. Probably through the era of the 1950s. Somewhere around there. Slim started performing in, I think, '32, and was picked up by RCA Victor, I believe, out of New York. And he recorded down there. And he always used to say that sometimes, in the spring, they'd be wanting him to be in the recording studio, cutting some more records. They used to actually cut them on wax. And he'd say "nope, I gotta get up to Massachusetts, and then up to Maine. I gotta go hunting, I've gotta go fishing." [laughs] So he didn't stay in New York for too many years, because he wasn't consistent like they wanted him to be, you know? But he made enough records so that he became internationally known. Those records were his way of connecting with people in Europe, in Australia, in South America. So he didn't have to travel. His records did.

**Murphy:** How often was he on the road?

**Clark:** Well, before I knew him, in his heyday of the '40s. I'd say the '30s, the '40s, the '50s. He was playing several nights a week. He would play in Grange Halls and Town Halls. All over New England. There's probably very few towns, very few of the small towns in New England that he didn't play. He even played in my hometown of Lowell, Massachusetts. And he pretty much stayed in the New England area, and maybe down into New Jersey and he played in New York. Some of the festivals. But in the '30s, '40s, and '50s, that was his venue, his way of making a living. He was a musician. A cowboy singer. He had radio shows out of Keene, New Hampshire. I believe there was another one in Massachusetts. I don't remember the name of that station. And then when he moved up to Bangor – up the Bangor area – he moved to Palmyra. That's about 40 minutes west of Bangor. He worked for WABI, both radio and television. He had a couple of different shows. One was called *Frankenstein's*, and that was named after a clothing store. Not the monster. And he had a radio show that still people talk about nowadays called *The RFD Dinnerbell*. And I've had people tell me they'd stop what they were doing at noontime so that they could go in so they could listen, hear that. I think it was a half hour. Some of it was Slim, some of it was, I think, a talent show. But it was very, very popular.

**Murphy:** Was it five days a week?

**Clark:** I believe it was. Again, that was before my time, I believe in the sixties. And Stacey's Jamboree was another thing he used to participate in on television. Slim had the first commercial television show on WABI. So that was probably in the early sixties. So that's how. And music for him, after he was divorced from his wife Celia in the late sixties, and his two children – Jewel and Wilf – were in their mid-teens, they were about two years apart. And they lived with their father. He moved them from Palmyra to up here on St. Albans Mountain to a farmhouse. And so

he had to get a steady job to take care of the kids. And he worked in a factory. And it just about killed him. He had a really hard time doing that.

**Murphy:** Do you know the factory?

**Clark:** It was a wood-working factory called Banton's in Newport. They made wooden things. And he etched different pictures onto different things. But I don't know exactly how he fit in there. I know he wasn't happy, but he did it. Obviously from love of his children. And then when they were grown up enough to be on their own – eighteen or nineteen or so – about that time the Bluegrass circuit started to become popular in Maine, Massachusetts, New York. And he's not a bluegrass musician, but several of the festivals hired him as a singles act. And he fit right in. And then he was back in his glory again, performing not several days a week anymore, but ten to fifteen shows in the summer. Almost every weekend would be a bluegrass festival. There was Fred Pike's Salty Dog Festival in Cambridge, Maine. There was Smokey Greene's festival in, in several different areas in New York. It moved around several times. And several others. Some in Massachusetts. Beaver Brook Campground was one of them. Campground out in North New Portland here, in Maine, had one. I'm not remembering too many of them. But that's how he did.

**Murphy:** That's okay. Is that how his son developed an interest in Bluegrass?

**Clark:** Probably. Probably. Wilf started playing bluegrass – he's in his fifties now – I think he got serious about playing bluegrass about twenty, maybe twenty-five years ago. Yeah. Slim was playing those festivals in the '70s. And then I came along in '81 and went to some of the bluegrass festivals with him and enjoyed that a lot. The music was great. I enjoyed Slim's performance. He was a tremendous performer. He could connect with fifty people or five thousand, from the stage. He loved his fans, and they could feel that. And he talked a lot on

stage. As well as singing. And he'd tell stories. People loved him. And they'd come over to buy his records and tapes. Back then we had records. 33 albums. And tapes. It was only in his last few years that he made a couple of CDs. And one of them was made after his death. And he and I started to put it together before he went into the hospital, and I finished it in Memory of Yodelin' Slim Clark, after his death. And I put a couple recordings on of his daughter and his son. And I think you even have those, don't you?

**Murphy:** Yeah, it's very nice.

**Clark:** Thank you.

**Murphy:** And was that designed to be an overview of his favorite songs, or his favorite music, as far as his own recordings?

**Clark:** The first nine were some of his favorites. The rest of them – four of them were ones that he said “play these at my funeral.” And he used to talk about his demise years before he did get ill, because he'd had a heart attack and then an open-heart surgery. Which changed him as a performer. It now was difficult for him to perform, whereas before he used to just walk out on stage, never even warm up. The yodel would be there, the voice would be there. His confidence was tremendous. But after the surgery, he lost his confidence. And it was a mark of his character that he continued to perform. He loved to perform, but it was a tremendous struggle. And he did a good job.

**Murphy:** Did it just become harder for him to yodel?

**Clark:** Yes, he lost his yodel for a while. You know if you have a tube pushed down through your vocal chords, it can do some damage. And I believe it was the anesthesia that affected his confidence. Because it numbs the nerve endings in various ways. And the trauma of the surgery was tremendous. But anyhow. He continued to perform, just a little less than he used to. And he

even, he died in July of 2000. July 5<sup>th</sup>. And he performed in the end of March at the Pioneer Show in Augusta that spring. That was his last performance. And just a few days before he went in the hospital, we went fishing.

**Murphy:** Oh, nice.

**Clark:** Yeah. [chokes up]

**Murphy:** Now, did he have certain friends in the local music scene, who were performers he would play with regularly or play a show with, or talk to for advice, or to complain?

**Clark:** Hmm. He had a number of friends. Dick Curless, a great country performer, started out under Slim's wing. They met in Massachusetts and Slim put him on his radio show down there. I wouldn't say they performed together very often. Dick was a singles, no Dick wasn't a singles act, he had a band with him. Sometimes he performed singly. But Slim always performed by himself. He had a group, he had several different bands, and Dick was in one of them. And Dick was... I'm getting away from answering your question I'm afraid.

**Murphy:** That's okay.

**Clark:** I'm thinking about what he'd told me about the early years when he used to come up from Massachusetts to Maine. He'd send up his band ahead of him, and he'd let them know he'd be coming up. And he'd perform after that group played, and he'd play with them. I mean he'd play by himself after them. He always performed by himself. For people that he enjoyed and talked with, Rusty Rogers who now lives in Pemaquid here in Maine was a great friend. Kenny Roberts in Athol, I think, Massachusetts, would perform with Kenny a couple of years before Slim died. We performed with him in Farmington, and that was a great reunion. 'Cause they hadn't been together for a *long* time. Maybe forty years or so. And Slim had started Kenny in the business, too. Johnny White has performed on the same stage with Slim, I believe we were up in

Greenville one time with Johnny, performing up, um, I think it was Squaw Mountain, if that's the right mountain up there. Sugarloaf. There we go. We performed out of Sugarloaf.

**Murphy:** Now, it seems like Slim gave, as you were saying, Kenny and Dick their start in the music business. And they certainly went on to achieve a lot of success on their own. Much later than Slim had initially. I mean, it seems maybe ten years or so after Slim gave them their start that they rose to some prominence. What was that like for him to watch? Did he ever talk about that?

**Clark:** Yes, he did talk about that. He was glad to see the people that he knew going off on their own and making a name for themselves. And for many years there was no contact, but then, you know how when people get older they get to thinking', and they like to make contact with old buddies? And there were a few letters. They'd exchange Christmas letters, or a phone call here and there. Not very often, but it was, he found it gratifying that as Kenny got older, he would mention Slim on stage. And the same with Dick. Whenever they performed in this area, they would always mention Slim. And he thought that was nice. He liked them as people, and it was very gratifying for them to recognize the little help that he had given them in just starting in radio.

**Murphy:** That's nice.

**Clark:** Yeah.

**Murphy:** What were things about playing, about playing music for a living that were frustrating to Slim?

**Clark:** Well, the music has changed. Slim played the same kind of music for seventy years. And he didn't want to change. He couldn't have changed if he wanted to because he never thought he was a good player. And like he said, it sounded like a lumberjack chopping wood

when he was playing the same four chords all the time. In a few different keys. But that was appropriate for the style that he had. So I think that the frustration was, “am I going to be invited back to these festivals?” And he was, but wondering, because he didn’t have a manager. He wasn’t performing in the last twenty years that much to need such a one. I think in the early stages what was frustrating was getting recognized. And Elton Britt was very instrumental in helping him to get on records. ‘Cause he had said, he’d gone to the record companies and say “you oughta put me on records.” And they’d say “I want to listen to one of your recordings first.” “But I don’t have any.” Back then you had to be hired by a record company. So I think that as a thirty year old he found that frustrating, but eventually was hired. Continental. I think I said RCA Victor. It was Continental that gave him the initial recordings. And Elton Britt, I believe, worked, recorded for them and got him involved with that.

**Murphy:** Okay. [tape stops and re-starts] I lost my napkin. What did I want to ask you? You had mentioned that he did some touring throughout New England. Did he do much playing up in Canada? And I thought of this when you mentioned Elton Britt. And I know Slim was a big fan of Wilf Carter. Did he have much interaction with him, or was it more with people who played in the New York, New England area.

**Clark:** Wilf, Wilf Carter and Slim interacted by telephone and by letter. Occasionally. They knew of each other. [sighs] I think they performed together once, but I don’t know where that was. And as far as Canada is concerned, his music went up there – like it went overseas – I don’t think he actually played in Canada. The year, the year that he died, or the year before he died, he was invited to a big festival up, festival up there. But he wasn’t healthy enough to go. So that, he would’ve liked that. He would’ve liked that a lot.

**Murphy:** Did he ever get to go out west?

**Clark:** In his younger days he did for a time. He got out to Calgary and up in, up in Canada. Saskatchewan. Did some cowboying. Mostly he sang around the campfires and the rodeos. He wasn't, he wasn't a, I don't believe that he herded cows. But more of it as a musician, performing for the cowboys at the end of the day. 'Cause he used to talk about that. He really enjoyed that he'd sing all night. [laughs] And that was, that was a short time. Then he came back to Massachusetts and had a dude ranch. And trail rides. He'd take his guitar and people would be on horses and he'd sing on the trail rides.

**Murphy:** And was that in Greenville, or Springfield, or do you know where?

**Clark:** Around there, that would've been in Petersham, I believe. Not far from Athol.

**Murphy:** Okay. And where did, how did he meet his first wife? Or do you – let me know if that's...

**Clark:** That's not a problem. [laughs]

**Murphy:** Okay.

**Clark:** I'm not sure where and how they met. I do know Celia was a singer. She originally came, I think, from Colorado. And I know that they married and lived in Palmyra. And that they had lived in Petersham for some time, but I don't know too much of their early history together.

**Murphy:** It's unusual that he would've gotten custody of the children, or maybe that's because it's just unusual today compared to the 1960s.

**Clark:** Well, it was probably unusual back then. But they made the choice. They [pause] they loved their mother, too. But their Dad was more fun. So, you know, I think that's important to a teenager. Yeah.

**Murphy:** Oh, okay. And does she still live in the area?

**Clark:** Celia died a few years ago.

**Murphy:** Oh, okay. And did I read, maybe this is, maybe I'm confusing things, but is she Native American?

**Clark:** No.

**Murphy:** Oh, okay. Was Slim friends with Hal Lone Pine?

**Clark:** Oh, certainly. Oh, that's right. That's a whole other area. Hal Lone Pine, Betty Cody, Gene and Flo Hooper. Many, many shows together. Many, many shows together. Up in Machias where Gene and Flo lived. The Pioneer Show, which has probably been the last ten, fifteen years in Augusta. The Pioneers were all the older guys that came down and performed. Yeah, he was. He loved Gene and Flo and Betty and Hal Lone Pine. Did a lot of performing with them.

**Murphy:** Who were his favorites?

**Clark:** His favorite performer?

**Murphy:** Who were his favorite performers, and who were his favorites to listen to on records?

**Clark:** Now, this may sound surprising, but Slim didn't listen very much. He was a performer that liked to perform and wasn't really interested in listening to anybody else. Not that he was snobbish. But it just wasn't something that he enjoyed doing. He would never sit down and listen to music here. The, he would have the radio on and he would be tuned into Public Radio, and sometimes he'd play the Blue Hill Station, WERU, which had Bluegrass and folk music and things like that. And Slim performed down there a few times for them. But he didn't sit down and listen to Country Music singers. Occasionally he, when he wanted to learn a new song, he'd sit down and listen to learn it so that he could perform it. Slim Dusty, out of Australia, was a *wonderful* performer. And had some really great songs. And Slim learned a few of his songs to perform. But that was the only time he listened to, to people. His favorite performer,

and he did listen to him a lot when he was growing up, was Wilf Carter. Wilf Carter was about ten years ahead of Slim in both age and performing. And yeah, he admired Wilf Carter. That's, he named his son Wilf Carter Clark.

**Murphy:** What did, did, you mentioned they talked on the phone and letters that he and Wilf had. What was that interaction like?

**Clark:** I think it was strictly music. Yeah, just I don't, I don't think it was a, it was more of an acquaintance as a musician than as friendships. Or maybe they would give some insight to one another in, you know, how things were going'. And what to expect from the music world. But I don't think there was a lot of, lot of times that they did that.

**Murphy:** Oh, okay. Did he have any reaction to finding out that Slim had named his son after him?

**Clark:** I don't know that. I don't know. Hmm. Sorry.

**Murphy:** Oh, that's okay. Now where were the, was Slim particularly fond of any places in New England to play? You know that he really looked forward to going to, or was he more just interested in hunting and fishing in certain areas.

**Clark:** [laughter] Well, he certainly had favorite hunting and fishing places. He loved Smokey's Bluegrass Festival in New York. In the last years that he went there it was a real struggle, cause eight or ten hours in a car wasn't his cup of tea. But once he was at a festival, he was just happy as could be. He loved Fred Pike's Salty Dog festival. Was real sad when Fred died. That was a great friend lost. Bob and Grace French, I should mention them. They're bluegrass performers that live here in Cambridge, Maine. Great friends, wonderful people. And we'd stop and visit with them from time to time. The Sydney Bluegrass Festival, put on by Blistered Fingers Bluegrass group was a favorite of Slim's in the last, I guess, fourteen, fifteen

years that he performed with them. And there was a performance – I’m trying’ to think – it was in the Belgrade Lakes area. Buttermilk Hill was the name of it. Old-time Music Festival. It wasn’t Bluegrass per se. Old-time music. And Slim fit in there very well. Loved it. Loved performing with John and Ellen Goller were the young couple who started that. And they were young then and now they have young people that are, you know, fifteen, eighteen years old.

**Murphy:** Hmm. It’s obvious through the paintings at the house that Slim did that he loved the outdoors, and that he, you pointed to several that are, I think, are about traditional Maine life. And the recordings that I have of his are mostly songs about the West. Or about, you know, are Swiss oriented. Did he write many songs about Maine, or about New England?

**Clark:** No. No, I don’t think so. Cowboy music, even though there are cowboys in Massachusetts, and Florida, cowboys were always associated – probably because of early television – with the West. So most of the cowboy music referred to the Chisholm Trail or the Calgary Stampede. Out west. Yeah. And because he was a yodeler, and Switzerland was noted for its yodeling – whether or not it actually started in Switzerland I don’t know – he did Swiss-type yodeling. And Bavarian yodeling. So, but, that was the music that he started with, and he pretty much stayed with all his life. He picked up a few, um as I mentioned, from Slim Dusty. And he sang “The Last Farewell.” That was probably the most modern, and that was back in, what, the seventies? Yeah, something like that. He just stayed with his traditional music.

**Murphy:** Okay. What are some things about Slim that you want people to know?

**Clark:** That he was a loving man. He loved his fans so much that they could feel it. And they loved him right back. He was a kind, quiet man. Very private guy. He had a few friends, and as, he liked to go out and visit with them and joke. He loved to tell stories and joke. But most of the time that I knew him, he would be here at home in his studio. Or listening to the radio, or just

meditating. ‘Course I met him when he was 61. So he was probably a whole lot more rambunctious in his earlier years. And many of his buddies were drinking buddies. He had a number of years where he did that from time to time, quite heavily. So he did some partying. But the times that I knew him, he was just a loving, wonderful husband. Just a great guy to live with. And he loved to teach others. He taught me how to hunt. I was from the city. He taught me how to fish. He’s a good teacher. He taught people how to do art. He had a class out of the, you know, from Nicomus, or adult education, who was a teacher, an art teacher for the Adult Education program for probably at least a dozen years, if not more. And he was a very *humble* person. Never pushed himself forward.

**Murphy:** Did he have any memorable expressions?

**Clark:** Oh, golly gee. Yes. Yes he did. And stories. He would tell the same stories over and over. And you know, it’s kinda painful for me to try to remember those right now.

**Murphy:** Sure, that’s fine.

**Clark:** So please forgive me. I’m not going to go into that. But there would be a few other things I’d like to have people know. He was a, he was not the kind of guy that would talk religion. He was a faithful church-goer.

**Murphy:** What church?

**Clark:** St. Agnes Catholic Church in Pittsfield. He was, he was a believer all of his life, but he wasn’t an organized religion kind of guy. His church was the woods. But when he met me, I’m a Catholic, and he decided he wanted to become a Catholic too. So the day that we married, he was baptized and confirmed and received first Holy Communion. So I always tell people I married a Saint.

**Murphy:** Wow, that’s a lot of sacraments in one day.

**Clark:** Yeah, it's four out of the seven.

**Murphy:** Wow, see I got three in one day when I got married. But I guess I got married and I had confession.

**Clark:** And first Holy Communion.

**Murphy:** No, I guess I just got two, because I had been a Catholic growing up, so. Yeah so just two. I always tell my wife, "I got more sacraments than you." Oh, I got Eucharist. So I did get three.

**Clark:** There you go!

**Murphy:** So that's interesting. Now, I was actually going to ask you if he was religious at all.

**[End CD 0972. Begin CD 0973]**

**Murphy:** Now, do you, just a couple of, I don't want to take up too much of your time. Just a couple of other things. Was his family musical at all? His, like his parents? Did he have siblings, and do you know if they played music at all?

**Clark:** He had two brothers and two sisters, and they did not play music. His mother did not play music. His father died when he was a baby. And I don't know.

**Murphy:** What did they do for work, do you know?

**Clark:** No, I don't. I know that there was some carpentry by the, his brothers. They were quite a bit older than Slim, too. And so were his sisters. Slim was the baby. No, I don't believe there was music in his family of origin, but his son is a very fine mandolin player. Has a bluegrass group called the Misty Mountaineers. And his daughter Jewel Clark is a wonderful

performer and a great person. She does up-country, up-town country music as well as performing her father's music. The yodeling.

**Murphy:** How often does she play?

**Clark:** In the wintertime she probably plays a little less than in the summer. She'll do the East Benton fiddler's convention, which Slim did for several years. And she and Wilf, every year, do the Slim Clark Scholarship Show, which we just had a coupla weeks ago here in Hartland. She'll probably play a coupla times a month.

**Murphy:** Oh, okay.

**Clark:** And Wilf probably is gonna play every weekend this summer at a Bluegrass Festival. Couple of other things people might be interested in if they didn't already know. In 1996, Slim was inducted into the Walkway of Stars in Nashville's Country Music Hall of Fame. We had a fella – Gordy Brown out of Massachusetts.

**Murphy:** I know Gordy.

**Clark:** Okay. He's an avid country music lover. He arranged a tour, and we went by plane. Seventy people that wanted to witness Slim's induction into that Walkway of Stars. So we all stayed at this nice hotel in Nashville, and got bussed to all the different places, and spent four days in Nashville. And that was a pinnacle of his career. He was really honored to be invited to become a member of that Walkway of Stars. And then in the 2000 he was inducted into the Western Music Hall of Fame in Tucson, Arizona. And he was made aware of that in the spring, that it was going to happen. And he was some tickled with that. That was what he was most proud of, because that recognized his lifelong commitment to traditional cowboy music. Traditional Western music. And so he was really happy with that. I went in November to that induction. My mother and I flew out to Phoenix, where my brother lives, and he drove us down

to Tucson. And we went to that induction. So he was posthumously inducted into that Western Music Hall of Fame. And was very, very, very, very proud of that.

**Murphy:** Yeah, that's quite an accomplishment. What were his biggest hits, do you know?

**Clark:** "Yodelin' Mad" has been performed by a number of different artists. Slim Dusty, I think, did that in Australia. And a number of other people have done that. Janet McBride has done a number of his songs, and she did "Yodelin' Mad," I believe. "The Cat Came Back" is a folk song that he made famous and wrote a few verses to, and I think he's pretty well known for that. His favorite song was the "Strawberry Roan," so those were some of his favorites.

**Murphy:** Just one last question and then I'll get out of your hair. I understand that he was a baseball player as well.

**Clark:** That's true! Yeah.

**Murphy:** Can you tell me anything about that?

**Clark:** He was selected for the Braves as a pitcher. He started pitching when he was in Junior High School, and he was so good that they used him in High School when he was still in Junior High. And then he performed for what they called the Industrial Leagues, which is kind of like what we would call the, what is it before...

**Murphy:** The minor leagues?

**Clark:** There you go. I think it was a step below the minor leagues. But then he was hired by the Braves when they were the Boston Braves. And unfortunately he had an accident and hurt his elbow. I think he told me he fell off a hammock. Hurt his elbow, and that crashed his career. But it's just as well, he figured, 'cause it was tough doing the music and the art, and it woulda been three major careers. It mighta been a little hard to choose that and still have time for hunting and fishing. [laughs]

**Murphy:** Did he make more of a living later in life from music or from art?

**Clark:** Later in life, hmm. I'd say it was more the art, I think he started to sell his work around the, in the seventies.

**Murphy:** Okay.

**Clark:** And the music, he was big in the '30s, '40s, and '50s. And he was in the Banton's Factory in the '60s into the '70s. And then he got back into the music business in the summers, plus a few indoor things in the winters for the '70s. And, I mean for the '80s and '90s. Yup.

**Murphy:** And who bought most of his work – was it locals, or was it people visiting? Was it tourists?

**Clark:** Both. Both. He kept his prices low enough so that local people could buy them. Many times we would bring them to the festivals, and we'd take about a dozen paintings and they'd be gone right away.

**Murphy:** Wow.

**Clark:** We'd take some to the Salty Dog. That would always happen, always sell out right away. One fellow who came from Vermont, name is Roger Brown, became a dear friend. Because they're both avid deer hunters. And because Roger liked his art. He bought one painting one year, came back the next year, bought six, came back the next year and the year after that and he'd buy six or eight every year. So that now he has the largest Slim Clark collection. Of artwork. He has, I'm pretty sure, over a hundred of Slim's paintings. God bless him. He's, he was a great friend for Slim in the last several years. And I guess Roger's maybe twenty-five years younger. And he kinda looked at Slim as a, as a father figure, too, I think. And there's been a coupla people. There's a local woman in Canaan who has thirty-five or so of his paintings. Most everybody in Hartland and St. Albans has one or more. And, yeah. He would sell them in

New York. And people would come from, tourists, coming to Maine for a vacation. They'd learn about him and stop here and then he put out some prints. So. They're all over the place. They're in several different foreign countries as well.

**Murphy:** Nice.

**Clark:** Yeah, it's cool. And there's a book we did. There's a book written in German, by a German fellow, about Slim. It's gonna be strong tea you know. [pouring noise] And I'm afraid I don't have any milk. But I do have sugar if you want some.

**Murphy:** No, that's okay. Thank you.

**Clark:** You're welcome.

**Murphy:** [mic noise] I'm just gonna put that down. I mean I think it's remarkable that anyone can make a living from music or art, let alone both.

**Clark:** Yeah. He did okay.

**Murphy:** I know, I feel like I know a lot of talented people in both areas that just don't have the good luck, or the motivation, or the drive, or the vision to kind of be an artist and figure out a way to get the music or the artwork out there to the public.

**Clark:** That's right.

**Murphy:** And it's a real, it says a lot about your husband, well, about Slim that he was able to do that.

**Clark:** Mmm.

**Murphy:** In those two areas.

**Clark:** That's true. That's true. [pause] And he didn't, he didn't push himself onto people at all. But because, well you can see in his work that he loved it. And people that have the same vision, or a similar vision, they'll look at it. I mean there's people that he'd tell me about that'd

come to the studio and sit down and talk about it for a coupla hours and say, “okay, now I’ve been, this has been my vacation. I’ve come and I’ve connected with the Earth.” By looking at pictures while they was talking to him. There’ve been people that’ve done that. And that’s why it’s sold so well, I believe, because he captured an era and a feeling. The feeling with the deer, and the moose, and the bear, and the woods, is *real*, just as he perceived it. And then he did a lot of country landscapes that people liked. And he did a lot of things like Maple Syruping. Pictures of that. Ice. Chop, you know, getting ice out of the lakes. And such things as that. So he kind of wanted to memorialize the way life was.

**Murphy:** Was he an environmentalist? Or was he political at all?

**Clark:** Not too political. Not too political, but yes, interested in the environment. He was a, we have the Sportsman’s Alliance of Maine called SAM. He was a SAM supporter. He wasn’t a club man, you know. To belong to too many things. He was in NRA, um, supporter. Oh, he’s also an avid golfer.

**Murphy:** Yeah?

**Clark:** When I said “club,” and when I say avid, he would do 54 holes in a *day*.

**Murphy:** Wow!

**Clark:** See, when I married Slim and he was 62, and I was 32, but that didn’t matter because he was so virile and so alive. Loved life. His life was simple. I mean, he was a fisherman. And he was a hunter. He was, ever since he was a kid, he was in the woods. And he would *walk* from where he lived in a little area of Petersham called Michewag, he’d walk to the next town to play football with his buddies. And he’d walk for hours pretending he was hunting when he was *seven*. You know? So he hunted ever since it was legal for him to hunt. However old that was. I think he gutted deer before it was actually legal. But. And he got many, many deer. Not so

legally, either. [chuckles] He *loved* deer. He wasn't a deer slayer because he didn't *like* them. He *loved* them. He loved the hunt, and he just, that was his life. That and then music was, was how he made his living. Music and art. He just had a vision when he was young that "I'm gonna be a cowboy singer, a baseball player, and an artist."

**Murphy:** Did he work as a guide at all?

**Clark:** Yes, he was a Maine Guide.

**Murphy:** Where would he... so he would take people out?

**Clark:** I believe he did a lot of that around The Forks.

**Murphy:** Okay. Hmm. Wow.

**Clark:** Avid hunter and fisherman.

**Murphy:** I would've loved to have met him.

**Clark:** Well I'll see if I can give you a tape, a videotape, to give you a better idea of the character. Because he was a character, and he did tell a lot of stories.

**Murphy:** Well, it seems, well, I'm going to be meeting Rusty Rogers on Saturday afternoon.

**Clark:** Good, give him my best regards and his wife Patty. They're very nice people. Very nice.

**Murphy:** I've spoken with her on the phone a number of times, and she's arranged everything, and she seems very nice. And he seems very, I mean, it's almost like Slim. Seems like you can tell a little bit about someone's character through his music. And he seems like a very kind individual. But it's also obvious, it seems like maybe your husband is the only person I can think of, I mean Slim is the only person I can think of who could outdo Rusty as far as the number of things that somebody can be good at. And the number of professions that somebody can have in a lifetime. It's really remarkable.

**Clark:** Yeah, Rusty had a television show.

**Murphy:** And that Rusty was a professional wrestler, and a landscaper, and at least in his bio it says that he did massage therapy as well.

**Clark:** I wasn't aware of that. But he's got good hands.

**Murphy:** It's just funny. Some people really hit the jackpot with talent.

**Clark:** Hmm. [chuckles] It's a struggle. When you have a talent. You have to be, you know, it's an obligation. At least Slim found it so. And he used to say, "you know," as you heard on one of the CDs that had one of Wilf Carter's last songs, oh what's the name of the song. [pause]

**Murphy:** It's the one that Slim talks for a little while before? Is that right?

**Clark:** It might be. Yes, I think so. It's like "Where have all the years gone" or something like that.

**Murphy:** Yes, I think it's something like that.

**Clark:** But he would ponder, and I think he agonized, how, you know, "I don't want to go onstage and not do a good job. But I don't want to not do what God gave me the gift to do." And he did, he agonized over that. So you just, you know, I guess everybody does. Yeah, you know.

**Murphy:** I don't know. I mean, sometimes it seems like not enough people do agonize about that. It's a big responsibility, I think, to feel like you're good at something and to feel like you need to make use of those talents.

**Clark:** Mmm hmm. Yeah. We all have a purpose. We're all put on this earth for a reason. We interact with others. We don't always know what that's gonna mean. But, you know, Slim did have a big, made a big impression on a lot of people. And it was his job to make people happy. He wanted. Um, rephrase. "I wanna make somebody laugh every day. Whether it's through, you know, a song. Or make somebody happy, make 'em smile, tell a little story, tell a

little joke.” And he did. That was important to him. Very important. That was his calling. You know? So I guess not, we don’t all know what our calling is so clearly. But there’s always some highs and lows in everybody’s life, you know? And the high for Slim were being onstage. The lows were “am I gonna be able to do it” towards the end. And the highs were the hunting and the fishing, and the lows were “gee, I can barely walk down the road anymore.” You know? But. [long choked up pause] We remember the good things, and learn from them. You know?

**Murphy:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Clark:** He was a great guy. He was a great man. He was a great guy to live with.

**Murphy:** Well everybody that I’ve spoken with, and at this point that’s really getting to be a large number of people, have only said the nicest things about him. I mean, nobody has said anything that...

**Clark:** Yeah. I’d be surprised. You’ll probably find one or two.

**Murphy:** No, some people that I’ve spoken with have not minced words about various performers. And he seems like he has everybody’s respect. And I think that’s pretty remarkable.

**Clark:** Hmm. Because he was humble. And because he loved them.

**Murphy:** And it seems that he really helped a lot of people. It seems – maybe you could correct me on this if I’m wrong. But it seems like he was very generous with his success. My feeling is that a lot of performers become, when they become successful, guard that because they’re afraid of...

**Clark:** Others stepping in and taking over.

**Murphy:** Yes.

**Clark:** No, he was not like that. So generous in his success? Yes. Yes he was.

**Murphy:** Hmm. I like that.

**Clark:** Being a musician, yeah, you can appreciate that. Yep. There was a fella, Mike Preston, you might hear of Mike in your travels, that started off with cowboy music but then went in more to Hank Williams and more of the old country stuff. Yep. And now he's down in Nashville. But he was, Slim was one of his mentors. They made a recording together called "Handing it Down." I'll give you a tape. I don't have it on CD, but I'll give you a tape. But Mike yodeled some, and Slim yodeled some. Now, Mike was maybe fourteen or sixteen at the time. And Slim was in his seventies. And I felt threatened by Mike. [laughs] For Slim. Because Mike was pushing himself forward, you know what I mean? And Slim *never* let that bother him one bit. And don't think I talked to him about it either. You know? But I, I kind of put Mike off a little bit. 'Cause I didn't like some of that. But he was a kid, you know, and kids are not mellow. Kids are not secure like people who've been around for 50, 60, 70 years can be. So I do, I do know that not everybody is as generous as Slim was.

**Murphy:** Was Mike local?

**Clark:** Yes, he came from Limerick, Maine. And he's doing a good job down in Nashville. He's performing for four nights a week, I believe. I keep a somewhat in touch. Once or twice a year. One of the things that, you know, he was a slim guy, like Slim, so I sent him some of his performing, you know, cowboy cut pants and stuff, you know, and a coupla shirts and stuff. Because that would *mean* something to Michael. So. Yeah. Well, you've asked good questions, Cliff, and I'm tickled pink that you're doing this. Now, you're going to be talking with Rusty. And you've already talked with Kenny Roberts.

**Murphy:** Yes.

**Clark:** And.

**Murphy:** And with Johnny White. And actually, you probably know Georgia Mae.

**Clark:** Yes.

**Murphy:** She actually, she seems like she's in great health, though her ability to yodel, she had – ah – I don't know if it was heart surgery, or if she had some sort of, she had some sort of health issue that as you were saying, she had to have a tube put down her throat. And she feels like she can't yodel anymore because it's unpredictable.

**Clark:** Yeah.

**Murphy:** Some days she can do it, and some days she can't. When I met with her, she wouldn't sing. But. She was incredibly nice.

**Clark:** She is. She's a sweet lady.

**Murphy:** And played some great old radio recordings that she had. Which was pretty exciting to hear. So. Yeah. I liked that quite a bit. So I don't know, is there anybody you can think of that I should make a point of seeking out to talk with?

**Clark:** Of the old performers? Is Gene Hooper still alive?

**Murphy:** I don't know.

**Clark:** They're up in Machias. And I don't have my address book with me.

**Murphy:** Gordy Brown has been helpful, and he's given me a lot of contact information for people.

**Clark:** And Betty Cody in Lewiston?

**Murphy:** Yes, I'm seeing her tomorrow morning actually. She and Denny Breau.

**Clark:** Oh, Denny is a great performer.

**Murphy:** I hear that he's a great guitar player.

**Clark:** He's a *great* guitar player. And his brother Lenny who died, was even better I'm told. And Denny. And that's Hal Lone Pine's son. Wonderful man. Sweetheart. Oh, just, just a teddy

bear. He's a, and he's a very, very nice, nice person. Betty is, has been a spitfire. She's like a *volcano* for, as a performer onstage. But her health is suffering. So I don't know how much you'll see of that. But she's about this tall. Flo is her sister. And Flo is about the same height. So Betty Cody and Flo Hooper, sisters. But you should talk with Gene and Flo. If you possibly can.

**Murphy:** Okay.

**Clark:** Yeah. Let me see, Jackie King is a performer. Curley O'Brien was her husband. And he was a, um, on some radio shows too. And he was known around this area, too. But that was before my time. She's still around. But I'm so sorry I can't tell you where.

**Murphy:** That's okay. I can try to, I'll try to find out. And I can talk to Rusty, maybe tomorrow, because he might know some people too.

**Clark:** These might give you some, you can have these. You can take these along with you. These are the Maine organizations. Let's see, it's *Maine Country People*. Same thing. Those are, and this is the Downeast Country Music, this is Gordy's thing. You probably have.

**Murphy:** I have some of that.

**Clark:** You might find addresses. Or info in there. And this is the same thing, I think. You can get bits and pieces here.

**Murphy:** Okay.

**Clark:** These just might, I hope they're of some help. They're kind of falling apart here. They might give you. And Massachusetts Country Music Awards Association. There's some real nice people in Massachusetts, too.

**Murphy:** Oh, okay. Thank you.

**Clark:** Yeah, you're welcome.

**Murphy:** Did you know Slim Sullivan at all? Larry Sullivan?

**Clark:** Yeah! Yes, I did! He was one of Slim's friends.

**Murphy:** Yeah, I just met him in the fall. He's, he [laughs] he's very charmer, he's a very charming individual, I think. He's very nice and talked with me for a while about, I think, about when he first started playing with Dick Curless. And he, he, he's like 80 something.

**Clark:** Late eighties by now.

**Murphy:** And still has it, whatever it is. If you know what I mean. He has a very youthful demeanor.

**Clark:** Wow.

**Murphy:** Very charming, and sharp dresser. Yeah, a little bent over, but that happens I suppose to all of us at some point.

**Clark:** Hey, eighty something. You know?

**Murphy:** Yeah, you're entitled to be a little stooped over, I think. Okay.

**Clark:** Okay. Let me see if I can locate a VCR of Slim performing.

**Murphy:** Okay, just so you know, I'm depositing these interviews at the Maine Folklife Center up in Orono.

**Clark:** Good.

**Murphy:** And that is all of the ones I'm doing in Maine. And the ones that I've been doing, I've been trying to place them in the archives of the different states that I'm working in.

**Clark:** Wonderful.

**Murphy:** And at some point my goal is to do my Ph.D. dissertation on New England Country Music, or Country Music from New England.

**Clark:** Great.

**Murphy:** And eventually, I hope, turn it into a book.

**Clark:** Mmm. Delightful. Delightful! Do it!

**Murphy:** That's the goal. That's what I'm shooting for.

**Clark:** Yeah, good to have a goal.

**Murphy:** And people have been very supportive. So I'm optimistic. And the music is great. And the stories are wonderful. And nobody knows about them. Not nobody, but nobody outside of the area.

**Clark:** There you go.

**Murphy:** And it's not recorded in a lot of cases. So we'll see.

**Clark:** Well, good luck. I would like you to let me know when the book's available. Okay?

**Murphy:** Absolutely. I'll keep in touch with you as this goes along. And give you any updates that I have along the way.

**Clark:** Let's go see if I can find you a VCR.

**Murphy:** Maybe while you do that I'll wrap this stuff up?

**Clark:** Yes, by wrap it up, you mean we were still on then?

**Murphy:** Oh! Is that okay?

**Clark:** Yeah. Sure.

**Murphy:** I just didn't want to be eating and holding this at the same time.

**[End CD 0973. End Session I]**