

Interviewee: Bianca DeLeon

Interviewer: Norie Guthrie

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### Interview Transcript

Norie Guthrie: My name is Norie Guthrie from the Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University. I am interviewing Bianca DeLeon. Today is December 1st, 2017. This is part of the Houston Folk Music Archive Oral History Project. Can you tell me about your early life?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, I was born in Corpus Christie, Texas, and then when I was about 6, we moved to Houston – my family moved to Houston. We lived at, um, a little unincorporated area called Millsville outside of Corpus Christie that was – they didn't even have a stop sign. I think they had a handwritten sign saying there were, like, 120 people in town, most of them relatives. And so, uh, we left there and went to Houston, and, uh, I was, uh, I played, had a little xylophone before I could crawl. You know, I remember crawling down the hallway with the one mallet and a little xylophone, and I learned all the nursery rhymes on it, and I couldn't even talk yet. And I, I loved that little xylophone, and I, then I'd set in the chair and listen to the, the radio in my ear. You know, listen to Patsy Cline and Elvis Presley and all the old greats. And, and I still love, know some of those songs. I memorized them then, and I still know some of them. So this, you know, always been a passion of my life since I was born.

Norie Guthrie: So, you were drawn to music in that way. When did you first start to play the guitar?

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, I played drums in junior high, and I played in the symphony. And then I left home at, at, uh, 15, and, and you know, I couldn't take drums – you can't just play drums on the street, so I took up guitar.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so do you wanna talk a little bit about what, what happened after you left home?

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, I was, um, you know, I wanted to go to college, and so I got a job downtown, 'cause, uh, we lived out in the suburbs, and there weren't any jobs out there, and so I was tryin' to commute, like, 2 hours each way to a suburban school, so my parents weren't speaking to me. So they wouldn't sign papers for me to transfer to downtown. So I would get up at, like, 5 in the morning and go out to school and then, and then go from there to my job in downtown, and then get home about midnight and then get up at 6 and try and sleep and study on the bus there. And then eventually I got really sick and so I, I didn't, didn't come to work. The doctor said he would call my, my job, but they didn't, so I got fired. It went downhill after that.

Norie Guthrie: So then what, what happened next?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, well then I, um, started getting into drugs and dealing drugs and, and then I hitchhiked to, uh, Chicago and then to California and ended up living in California for a while and hanging out with rock and rollers, playing guitar on the street in the Haight-Ashbury.

Norie Guthrie: Did that end up – um, hanging out with those people and then also just, um, busking – did that help improve your craft?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, it, uh, you know, the more you play, the better, you know – the first guitar I had was, had a real high set neck, and so my fingers would bleed and I, I was really determined to do it anyway, and then someone said, you know, if you get a good guitar with strings lower to the neck you won't have that problem, and I went, really? So I, so then I managed somehow to get a little better guitar, and then it was much better.

Norie Guthrie: How long were you in California?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, the first time I moved there, um, I lived in, in L.A. Well, I, I hitchhiked from San Francisco. Actually, I caught a ride with Charlie Manson, amazingly enough. I spent a week with him and a couple of his followers, and then, uh, broke away. He tried to hit me, he tried to punch me out, and I, and I got away from him, and hitchhiked down to uh, the, uh, Orange County Pop Festival. You know. I met up with the people that had the light show there, and they put, they, uh, put me up, and, uh, and then they found me a, a apartment to live in. I was house sitting, actually, for the, um, bass player of the, um, um, the, um, oh who was that man – my famous man, bass player.

Norie Guthrie: Jefferson –

Bianca DeLeon: Jefferson Airplane, yes, thank you.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: So it was, it was a pretty good gig.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And, and then there was a big earthquake, and, and I decided to get out of there and hitchhike back to Texas, back to Houston.

Norie Guthrie: So then what happened when you came back to Houston, then what did you do? What happened?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, I started dealin' drugs again and eventually got busted and, and, uh, so it was – then I was 17, you know. So the federal government decided I was pretty smart, so they sent me to college, so I went to Saint Thomas. Studied classical guitar.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: Under Jan Cole. She was great. So, my, my class consisted of drinking wine at her house and playing guitar. Singing songs, you know, like get drunk, drink wine, have a great time.

Norie Guthrie: So playing classical guitar – was that, um, it seemed like that would, that's kind of a big departure from what you would have been, how you would have been playing before, right?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, I was, I was doing a lot of finger picking already, and I thought, well, this is something, you know, it's music. I really liked it. I actually tried playing the upright bass first, and I decided I was miserable at it. So I gave that up and, you know, I went to classical guitar, and I, I did learn a lot. A lot of techniques, stuff that I still use. And, and then at one point she asked me to, uh, if I would go on the road with her, 'cause she could play but she couldn't sing. And I could do both, so I could back her up and sing, and I thought, you know, I could do that, or I could drop out and join a rock and roll band. So, I did the latter.

Norie Guthrie: Can you talk about that band?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah. We, uh, we didn't have it for very long, but, uh, it was a regular band. We had, uh, big twin Marshall stacks and everything, and I screamed out Jethro Tull's, uh, "Locomotive Breath" and "Bell Bottom Blues" and, you know, all the old classics, and, uh, I remember, I think my ears were permanently damaged from that.

Norie Guthrie: Oh.

Bianca DeLeon: It was so loud. And so, I, I think it was – our first gig was a high school prom. And I was, like, younger than anybody there, you know.

Norie Guthrie: So where did, um, how long was the band together?

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, I don't – not very long. I think I went solo after that.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, I didn't like – it was so loud, painfully loud, and they didn't want to turn it down, and I – so I just went solo after that.

Norie Guthrie: Where, um, where were you playing when you started, um, playing solo?

Bianca DeLeon: All over Houston, toward the coast, Galveston, Austin. I played, uh, Deep Eddy Cabaret in Austin, and some other places I don't remember the names of, and I played Houlihan's and Gentlemen Gene's and, um, I don't remember all the names of the places, you know, I, I don't even remember where I played last year.

Norie Guthrie: Do you remember, um – a frequent question that I ask of people is for them to remember what the spaces looked like, um, the reason being is that people are able to kind of fill in the, um – each person can add something a little bit different.

Bianca DeLeon: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: And so, um, a overall picture of the place could be, can exist because many times we don't end up getting photographs inside the music venues –

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Are there any that you remember playing here and kind of the spaces?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, absolutely. Uh, I did play the Old Quarter, and I have a photo of, of Rex Bell on stage at the Old Quarter. And I had some letters from him, um, that he wrote before he opened the Old Quarter. I knew him when he was out working as a, uh, uh, crane operator to save up the money to open the place. So interesting. And it was, uh, brick inside. Little tiny place – kind of a long narrow place. I think it's a los – a law office now, and uh, so there was, like, you walk in the front door and stage was on the left. A little tiny stage. And then bar was at the end, bathroom behind that and then upstairs there were, uh, pool tables, a couple of pool tables. Um, I remember one night I passed out on the pool table, and they locked me in – you know, I wake up in the morning in the Old Quarter. Yeah, the good old days.

Norie Guthrie: Did you, um, did you prefer the Old Quarter to other places, like, Sand Mountain and –

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, yeah. I, uh, Old Quarter had a lot more soul than Sand Mountain.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And, actually, a lot of people liked Mrs. Carrick that owned Sand Mountain, but I played there one time – uh, me and my bass player – and, uh, you know, I, I'd, uh, you know, her manager had booked me for X amount of dollars, and then when I finished playing, I went over to her to get paid, she said, well, my, my manager agreed to that but I didn't – and refused to pay me.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, gosh.

Bianca DeLeon: I know. I was real – I was so pissed. So I told my bass player, I said, I, you know, I'll pay you later, but just – you, you might wanna leave right now 'cause the hell – you know, shit's gonna hit the fan. So, I, I, uh, I got back up, up on stage, and I asked everyone at the, management was refusing to pay me, and there was a cover charge at the door, and I counted heads. Somebody told me once when I was a kid to always count, you know, number of people in the audience so you know if they've made enough money to pay you. So I did, and they had the money. They just didn't want to do it. You know, so then I went into the back room and, and I cleared the whole building out and I got, I went out the back door as the cops came in the front.

Norie Guthrie: Um, you also played at Houlihan's. Um, what was, uh, what was that place like?

Bianca DeLeon: It was great. They really treated me well there. They had a nice stage, um, good sound system. They fed me, got drinks there. I played there like every day for a year. I was the house band.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, wow, um, what was the interior like?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, walked in the front door, um. There was seating there and then at the end of it, there was a, uh, where you order food. They had good food, and then to the right was a music room and more seating for food and people that wanted to hang out, and have drinks and watch music. So it was a really nice room. They treated me well. It's a great place, right on, uh, on Westheimer just, um, just east I guess it is from Montrose.

Norie Guthrie: Okay, did, what kind of food did they serve?

Bianca DeLeon: I think it was just like a burger joint. I don't remember.

Norie Guthrie: Okay, all right. Well, that must've been really, um, great in the beginning for, in your career to be able to play there for year, right, I mean.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, every day for a year and, and I also played lunch at some places, um, like some juice bar. I forget what it was called, Natural Juice or something. I did a lunch set there, and I did lunch sets some other places.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: So I played every single day.

Norie Guthrie: Wow.

Bianca DeLeon: And I, I made pretty good money there. Actually, they paid really well then.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: They don't pay anything for music now in Texas, but back then.

Norie Guthrie: Did you, did you end up playing at some of the, like at the steak places also?

Bianca DeLeon: Oh, yeah, I played, you name it, I played everywhere, you know. I, I played every day at Houlihan's for a year and then decided that was, you know, that, that was my, you know, tenure was up. So I would still play there sometimes and then I played, you know, steak houses, you name it, everywhere, all across town in Houston, Austin, Galveston, and La Porte, some steakhouse in La Porte.

Norie Guthrie: Okay, yeah, I've always, I've, I've heard many times that those are pretty lucrative –

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: – gigs since you would get fed.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, it paid well. You know, you got good money.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: Lots of food.

Norie Guthrie: It's always a bonus.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: So I assume around this time is when you met, um, Townes Van Zandt. Um, can you talk about that relationship?

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, I actually met him when I was about 15 when I first left town, and, uh, as near as I can remember, I think I sold him drugs. Uh, it was like weed.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And we knew some of the same people, so I met him through and, uh, then when I came back from California, then I saw him again. When I first met him, he was going to law school in, in Houston and it was, he was being pretty straight and he was married, and, um, when I came back, he was married and his wife was pregnant, but they were talking about splitting up, and then, uh, which they did after she had the kid, which was, uh, JT, and he used to come by and visit and bring JT when he was a little toddler.

Norie Guthrie: And so, um, in your biography, you talked about, um, like going to the Jester Lounge and kind of seeing him change as a performer. Um, there aren't very many, well, A) there aren't a lot of people that remember the Jester Lounge, so anything that you remember about that place is awesome, um, and also how did you kind of see him change there?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, I, I didn't go to the Jester. I lived near there but I didn't go there, but I knew that he started playing there.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: That's where he started out and then when I first saw him play, I think was at Family Hand –

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: – downtown.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: Which is, you know, a really nice kind of hippie, hippie restaurant. Had a little stage over on the side.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: I played there a lot too. I'd forgotten about that. Yeah, I played there too and, uh, so when I first saw him, he was playing old folksongs like the “Wreck of the 97,” and “Ballad of Ira Hayes,” and all the old classic folksongs, and he hadn't written anything at that point.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And that, I think the first one he wrote was “Waiting Around to Die” and he wrote that right about the time I got busted and, uh, it was, they sentenced me to like 3 years, and there were a lot of similarities with it in the song, you know, and, uh, and so I was in a federal halfway house. I got busted for smuggling, you know. So I always thought that he probably wrote that for me. I ne, I didn't ask him, but I know he did write other songs for me that he told me –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: – that he wrote for me. So I just kind of assumed, but I don't want to ask.

Norie Guthrie: Right, what was it like to kind of feel like you were, um, a muse for songs?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, I didn't feel, I didn't feel like that. I just felt like we had this connection, you know, and I wrote songs about him and he wrote songs about me.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: You know, it didn't occur to me at the time, and of course, now it does.

Norie Guthrie: So was this about the time that you started to write your own music?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, yeah, when he started writing, I thought well, I could do that.

Norie Guthrie: And so what did, um, how did you start working on that process? Did it just kind of, you just start to kind of do it one day or did you kind of look at other people's songs to kind of get inspiration of how to do it, or kind of study the craft, or?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, um, the first song I ever wrote, I was about 10 years old, and I remember walking around outside singing this song that I made up in my head. And I thought oh, that's like being a songwriter. I could do that, you know, and, and I thought yeah, that's what I want to grow up to be, you know, and I was already playing music, you know, playing drums in the band in, from junior high.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And so I thought, you know, I could, I could do that. That's something I would like, you know, be a writer or a songwriter.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And, and so when I left home, it was kind of a natural progression. I'd tried writing, you know, probably a dozen songs that were horrible. It was really bad. I knew they were bad and I, you know, tore 'em up and threw 'em out, and then I was with Townes one evening over at, uh, their, we were staying in a friend's apartment downtown and, um, I woke up in the middle of the night and I felt this compulsion to write this song. So I let them sleep in there and I went over to my house about two blocks away and I wrote this song called "San Antonio Express."

Norie Guthrie: Would you like to play that song?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, sure, I can play that song. So it was the first keeper, and it's still, I think it's still a decent song. Every once in a while, I'll play it.

[Plays "San Antonio Express"]

In the quiet of the morning  
With a lonely depot warning  
San Antonio Express is pulling out in a number nine  
It's not the first time or the last time  
I'll be riding down this line  
On this path we lead together  
Each one going our own way

But with your storybook songs  
And your guitar strummin' time  
And my fiddle bow bow riding you along  
It's just the tender smile you give me  
In the early morning hours  
When I'm asking you for one more ticket  
Down the line

With your guitar named Sarah  
And my fiddle I call Sam



The marriage of these two  
Is certainly more than ours has been  
But it's not the silence that's between us  
Or the life that holds us close  
It's a feeling that's inside me  
Like the words that you once said  
You can follow me right to the sun  
And I'll never understand  
I don't want you, but I love you anyway  
It's just the tender smile you give me  
In the early morning hours  
When I'm asking you for one more ticket  
Down the line

Norie Guthrie: That's really nice, thank you. Is there a story behind that one?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, after, uh, yeah, part of it is, is Townes was trying to play fiddle and it was the worst you can possibly imagine. It was horrible, screeching. Oh, god, it was painful, and so that's where the fiddle part comes in to there, and, um, I think it was kind of the neither one of us were ready to settle down at that point. I mean he'd been settled down. It didn't work out for him and I wasn't ready to settle down at all. So we had this connection, you know, that always pulled us together, you know. He would go out with other women, take up with other women, but he always came back to me, you know, up until he died, you know. I knew all of his wives.

Norie Guthrie: In the 1970s, you lived on and off between Houston, Nashville, and California, right?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Can you talk about that period in your life?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, I'd, um, been kind of commuting between, uh, Houston and, and Nashville, and I had a place in both places, and then eventually, I, um, well, when I, I would go up to Nashville and hang out with all, it was called a, uh, Texas convention, Texas, uh, I forget, there was a word that they used for it, Texas contingency, and, and Guy and, Guy Clark, Townes was up there, Steve Earle, Rodney Crowell, um, some, some of the musicians just moved up, up there in en masse. And most of them all stayed in this big house in Hillsboro Village and Rodney had this little uh house three blocks away from there, and we'd, uh, collect Coke bottles in the morning so we could get enough wine to drink in the evening. And, uh, we walked over to his house one morning because we were supposed to go collecting that morning and, uh, and he opened the door and he said oh, we, come on in. Like we just, Rodney just wrote this great song. Come listen to this, and, uh, he played me "Leaving Louisiana in the Broad Daylight", and I thought that –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: – Rodney that's a great song.

Norie Guthrie: Um, what was it like living amongst them, um. You know, did you, did they influence your own writing? Did you, did you just kind of like the comradery or?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, all the above, all the above, I mean I, I have kind of a different style than, than any of them pretty much. Well, except Townes I guess is probably the closest, you know, because he was the closest to me. So I guess it all, you know, it wasn't intentional, but it just kind of rubbed off from being around it, and it wasn't like I said oh, I want to write like that.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Bianca DeLeon: But, but you just kind of like, you know, absorb by osmosis.

Norie Guthrie: Um, were you, were you there also around '75 when they did the, when they started recording the documentary?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, I was there but I was, you know, traveling a lot then.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And then back and forth between Houston and you know, Austin, Galveston.

Norie Guthrie: Was that grueling kind of doing that, doing all that travel or did you enjoy it.

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, uh, both. It was pretty grueling. I had a little sports car, a little two-seater sports car and I took out the passenger seat so I could just sleep on my clothes on the passenger side. So everything I owned would fit in that car, and it didn't have a trunk. It just had a space behind the seat where you could shove stuff back in there. So I shoved my guitar back in there and then packed some stuff around that, and then, and then with the seat out, I could put my clothes there and sleep on 'em, to give me a little cushion.

Norie Guthrie: As a woman, how did, did you feel safe?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, I was, I was pretty fearless then, but, uh, one time, I was just, uh, just west of Little Rock and I –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: – I was really tired. I think I left after a gig at 2 in the morning. By the time I got there, it was, it was, um, I don't know what time I left, but I got there, it was dark, middle of the night, and, uh, I'd counted on pulling into this roadside park that I usually slept in halfway, and they had it barricaded up for construction or something, so I just drove around the barricades, of course. I went in and I parked, and I had my dog with me. So I fell asleep with my head against the steering wheel, immediate just boom, out, and then I heard my dog growling, and then she started growling louder and louder, and then she started like low barking, and I

looked up and there was a guy at, at the hood, at the end of the hood of my car bent over like this with a, you know, something, like a gun or something shiny, metallic in his hand, you know. And, and, uh, so then, my dog started barking furiously and the guy jumped up, and ran off, and got in his car and left, and so I fired up my car and got on the highway, and went god, please don't let me pass him, so. I didn't know which way he went, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Right, right, now I just, I guess I would feel like, if I was, I would sometimes be nervous now –

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: – which is not the 70s, traveling by myself, um, so much. So no, it's interesting to know that, that you were, that in a sense, that you felt pretty safe, that you were able to take care of yourself.

Bianca DeLeon: I had a good dog, I think.

Norie Guthrie: Um, you also spent some of that time in, uh, in the cities in California.

Bianca DeLeon: In, in the cities in California?

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, well, I first moved out and I was in Nashville, and I'd been living with, uh, Guy Clark's guitar player, and he, he ditched me for some beautiful young blond, you know, and I went back to Houston for a while, and then ended up, um, you know, I was friends with Fred Koller in Nashville. He was going to, uh, California. He was gonna record in a studio and go out to California, and, and so was I with OHS Music for a potential record deal. And so he went out first and I went out, my car broke down out there, so I ended up living there, getting kind, just didn't come back. And so when I left Nashville though, I, uh, went by Guy Clark's house and I said, you know, Willie and I have split up so I'm leaving town. And he says well, where you going. I said I don't know. I'm just leaving. And he said you're not going home, and I said nope. And so I went out to California and I guess that's, you know, I don't know this, I never asked Guy, but I presume that's, he came out with that song right after that, "She Ain't Going' Nowhere, She's Just Leaving."

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And I remember having that conversation, so I think that's where that came from, but I wouldn't swear to it. I had a band out in California too.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm, you had a band out in California?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Can you tell me more about that?

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, I had, I had a band. At first, I had, um, a band called the Mud Flaps, and then, and then, uh, we reformed and had a band called Five and Dimers, and we played like, uh, um, something something's Country Palace. I forget the name of it now, but real nice gigs, a big dancehall place.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: It was fun. I actually just, when I was going through all my documents, I just ran across an old, uh, reel to reel from there.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, wow.

Bianca DeLeon: So.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah, that'd be cool.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah, to digitize, cool. Um, so then what, what did you kind of do next in California? What's your, you now had just decided to come settle down, I guess, a little bit.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, a little bit, uh, in the first year I went out there, uh, I lost eight good friends from drug deals gone bad, you know, shot, you know, murdered, all kinds of stuff. And I thought you know, it might be time to straighten up my life a little bit, you know –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: – get my, get myself sober and, and straighten up, you know, and find a, a better class of people that aren't gonna die, you know. And it took me a long time to, to go through that, you know. I had one group of friends, and then I'd find another group that were slightly straighter.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And then I'd outgrow them and go into another group and kind of worked my way up to people that didn't drink or drug at all. It took me a long time, and so I had different businesses. I started several different businesses –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: – when I was going through that process, and, uh, and then I moved back to Austin and you know, had a whole different group of people then who were all real straight.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Bianca DeLeon: So it worked out pretty well. I survived.

Norie Guthrie: What were some of the businesses that you, um, did in California?

Bianca DeLeon: I had, um, I had like a land development company. So I bought a piece of land in, uh, it was 10 acres and I, um, for a while, I got a job to pay for it, and I borrowed money for the down payment, got a job in a motorcycle shop as a, as a motorcycle mechanic, and slept in my car on the property, or my truck. I slept in my truck, and I saved up enough money to buy a 22-foot trailer and then lived at, in that for a while, and then, and eventually, I was able to log of the property and subdivide it and made enough money to buy another bigger and better place that eventually had a house. It was good.

Norie Guthrie: And so what was the, what was the timeframe that we're talking about right now? It's, like when did you originally arrive in California and then when did you leave?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, twice I was in California, once, um, in the, I think it was maybe '69 for the, for the pop festival.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And then I went back to Texas, and then, and then, uh, went to Nashville, and then moved from Nashville back to California.

Norie Guthrie: So your time in California was maybe '77 to the 80s?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah, okay, 'cause I have, um, from what I could, um – oh, I actually another kind of question for us to cover even though it's kind of out of, uh, out of order. Um, you mentioned, um, kind of your friendship with, uh, Guy and Susanna Clark. Can you talk more about your experiences with them?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, well, I knew 'em in Houston. I remember when Guy first came into town. He was working at a TV station, I think.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And, and, uh, he was making guitars, building guitars, and, uh, he worked on a couple of my guitars that I still have. He tried to trade me one of my guitars for one of, for his, his regular guitar, but I still have that guitar, and he, he loved that guitar. He really wanted it and he worked on it for a couple months, finally gave it up. And then, uh, Townes called me. I was at the Old Quarter. Townes called me and asked me if I'd go to Nashville. So he, uh, gave, sent me a ticket, which I still have, and flew me out to Nashville, and I stayed with him, and Guy, and Susanna.

Norie Guthrie: And so what, um, so you, how, how long did you end up kind of staying with them? Do you mind telling me that?

Bianca DeLeon: I was there for about a week.

Norie Guthrie: About a week, okay.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah and when I was there, um, Townes wrote that song "If I Needed You." I think he had started writing it before I got there, and then when –

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: – I think he wrote the first verse, and then when I got there, he sat down in front of me on the couch, and I was sitting next to him on a table like this, and, uh, when they started, you know, he wrote the rest of the song. He sat down and he said I worked on this song and now that you're here, I can finish it, he wrote, "If I Needed You," and then Luke and Lil were the parakeets were, uh, Guy and Susanna's parakeets in the corner, but after we left, then Lil died. It turned out that she was a female, not a male, so.

Norie Guthrie: Um, and then is that then when you went to live with, um, the guitar player or that you were then living with Guy Clark for a little bit?

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, that was, no, I lived with the guitar player –

Norie Guthrie: Because I have –

Bianca DeLeon: – before that.

Norie Guthrie: – okay, okay. I'm trying to –

Bianca DeLeon: No, I'm sorry, it was after that.

Norie Guthrie: – okay.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, it was after that.

Norie Guthrie: And so you, how long did you end up staying in Nashville do you think around?

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, couldn't say.

Norie Guthrie: That's okay.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, um, a couple years, I think.

Norie Guthrie: Okay, all right.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah and, uh, the, I don't know. I was drinking a drugging a lot there, and, uh, so I went to play, went back to Houston to play some gigs and like my, uh, roommate there was Louise Willis was the one whose husband recorded, uh, Townes' *Live at the Old Quarter* and we were really, so I introduced her to her husband, to Earl, and they're still married. And, uh, so I went back to Houston and played a few gigs, and she called me up and, uh, we talked for quite a while, and they said well, it's gonna cost you a lot. We should hang out, and she's no, it's not, I'm in Houston. So is all your stuff. I moved you back. I said okay, cool, I'll go get an apartment. Good move.

Norie Guthrie: And that's when you stayed in Houston for a little bit then went ahead and went back to Nashville and then back to –

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: – stay in California, okay. I know it seems weird that I'm trying to trace all this back.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, I traveled around so much, I can't even keep track of it.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Bianca DeLeon: So –

Norie Guthrie: No, no –

Bianca DeLeon: – yeah.

Norie Guthrie: – I understand, um, so then, um, what caused you then to move from California to Austin in 1989, when you were there, right?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, it, it was, um, I was out there when there was like the big mudslide. They had like I think it was 7 feet of rain in one winter, 136 inches of rain that winter, and so there were mudslides, and people were killed, and right across from me, the whole mountainside gave away and it was too unstable to dig out the people, so they just went over and put little crosses on the side. And so that was part of my view.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And then there was a big fire that was coming over the mountain, the mountain ridge, and I was on evacuation alert, and they gave me 15 minutes. They said once we issue the mandatory alert, you'll have 15 minutes to get out. So I sat there with my guitar, one bag and my guitar, on a leash, dog on the leash and watched the fire come up over the ridge, and we ate by firelight. You know, ashes were falling all over everything, and, and then there was the '89 earthquake and I thought okay, that's it, you know. I was in a building that came down. It was really scary.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: So I had a lot of damage to my house. So fixed that, fixed the house up and then I got out and moved back to Austin because it's central. I could tour from there, because in California, you know, they either tour up and down the coast or, you know, or you fly somewhere else and there's not really any driving across the desert.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: So I thought Austin's got a nice music scene and Ann Richards was the governor then, so I thought how cool is that, you know, and then I moved back and then they booted her out, pissed me off.

Norie Guthrie: So what did, um, so then you start, you move to Austin. You were touring from there using it kind of as your base.

Bianca DeLeon: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: And then, um, you then went on to record your first album, *Outlaws and Lovers*. Can you talk about that?

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, a lot of those songs I'd written, you know, a long time before, you know, 'cause "San Antonio Express" is on that.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: You know, and then I had a few new songs. Yeah, so it felt like it was time to start getting more serious about it. You know, I moved back to Austin to do that, so and, and studio time was cheaper then, a little bit cheaper. So I recorded the album, released it in Europe and it did really well, and, uh, I got lots of airplay and press, and then nobody called me for gigs, and I thought, you know, what's that. What's up with that, you know. So I decided I would go over. So some friends of mine were playing in a festival in Holland. So I said well, I would go over it and hang out backstage with them, and see what happened. So I walked into the backstage area and there was a guy there with a, um, a DJ with a tee shirt on from a radio station I knew was giving me a lot of airplay. So I walked up and introduce myself, and he said you're Bianca DeLeon, really, oh my god, I can't believe you're here. And he took me around and introduced me to all these people, and then that, that morning, you know, they put me in a car with a fiddle player and drove me around Holland, and I was on tour just like that, boom. I hadn't even slept. We rehearsed in the car on the way to the gig.

Norie Guthrie: How was that different, um, touring around in Europe rather than in, in the U.S.

Bianca DeLeon: Well, I, that's where I started really touring. You know, I'd been playing gigs in California up and down the coast, but not really, you know, major touring.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.



Bianca DeLeon: But once I started that in, uh, you know, that night turned into, you know, a lot of touring in Europe, so I started going over twice a year for 2 months at a time each, and that was my main tour. And then I'd go to Chicago sometimes, and tour around Texas a little.

Norie Guthrie: What, um, what countries do you hit when you are abroad?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, all of Europe pretty much.

Norie Guthrie: Do you hit just western? Do you go to Eastern Europe also?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, Holland, Finland, German, Belgium, Italy, Scotland, France, that's it.

Norie Guthrie: What, what are the, how do the audiences differ from U.S. audiences or what is the difference?

Bianca DeLeon: They're, they're great. They're very attentive. Usually, they speak English. You know, you can have some of the smaller towns, they might not, but, uh, they speak English and in the smaller towns where they don't speak English, I always have the lyrics in my albums and the CD artwork, so, so they can read them, the lyrics and they'll have like one designated translator for the group, and they'll like read the lyrics as I'm singing so everybody else understands what I'm saying. They're very attentive.

Norie Guthrie: Very cool.

Bianca DeLeon: Very literary.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And so it's, and you know, you're lucky if you're not just background music in the U.S.

Norie Guthrie: You know, that's, that's really, that's very interesting. So it, it's something that you enjoy a lot more going over there to play?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, um, yeah, they're more appreciative and they have much better transportation. I just got back from, from Holland and Germany. I was on a train that went, goes 200 miles an hour across Germany. You know, it went across the whole country in 2 hours. So it's great, and it's dead quiet, you know. You sit there in the club car having a cocktail, an adult beverage, you know, watching the world just fly by. It was great. It was cheap and they're on time every time.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, wow.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah, that's, it's interesting that yeah, I, I've heard some other people kind of talk about different experiences with audiences, that sometimes there'll be a lot of line dancers, and they'll –

Bianca DeLeon: Oh, yeah.

Norie Guthrie: – kind of like a certain experience, and then other times, they'll have, you know, very attentive –

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: – audiences. Have you experienced also the line dancers?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, I played a, I played a country western festival once where there were lots of line dancers and stuff. It was kind of bizarre and, uh, they were all doing this line dance thing and I'd never seen before, and, and, uh, they wouldn't believe me. They said you're from Texas and you don't know how to line dance. You must not be from Texas. And I said yeah, born and raised, and, and so when we got on stage, I was with my fiddle player, we got on stage and the next band came up, we went out and started two-stepping, and they're looking like what is that. I actually have a video of that that I brought.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, cool.

Bianca DeLeon: I don't think I'm on, I'm on stage, but I'm doing, I'm doing dancing on it.

Norie Guthrie: Um, can you tell me about your other albums?

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, I did, I think the, um, let's see, I think the next one I did was, was *Live from Hell to Helsinki*, which was, um, ended up being a 2-day nightmare of a trip from, from, uh, Rotterdam, I think I was in Rotterdam and, and trying to go to Helsinki, yeah. It took me 2 days to get there. I had no food, no sleep, and it was just a nightmare. I started out on two trains that broke down, got on a, a plane in Belgium, and, and right as I got on the plane, they were, they were trying to shut the door and it wouldn't shut, and they would fire up the engine and it would, I guess it would say that door not closed or something, and so they'd bring the stairs back and pound on the door. I was sitting in the seat right next to the door, you know, lucky as I am, you know, and they're like pounding on it, pounding on it, and roll away the stairs and they, the pilot would fire it up and it wouldn't, you know. So they did that for about an hour and a half and then the pilot finally said well, I think the door is finally shut. You think? Wait a minute. So I stood up and said can I sit on somebody's lap in the back. Everybody just laughed and nobody offered. So we got into Heathrow and then we ran, you know, we were really late. So we ran across the airport and I was starved by then. It was in the evening, and we got across the airport and got in line to get on the next plane, and they announced that they were forcibly evicting an armed passenger, I guess some terrorist or something. So we waited there for several hours while they cleared the plane, and I was hoping they got whatever bomb or whatever it was, and then, uh, got, and so then we didn't, weren't able to fly into Stockholm. We flew in 2 hours north and they bused into Stockholm, and I got on the um, went to get on the, um, um, train to go to the ferry

and they, you know, I got out of the cab, the bus, and then they've locked the door. So I'm sitting there and I realized I could freeze to death. It was really cold, you know, so you know, flagged down a cab and ended up, you know, I think I went to a coffee shop until 7 in the morning and got on a, had to borrow money, because I had euros and dollars and only took kroners, and somebody loaned me the money to, you know, to get on the bus to go to the ferry. And then the ferry communications broke down, you know, so I couldn't tell them to come pick me up, and I landed in Turku, Finland, and so then I finally got to Turku and the manager said we might as well take the plane into Helsinki. I got into Helsinki and the manager's car broke down. So he showed up, you know, in, in a, we had taken a bus to go to his house to get his wife's car, and then got to the radio station, I thought it was going to be 15 minutes, but it ended up being an hour and a half interview, and, and then all the, the, uh, power system between the music room and the studio room went out. So they had to send in this little guy as a runner. He would like come in and whisper to my fiddle player, as her this question, you know. So he pretended he was the DJ and I can't, I'm starving, hadn't eaten in 2 days, and I'm sitting on a stool, and I thought please don't let me fall off, you know. And I thought well, this I can do. You know, I have control over this. So I thought I'm not gonna miss a note. So then recorded it, of course, so when I got back to, to Austin, I finally played it and I thought that's a whole CD right there, you know. So I put it out, *Live to Hell to Helsinki*, and after I put it out, then someone in Europe said so Hell to Helsinki, were you in Hell, Norway? And I looked it up on the map and sure enough, I was pretty close to Hell.

Norie Guthrie: Which one, what came out after that?

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, I did the, uh, *The Long Slow Decline of Carmelita* –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: – after that, which is the title cut and so, and, um, most of that CD is about, uh, living in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico and, uh, I had, um, I met this guy from Hermosillo through a friend of mine, a Columbian friend of mine in Santa Cruz, and he came up to visit her, and they all had dinner at my house, and I, you know, I fell for this guy, so I ended up, started going down to Hermosillo and seeing him, and met his family, and we became engaged, and then his father died, and, uh, there was huge big family feud, feud and he just became a different person, you know. So I broke off the engagement, but I stayed in Hermosillo playing gigs down there, and I had a booking agent and a guitar player, you know, a Spanish guitar player to play with me. So one of my gigs though was at, uh, at this whorehouse, which is the, one of the best paying gigs in to, paying gigs in town there, and you know, I had to, my booking agent with me and my guitar player, so it was, felt fairly safe, you know, had a nice stage, you know. So it, I was playing one time and the club owner came over and put a box on the end of the stage and said when you're finished with your set, come help us load out the liquor because the Federales are coming, you know. So I finished my set and walked over with the box, and he put lots of whiskey in it. We took it to this white four door Econoline van at the door, loaded everything up, and all the prostitutes left and all the johns left and we, we took the van and parked, you know, pulled up to the stop sign, burned a joint and then looked, I was watching the rearview as all the Federales came in through the open door, went into the place, and then 15 minutes later, they all left, and

we backed down the street and loaded out all of the liquor, and all the johns came back, and all the prostitutes came back, and I played another set.

Norie Guthrie: Um, would you like to play a song from that album?

Bianca DeLeon: Uh, yeah.

Norie Guthrie: On your guitar right there, those post-its?

Bianca DeLeon: Oh, that was some, um, a gig I played last night. These are the, um, we were only doing like 6, the songwriters in the round, so we were only playing 8 songs, so I had like 50 or 60 songs on my list –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: – and so I wanted to pick out the ones that I thought would be more likely for me to want to play.

Norie Guthrie: Oh.

Bianca DeLeon: So I don't need this anymore actually. So, because otherwise, I could spend a lot of time saying, you know, which song is that that I want. Be hard to make up my mind. So at this, um, the whorehouse that I played at was, um, painted brown inside, but you could tell at one time it was like a regular warehouse and it was painted white. So there, there was a stage in one corner and then the bar over here, and then, and then beyond that were some, a hallway with restrooms right at the start of the hallway, and then the hallway went back to rooms and stuff, I guess, and I didn't get, went that far but, but right near the restroom, there were, uh, names scrawled into the paint, and, and you could, you could see where they scrawled the names and the white paint showing out in the dark, you know, like Manuel loves Carmelita.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And so that's kind of where the, the title, that's where the song originated in there. It was from a lot of other things that happened there and some other places.

[Plays “The Long, Slow Decline of Carmelita”]

She was born in a border town  
Some 21 years ago  
To a black-eyed Spanish beauty  
Some called San Antone Rose  
With a tattoo on her shoulder  
And a bottle in her hand  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita

She was workin' in Soledad Bar  
When she took up with Manuel  
He was flashin' money and cocaine  
Just fresh out of jail  
She kissed the Virgen de Guadalupe  
She wore around her neck  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita

She rode shotgun in a '69 Chevy  
With Manuel at the wheel  
The drove on down Brownsville  
Trying to make a deal  
But the bullets flew, and two men fell  
And that was all she wrote  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita

They crossed the border flying  
Headin' toward Monterey  
They stopped for gas in Saltillo  
Just on down the way  
She threw a bottle through the windshield  
As he drove off in the night  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita

She found work down in La Zona Rosa  
Workin' for Madre Miel  
She turned 21 high on heroin  
Just trying to stay out of jail  
She pawned the Virgen de Guadalupe  
And scored just one last time  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita

And the spirit of Carmelita  
Goes floatin' down the hall  
In La Casa de Madre Miel  
Her name's scratched there in the hall  
And no one shed a tear  
No one called out her name  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita  
It was a long, slow decline for Carmelita

Norie Guthrie: Um, let's see, um, yeah, do you want to talk a little bit more about your other albums? After comes, there, there's two more that come after *Carmelita*, correct?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, yeah, I have one called *Love, Guns, and Money*.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: That stood out, and released last year. That's the CD and I just finished another one that will be called *Dangerous Endeavor*, and I'm pretty excited about it. I've been trying to label shop it, but I've gotten two or three rejections so far, but *Catcher in the Rye* was rejected 29 times, so I feel like I've only got 27 more to go.

Norie Guthrie: Have you, um, the other albums that you had, did you, did you find labels overseas for those?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, I almost signed with one company over there, Corazong Records, but they, um, they wanted to use, you know, instead of using all of the songs that I already had for an album, they wanted to use some of those and a lot of ones that I've already released, and I thought that was a really bad idea, and they wouldn't back down off of it, so we never came to an agreement.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: So other than that, I've been label-less.

Norie Guthrie: Do you, do you find that there's some freedom in that or?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, yeah, absolutely, you know, 'cause I have the freedom to turn them down for one thing, 'cause I thought it was a really stupid idea of releasing songs that I've already released.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: You know, so, um, you know, and then, and I work harder that probably any label would anyways, so.

Norie Guthrie: Um, the, the current one, when do you expect that one to come out?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, it's, it's still at that I have 27 more to go.

Norie Guthrie: Okay, how does it, how does it work for, um, submitting your work to a label? Do you just send them the CD with a letter? How does that work?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, uh, um, I've been going off connections 'cause otherwise, they just will round file it.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: You know, so I've had a couple connections that, that looked very promising, but didn't work out, and I've still got one label in Houston that I just talked to this morning. They're gonna listen to it. I sent 'em a link, you know, through the Dropbox.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: Of the CD, so they're gonna give it a listen, and then I know them. They've heard me play before and have expressed an interest before.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: So and, and there's another label, um, somebody's, you know, given me a connection for.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: So you know, see what happens. I figure I'll give it another 6 to 8 months or something and release it myself if nothing comes of it.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: For a long time, I came up with this alter ego 'cause, so that I could call and, and not be myself, because people don't want to turn you down, say no, your music sucks and is not appropriate for here.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: You know, so I created this alter ego for it, Tina White, so this friend of mine, Jeremy says Tina White, that sounds like a prostitute. So and I'd call up and I'd say hi, this is Tina White. I'm representing Bianca DeLeon. I was wondering if she would be appropriate for your venue. Maybe you could find a spot, a spot for her to play there, you know, and I'd like alter my voice a little bit. It would only work once, and then, I'd have to call back and be me.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And you know, and, uh, and they'd say well, you know, Tina always makes the first cold call and I always do the follow-up stuff, because otherwise, people were saying you and Tina sound so much alike, and I'd have to say well, you know, we're both from Texas.

Norie Guthrie: When did, when did you invent Tina?

Bianca DeLeon: Oh, when I first started touring.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: And then I did an interview one time, and people, people, the guy said, poor guy, he said so I've been talking with Tina. She seems very nice. You know, you're lucky to have her representing you, and, and I'd say yeah, you know. So then, I started making up these stories and said well, I don't know if you know about Tina, but you know, she used to hang out with Mick. She was really wild back in the day. There were some stories about her and, and I kept waiting for, I started Googling Tina to see if she came up. People are gonna start like writing reviews on Tina or something, but then I finally decided that's gone long enough, so now I just do it, and I'm more established now, so I can just call people and, and it seems to be working out.

Norie Guthrie: Really.

Bianca DeLeon: So I fired Tina.

Norie Guthrie: This is really interesting to create an alter ego.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: I mean it's really smart, because you have to work the system any way that you can, right?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, because I was emailing people and then not getting responses and you know, I didn't know if they just hadn't gotten the email, if they weren't interested or they were, or if I just needed to press them further, you know, 'cause they were, you know, and I figured if they didn't want to, to have me, they didn't want to just say yeah, you suck, you know. So it worked out pretty good, but now, I think I have enough of a reputation that people know who I am, know if I'm gonna work or not, and don't hesitate to tell me, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: Doesn't really feel that the venue, we're a jazz venue or this or that, you know, not you know, you suck.

Norie Guthrie: Hopefully, no one said that. Um, you had a friendship with, um, David Rodriguez that you had mentioned to me before. Um, what was he like?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, as his mother even said, he was a very difficult man. She said that at his funeral. She said I know you're not supposed to speak badly of the dead, but, presumed dead as they say, well, we all know that David was a very difficult man.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: So that's how the, the, uh, funeral service started out, and I'd said that to somebody that I was going to the funeral with and they said oh, you shouldn't speak badly of him. And I said it's just really true and everyone knows that. So when we got there and sure enough, that's the way it started out, you know, and he was very difficult. He was, it was a love-



hate because he was so brilliant and such a great songwriter, guitar player, singer, and just brilliant, brilliant, you know, blindingly brilliant guy, but just a little paranoid, could be mean. He had a mean streak in him.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: You know, he could say some really vicious stuff, you know, um. He lived with me. I knew him, you know, from Houston when I was a teenager. We knew each other then, and, um, he, you know, I knew him, you know, when I was seeing Townes, so he was kind of on the fringe of that.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And he came out to California in '02 with Vince Bell and Ani DiFranco, and, uh, they came over to my house and, and I was living in Santa Cruz and, and he and Vince and Ani stayed at my house, then then he wanted to, to stay with me that night, and I said well, aren't you with Ani, and he said no, no, we're just touring together. So, so we stayed together. In the morning, I, you know, I get up and Ani's gone, you know. She's just taken that one bag and left her clothes and stuff, and, and gone. I said are you sure, you know, you sure there wasn't really something going on here. He said no, no, I don't know what happened to her. She's a little moody sometimes and of course, I found out later that they were, you know, an item.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: And I felt like an idiot. So I ran into, I came back to, uh, Austin for South by Southwest and walked backstage at the Chicago House, and there was Ani. So I walked up, apologized profusely, and, and volunteered to send her clothes to her, which I did, and then David walked in the room. He walked in and looked at us, and started backing up out the door. So yeah, he was, you know, just the way David was, and they, and they showed up. He moved to Holland, moved to Dordrecht, and I think he moved to north Holland to some island for a while and was living with a dwarf there, and they sent me some photos of him on horseback there. I have lots of photos and letters from him, and, uh, then he moved to Dordrecht and he showed up at one of my gigs over there, which was a major radio show, TV show gig, you know, a big concert hall kind of a thing. It was a big deal and, uh, went backstage in the group green room, talked his way back and, and proceeded to drink all the alcohol there. He got staggering drunk and then when I went on stage, he got in the back of the room and started like catcalling, and then he decided that wasn't good enough. So he walked up front, tripped over the monitor wire, and unplugged the monitor, so they didn't have any monitors for the whole show and he sat in the front, front row and would shout out things like play a good song. So yeah, he was difficult.

Norie Guthrie: I like how you say that with a smile.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, well, we were still friends after that. We had a love-hate, like I wanted to kill him and then I thought oh, you know, we had too much history together to do that.

Norie Guthrie: Um, let's see. Do you want to take a moment and play one of your newer songs?

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, I'll play the title cut off my new C, CD, which I am very excited about.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Bianca DeLeon: [Plays "Dangerous Endeavor"]

I headed on down into  
No man's land  
Just south of Hermosillo  
I had fifty grand  
In the back of my boots  
And a pistol down in my waistband  
Out in the desert  
Where the cold wind blows  
Ain't no one to tell the story  
Of what went down  
'fore the sun came up  
And the moon all big and shiny

It was a dangerous endeavor  
It was a dangerous endeavor

I left Mexico  
And everything behind  
And I ran while I still could  
Headin' for the border  
With a change of my name  
In the Texas Piney Woods  
I settled in a town  
With an ear to the ground  
Where no one knows  
My name  
Sometimes I wake in a cold, cold sweat  
With a dream of them on my trail

It was a dangerous endeavor  
It was a dangerous endeavor

It's been a few years  
Since I crossed the border  
With a hell-hound on my trail  
I met a nice man  
Gonna settle down  
Gonna listen to the  
Night birds wail  
And I'm never going back

Down south of the border  
And I'm never gonna tell him why  
Like a rattlesnake buzzin'  
In the heat of the day  
It's just better to let 'em lie

It was a dangerous endeavor  
It was a dangerous endeavor

Norie Guthrie: What's the impetus for writing that song?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, when, uh, when I lived in Hermosillo, I started going out with the guy named Guillermo, who, who, um, who was a cop and he studied at the School of the Americas, which is where they train all the like Manuel Noriega and all the South American despots, you know, and he, so he went there. The more I got to know him, the more it was kind of a little odd, but he really seemed nice enough. So he, he invited me to the beach one day, and he came by. I was staying at, um, a friend of, uh, a friend of mine named, um, Lu, Luchi and so he came by Luchi's and, uh, picked me up to go to, to New Keno Beach. And so we were driving down the highway and he's got a, this big king cab white truck and, and cowboy boots and a hat on, and we're driving down the beach, and as we were going down the road, he pointed over off in the desert and says oh, there's were all the Columbians are flying in the drugs. You want to go see? And I thought maybe some other time. Why don't we just go on to the beach, you know, and I'm thinking I need to get out of here. I need to leave Hermosillo now, you know. It was, and, uh, there were undercurrents of like weird jokes. There was undercurrents of, of violence and weird stuff happening out in the deserts out there.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: You know, I was hearing like rumors of this and that, and I'm going what's going on here, and that was right when the Columbians first started, you know, bringing in drugs into Mexico, and of course, that's developed into what the cartel is now down there, and so it was just starting to become dangerous. They were like finding bodies out in the desert and weird stuff. I didn't know exactly what was going on then, but I thought, you know, it's time to get out of here.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Bianca DeLeon: So that's, you know, it's part of where that comes from.

Norie Guthrie: So it seems like for many of your songs that you draw upon stories from your past, um. Why do you do that?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, I'm a storyteller, like *Canterbury Tales* only different.

Norie Guthrie: Um, do you, have, have you ever written some songs that maybe you don't have as much of a person connection, that might be about other people. The "Carmelita" song does

seem to be about kind of somebody else more, but do you kind of just, do you enjoy drawing upon your personal life to write the music?

Bianca DeLeon: Well, I've done so much weird stuff that people always ask me about it, so end up writing it.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Bianca DeLeon: I mean you've got material, use it, right.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Bianca DeLeon: You, I don't have to make it up.

Norie Guthrie: You've lived an incredibly adventurous life. Um, I feel like we're, I feel like there's more that you could tell me about some things, but I don't know if there are like specific stories that you want to tell that I could weave back in.

Bianca DeLeon: Well, feel free to ask.

Norie Guthrie: Um, let's see.

Bianca DeLeon: As long as this doesn't go to like the police department or something, I'm good and I can tell you.

Norie Guthrie: No, no, no, just like, um, is there like other like specific stories that you feel like you want to tell about your interactions with other people or things that have happened to you that you feel like that we haven't talked about?

Bianca DeLeon: Um –

Norie Guthrie: I just don't want you to feel like, you know, when you walk away like man, I wish, I should've told her –

Bianca DeLeon: – I know.

Norie Guthrie: – this one thing and I wanted to. I just want to make sure that there's nothing like that right now that's –

Bianca DeLeon: I'm sure there will be as soon as I stand up.

Norie Guthrie: – all right. Well, we can go to kind of like the last question.

Bianca DeLeon: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so looking back on your career, and on your life, what accomplishments mean the most to you?

Bianca DeLeon: Um, my touring time in Europe, you know, like I had, I had a blast doing it. I made money. I made friends, you know. It was really important for me. It was great. I did kind ignore the U.S., so then when I, you know, started touring the U.S., they're going like we don't know who you are. That was a little difficult, but touring Europe was great fun. I, I always scheduled in time to go to the museums. You know, I've, uh, seen the David and the Mona Lisa, and the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, uh, the Gates the Ishtar, you know, so I've seen all the great museums. I went to the Van Gogh, Gauguin exhibit in Amsterdam, and by the time I got to the, to the, uh, where the last letters were from him when he cut off his ear and he painted the, the, uh, "Starry Night" was the last in the exhibit, and by the time I got there, I, I cried. I, I saw all the, you know, read all the letters from his brother who was giving him monetary support, you know, and so every, every painting every place he was, he had these letters describing, and, uh, and I saw, I went to this exhibit the end of my tour over there, and he described almost every place that I played. There was a, a bridge that he painted that I played at the café right at the bridge, and, and as, on the way to one gig, uh, near Dordrecht, I was, went past this windmill and my driver pointed. I said oh, that windmill is in the, you know, Van Gogh painting if you go to the Van Gogh museum, and, uh. So there were all, and one of the letters said, uh, to his brother said painted yesterday in the, the dunes outside of Den Hague, you know, The Hague, and I had just been walking on the dunes. I stayed at someone's house in the dunes. I had been walking on the dunes with her the day before. So I felt this eerie connection with him.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Bianca DeLeon: By the time I got to the last painting, I, I had identified with him so much, I, I, you know, would be like, I just cried. That's really beautiful, and the other, I think, highlight of my career was a couple years ago. I, I got invited to play at Berklee College of Music with Betty Soo and Eliza Gilkyson, you know. They paid me well. I played, you know, for classes and student performance and public performance, and just had a great time there. They treated, they carried my guitar for me, treated me like royalty. I thought I was hot shit for a while, 15 minutes anyway.

Norie Guthrie: Well, is there anything else that you want to talk about?

Bianca DeLeon: I can't think of anything offhand.

Norie Guthrie: All right, all right, um, so I want to thank you very much for coming out, um, for coming and talking, um. I really appreciate you taking the time.

Bianca DeLeon: Well, thanks for, thanks for inviting me out. Now I don't have to go through everything and just throw out all that stuff, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah, I'm glad. We don't, we don't want you to throw out anything.

Bianca DeLeon: I keep looking at it every time I go to, you know, my little storage area there. I keep thinking, oh, get rid of all that stuff, you know. So got it just in time.

Norie Guthrie: Good, I'm glad. I'm glad that we're able to give it a home.

Bianca DeLeon: Yeah, me too. Thanks, thanks for having me here.