

Interviewee: Sharon Mathews

Interviewer: Norie Guthrie

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Interview Transcript

Norie Guthrie: My name is Norie Guthrie from the Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library at Rice University. I am interviewing Sharon Mathews. Today is June 28th, 2018. This is part of the Houston Folk Music Archive Oral History Project. Can you tell me about your early life?

Sharon Mathews: Yes, I can. Well, I started out on Long Island, New York and my sisters, uh, Lynn Sterler and Elaine Sterler, went to Houston and they got in the folk buse-, business, well, in the restaurant business at Anderson Fair with Marvin Anderson and Gray Fair. And I loved my sisters dearly that, you know, they came in and, um, when I was 11 years old, my sister Elaine and Pat Stout came in and, uh, got me, uh, so excited about the music. And so, my, uh, uh, mm, my whole visit to, uh, Houston was when I was 12 years old, and I went to Anderson Fair and saw the magic that my sisters were involved in. I went to their apartment on West Gray and, and, you know, met a lot of people but I was with my parents. And so, over the years, I would write to my sister and my sister would say, "Well, you should come. You should come. I'm dating Tim Leatherwood and he's got a job at Hermann Park and he could get you to work at the zoo." So I said, "Oh my God, dream job! Yay!"

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: So, I got on the bus with my friend, Kathy Slane, and took the Greyhound bus to Houston. But by that time I got there, Lynn broke up with Tim and was goin' out with Bill Cade. And he was at the bus stop waiting for us and, uh, and as soon as we got off the bus this big old burly man comes over. He goes, "You must be Sharon Sterler." I looked up at him and I said, "Yeah, I am." He goes, "Get in the van." You know? Oh! Best ride I ever took. And so, he took me to se-, to my sister's house, which we lived right around the corner from, uh, Houlihan's on Westheimer and, um, we went to Anderson Fair and I felt like I had the golden ticket, because I got in and I got the VIP pass to where I got backstage. And right then, everybody was just startin' out. Lyle Lovett, um, Lucinda, um, Vince Bell, Nanci Griffith, um, Eric Taylor, um, Don Sanders. And I, you know, immediately, "Oh, Sharon Sterler, so, you gonna work at the Fair?" And then so, yes, I got in, uh, at the Fair, and Walter Spinks and, um, and Steve Baker were managing Houlihan's on Westheimer. And they, they gave me a job there, and so I had double the music, you know? Working at Anderson Fair and working at, at Houlihan's, we had the best acts in the world come through. It was amazing. So that was my start of, and it was 1978.

Norie Guthrie: 1978. Okay. Um, can you talk a little bit more specifically about the scene?

Sharon Mathews: The music scene was incredible. And to watch it all start, and to be a part of it and be in the late night and the beginning of it; the, you know, starting out the evening and seeing people come in. I mean, it was, it was incredible to be a part of this folk generation that were amazing writers. The lyrics would grab you, make you wanna cry, make you wanna laugh, make you, you know, like Lucinda's album. I was involved on her first album. I was so excited to know who was a part of every song and she would break down everything because, you know, we were there recording with her and Rex was in the band, Andre Mathews was in the band, Mickey was in the band, Mickey White, um, uh, Malcolm Smith was in the band. Um, a lot of people and just being a part and knowing where the songs come from, you know? It's, it really does, uh, bring a full circle to everything. Yes.

Norie Guthrie: Do you mind telling me specific stories about any of the musicians?

Sharon Mathews: Well, everyone accepted me like a little sister, and I was grateful for that because I truly, um, I, uh, my sister Lynn, who's 13 years older than me and my sister Elaine, who was 11 years older than me, they really, um, they were so into the music. Lynn knew every lyric to Eric's Taylor's stuff and Vince Bell. I mean, and then the whole choir would sing to Bill Staines, and Roger Ruffcorn was working at KPFT so, you know, he would have some of the musicians go down there and then whole bunch a crowd o' people would go into, so we could sing along. It was, it was magical. And everybody fed, felt the magic. It just wasn't one person. It was everybody. Everybody was included. And back then, you know, you had a crowd. I mean, you could get a ton o' people out. Everybody was so willing to be a part. It was beautiful.

Norie Guthrie: Um, maybe we could focus on some specific people. So, um, you were talking about, um, Don Sanders. What were some of your interactions with him?

Sharon Mathews: Don Sanders was, um, a very gentle, sweet man with just incredible songwriting lyrics that will, would grab you. Um, he was generous with his love, sweet love, you know? And just, um, and uh, kind, and later on in life, he came and played, uh, my venue at the Oaks in, in, um, Austin for me. He went to teach and, you know, so, we, with mostly all of the people, we kept a relationship over the years. And it's a long time, you know, relationships. Richard Dobson, you know? I really got to learn how to play guitar, learnin' Richard Dobson's songs. Bill Cade helped me find my guitar. I mean, Linda Lowe and Tim Leatherwood sat there and taught me how to play guitar. Had, taught me on one of Linda's songs and we'd play it over and over and over and it was just, um, indebted to her for life. Candle in the Sky, yes.

Norie Guthrie: When did you pick up the guitar?

Sharon Mathews: In 1978.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Sharon Mathews: And so we would start picking parties, 'cause I lived right across the street from Houlihan's. And, um, you know, then, then I started dating and I got married to Rex in that house and we still just had a room but everybody came in and a-, a large room downstairs in the house that everybody would come, and we'd have, uh, picking parties. And, um, you know,

because the party never ended. When you're that young, I mean, you don't get tired at 2:00, you know? You wanted to go on forever. And it seemed like those parties never ended. Uh, yes.

Norie Guthrie: Um, who were some people that would come over for those?

Sharon Mathews: A lotta people. A lotta people. Um, uh, let's see, uh, Steve Baker and Walter Spinks and Franci Files Jarrard and Bill Cade and Richard Dobson and Mickey White and Rex and, um, let's see, um, Johnny Guess. When we moved out, when Rex and I moved out to other houses, we had other people that would come, Townes Van Zandt, every time that he came into town, you know? Um, uh, and he had his entourage and, and, um, let me see. Uh, I can't think of any, Nanci, you know? It was, few, uh, she didn't come to the Westheimer house, no. She didn't. She was the ones that, she played, um, Houlihan's a lot. Her and Eric. And, uh, you know? But didn't come over to the pickin' parties at the.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. Um, are there any experiences from being at Anderson Fair that really stand out to you?

Sharon Mathews: There's so many, because, you know, I had the golden ticket. And so, I could, we had meals and, and love and shared, shared, um, birthdays, which I'm the birthday queen. I love birthdays and I still call. I still call and I, now I sing Rex's song, you know? You're a grand ol' man, you're a high-flyin' bag, and your spare tires added, spare, run-dun-dun. Overweight, you're underrate, you're living in total despair! But it's your birthday and we decided to say, that we love you anyway! May old acquaintance wish you well, to Norie on your birthday! Not your birthday, but.

Norie Guthrie: That's okay. Um, there was something that you said in there, um, oh food. Did you work on preparing the food, the spaghetti?

Sharon Mathews: Oh, yes! Yes. Taxi Tom gave me a thousand dollars. It seemed like that was so much money and so, Kathy Slane and I got to be the spaghetti mamas with our thousand dollars that we put down. It goes fast, but I didn't realize that. I thought it would last forever. But it doesn't, you know? But that was the joy of, you know, uh, being at the spaghetti lunches, is because Reb Smith and, and Malcolm Smith and, um, you know, uh, people would come down there and play and it was phenomenal. Yes, and it, um, Connie Mims and lots of people would come down and, and play the lunches and, you know? And more fresh spaghetti!

Norie Guthrie: Do you re-, I, I've been wondering, do, do you remember the recipe?

Sharon Mathews: Franci does.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Sharon Mathews: Franci has the recipe down. But I, you know? It was a vegetarian, uh, recipe with fennel in there ands, and, uh, squash and then, you know, the meat-based one. And so, it was nice that you had a choice because you had vegetarians.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. Then I will, I will see if I can try to –

Sharon Mathews: Ask –

Norie Guthrie: – get –

Sharon Mathews: – Francie. And I –

Norie Guthrie: Yes.

Sharon Mathews: – eh, matter of fact, I know that I can get you the recipe.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. 'Cause that would be a really awesome thing to be –

Sharon Mathews: Yes!

Norie Guthrie: – able to –

Sharon Mathews: Yes!

Norie Guthrie: – to have –

Sharon Mathews: Yes!

Norie Guthrie: – archivally, because it is such an important aspect –

Sharon Mathews: Yes, it is. And you –

Norie Guthrie: – of Anderson Fair –

Sharon Mathews: – yes! Yes.

Norie Guthrie: – in the '70s. Yeah.

Sharon Mathews: We all make spaghetti a thousand different ways now because I have a garden and it's whatever comes out of that garden goes in.

Norie Guthrie: Um, can you, um, describe the interior of Anderson Fair when you arrived there?

Sharon Mathews: Well, when I arrived there, it wasn't like anything now, you know? It was that one room and the people played up in the, eh, up in the front of it. And there were tables, you know? But, and then they had the kitchen. They, eh, you know, it was, it was small and, you

know? They had the other room but, um, it was, it wh, they expanded it out and, and, you know, put in the bar and everything and, and they didn't have that at the time. And I have lots of pictures of that. I brought in the trunk load of pictures so you can see.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: And they will be in the archives, those pictures.

Norie Guthrie: Great. Um, around, so, this was when you first visited in the early '70s compared to the –

Sharon Mathews: '78 was –

Norie Guthrie: '78.

Sharon Mathews: – for me. My sisters were earlier –

Norie Guthrie: Right. Earlier.

Sharon Mathews: – yes.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. So in '78 they were still just using the, kind of the small long room.

Sharon Mathews: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. All right. No, that's, that's good to know. Um, 'cause there wasn't yet the stage or was there a stage kind of built in there?

Sharon Mathews: You know, I can't remember. I'm tryin' to think if the stage was – I can't remember. I'm trying to think if the stage was, I can't remember.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Sharon Mathews: Right now.

Norie Guthrie: That's okay.

Sharon Mathews: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: All right. Um, can you talk ab – you, also worked at Houlihan's.

Sharon Mathews: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: No. 2.

Sharon Mathews: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: Um, can you talk about that venue?

Sharon Mathews: Well, John Toomey owned the place and Pam ran it for him and, uh, they loved music. They absolutely adored music. And they, uh, let whoever manage it, run it and, you know, all these phenomenal musicians would come in, you know? And all different styles and served hamburgers and that's where I met, uh, I met, um, Andre and Andre met me, is, I was workin' behind the, um, the counter and he saw me and I had pigtails –

Norie Guthrie: Mm.

Sharon Mathews: – you know? And, and, um, runnin' the show. You've got a hamburger and you wanna beer, okay! Everybody just hold on, we're gonna get it you, you know? Just, and he liked my energy. And so, that's when he really, you know, said that, that was the start of our relationship, you know? Because he saw me back there, but it took him 7 years to get, you know, because I married Rex. You know? And, and that was a wonderful, wonderful relationship, too, you know? And you know we're still good friends and wonderful friends.

Norie Guthrie: Um, were there other venues that you went to in that, during that time period?

Sharon Mathews: I mainly, uh, hung out with the both, Anderson Fair and, uh, Houlihan's. But if, uh, Bill Cade and Steven were playing Theodore's, I would go there. Shake Russell over at Corky's, I would go there. I worked at Fitzgerald's with Sara Fitzgerald and, and, and we, you know, we got to dance all night long. And I loved the music that she –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: – she brought in there, too. It was phenomenal. And, um, and there was another place, uh, La Bodega, you know? We would go over there and, um, ss, and, you know what? Mm, a lot of the people did the same places. And I'm, and I was part of the crowd so I followed 'em, you know? And I was the fan.

Norie Guthrie: Can you talk about La Bodega? Like, can you remember like, what did it look like?

Sharon Mathews: Oh, God. All right. Um, it was a downstairs and upstairs and the downstairs was the stage, okay? And, um, the bar, the big long bar and I know Tom Cranston worked there at serving food. And, um, during the 70s, '78, in there. And, uh, it was comfortable. Everybody was comfortable. That's the, you know, it was just a real nice place to go to play, to hear music, get something good to eat, and, you know, and head out after that.

Norie Guthrie: All right. Um, and you said that you also worked, um, spent some time working at Fitzgerald's?

Sharon Mathews: Fitzgerald's and Corky's, yes. And, um, I, uh, I absolutely love the places. I love Fitzgerald's because I love the dance floor and I love Dr. Rockit, you know? Herschel

Berry, I mean, I'm ss, fans, Sean Walters, I'm a huge fan. I could dance all night long. Uh, you know? And they, they had phenomenal acts in there and, and, um, and, uh, you know, with drinks and they hardly have any tables, so you gotta dance, you know? And it was fun. It was just a lot of fun.

Norie Guthrie: What was Fitzgerald's like on the inside?

Sharon Mathews: Um, downstairs there were pool tables and a bar and, you know, people would mingle down there if the upstairs was closed, you know, if, or it wasn't a show happening, you go downstairs and I would play pool and, you know, have 75 drinks. I'm just joking. But I would have drinks down there. And, you know, uh, uh, the Friday, the, ss, you know, Friday, Saturday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, you know, upstairs was happening. The Ooze Brothers, they would come in and do their thing too with the, you know, acts and tho, those guys were so much fun. Everybody was being, um, creative.

Norie Guthrie: Was the, um, the upstairs, um, so mm, most of that was a dance floor or just –

Sharon Mathews: Yes –

Norie Guthrie: – a few tables?

Sharon Mathews: – a, a bar, a little bar, little, couple few, few tables and then the big gigantic stage and, you know, they had ch, some chairs, some tables and, and, in there too. But I loved the dance floor.

Norie Guthrie: Did you, uh, so the, the interior that was that kind of similar in size to Rockefeller's? The same kind of amount of people would go?

Sharon Mathews: Similar. Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Sharon Mathews: Rockefeller's was nicer. I worked at Rockefeller's too. I, I did! Well, you know what? Why not?

Norie Guthrie: Yeah!

Sharon Mathews: Why not? I got tired of one and moved onto the other. I was young, I could do anything. I was invincible. You know, I still think I'm invincible at 59. I'm still, you know, it's, it's a little bit slower, but you know, still goin'! Yeah. And, um, uh, Rockefeller's was, uh, you know, like, people would come in there, ZZ Top and, you know, you know, Kingston Trio. I mean, you know, it was amazing, the music. Uh, all the places, they were, it was really amazing. Loved the blues at, um, at Fitzgerald's but, and, uh, you know, Fitzgerald's was more, um, relaxed and it, um, uh, Rockefeller's was a little nicer, cost a little bit more but, you know, being upstairs and sitting at one of the tables and watching the act down there, you felt like the Royals.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, okay. So there was seating up above –

Sharon Mathews: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: – and then there's the stage. I've been told that there was a, the green room was kind of, uh, the bank vault, so you, that was right kind of behind –

Sharon Mathews: Behind the stage.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Sharon Mathews: Yes, yes.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Sharon Mathews: It was beautiful! Beautiful and, and one of my friends, Deborah Bowers' daughter, had her wedding there and it was amazing. It was gorgeous.

Norie Guthrie: And then you, you also mentioned working for Corky's.

Sharon Mathews: Yes. Yes.

Norie Guthrie: Um, could you talk a little bit more about that?

Sharon Mathews: Um, uh, you know what? I had fun with, uh, my girlfriends, Kathy Slane's sister, Pat Slane, worked with me there and we worked the same shifts. It was, you know, it was a short time but, you know, uh, Dana Cooper and, and, um, and John Vandiver and, and Shake Russell and, you know, spectacular acts and, you know, we had free drinks there a lot. So, and, 'cause we were young and cute –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: – you know? And you, and you want young and cute. It attracts mm, anybody, right? And, um, and, uh, so, uh, we, we, uh, smaller, way smaller venue but intimate, intimate. It's like, eh, people were quiet there and respectful and listened like, Anderson Fair. You cannot talk. And I've gotten in trouble in there because I'm [motions talking with her hand] to, you know? Or takin' pictures, you know? I love takin' pictures and no takin' pictures. Yes.

Norie Guthrie: I've, I, I was told by one person that, um, they were, they were known for their piña coladas. They were –

Sharon Mathews: Yeah, oh –

Norie Guthrie: – making a lot of frozen –

Sharon Mathews: – oh, I –

Norie Guthrie: – drinks?

Sharon Mathews: – loved them. Oh my God, I love piña coladas. I mean, I even had piña coladas in my trunk of my car set up. I would just stop and get ice and just, you know, for the after party or the beginning party or just in case anybody wanted a piña colada –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: – I had it.

Norie Guthrie: Um, if you're kinda thinking about all those different venues, ones that you worked at or ones that you had went to, um, what would you say was your favorite?

Sharon Mathews: Of course, Anderson Fair. Anderson Fair. That was my home. That's where I grew up. That's where I really got an education. People were so generous and kind to me because of my sisters, you know? That they worked the, uh, spaghetti lunches. My brother baked bread at the spaghetti lunches, you know? That was, Tim always made me feel comfortable. And I dated Roger Ruffcorn for a while and, um, you know, while he was running it and, um, we had all of our funerals there, you know? And so, we well, you know, good and bad times, we'd go in the back rooms and, you know, a lot was said and a lot were, a lot of our future was planned in the back rooms. I remember at Roger Ruffcorn's funeral, I was sittin' in the back with Dale Sofar, and I, I was really good friends with Dale Sofar because of Rex. And, um, and, uh, Dale said to me, he goes, "Sharon, listen. This is what we gotta do. Um, when we get old, we need a community so we could all have a big community room, then we could have the music, we could have artwork goin' on, we'll have a woodshop that, you know, Doug Duryea and Jack Farrell and all those guys can build. We all got rooms and a huge kitchen so we can make spaghetti and eat." So, and, it wound up that I did that. You know, I did that in my community, um, and in, in Elgin, so, you know? Very lucky, but it was Dale's idea that really made me think, "You know what, Dale? You're so right. You're so right, you know?" And Dale was, uh, a great friend. A really great friend and we did many, many wonderful things together.

Norie Guthrie: Can we go back to Roger –

Sharon Mathews: Sure.

Norie Guthrie: – Ruffcorn?

Sharon Mathews: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: Can you talk a little bit more about them? He, he's mentioned, many people have mentioned him and mentioned the name. He was on the radio, but I haven't had any like, really good stories about him.

Sharon Mathews: Oh, he was the salt of the earth. He was kind. He was generous. Smoked cigarettes and loved readin' the paper in the morning, you know? He was, he loved music. He

loved musicians. He loved, to, just tryin' to set up, you know, you, maybe you could play here, play at Houlihan's, you know, get on KPFT. He would always try to think, you know? "Let me give you a couple days so I can fill it in and make it worth your wild." He was always generous to everybody. He always had a smile and at Anderson Fair, you could bring in your dog and, you know? Dogs in there and, I can't think of his dog's name right now but, um, he always had it. It was a Doberman Pincer, you know? Which scared me a little bit, you know? Um, and he had a beautiful son and, uh, he was, he, we stayed strong in our relationship all the way to 'til the day he died, you know? With everybody, if years go by but, our relationship from our foundation from Anderson Fair, you know, really set the tone, you know? I still talk to a lot of the people. Like, Andre's 70th birthday's comin' up. Lot of the people are coming, you know? A lot of the, the old friends, and I appreciate it because half of my friends are on the other side. There's a great darn band and folk music and songwritin' and food on the other side. Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: And then, can you talk a little bit about Dale?

Sharon Mathews: Um, uh, Dale was a wonderful man. He had wonderful women and he always had parties and he had a hot tub and, you know? He would, he would, um, he would be gracious to invite people over with cocktails and, you know? And, and, um, and he would make all the gigs too. He would make a lot of the gigs that were important. He was always there for Rex. He really, he cared deeply for Rex. And so, um, we would have that bond where he'd come to us at our house and, um, so, you know, he and his entourage, who with, whoever that was, we would, it would always be a good time. We were not gonna sit around and do nothing, you know? We always had something to do.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so, how long did you end up staying in Houston? Up until the 80s?

Sharon Mathews: Uh, yes, up until the 80s. Um, I worked at, um, at the, uh, Houston, oh, I can't think of the name now. Uh, where the Houston Rockets have the tunnel over in the country club. I worked at the country club, and I can't think of the name right now, but, uh, you know, uh, in '85 I got pregnant, and, uh, so I stayed with the same company, and moved to the Austin Great country club.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: And moved up there, and then, too, got pregnant with Andre's and my first child, my pride and joy, Ray Andre Mathews, and, uh, raised him in Austin for only until he's 2-and-a-half 'cause Andre got a position at UCLA, so then we went out to California after that. Started our mu, mu, well, really my musical career out in, in, in California.

Norie Guthrie: Okay, and what, what year was that around?

Sharon Mathews: That was, um, uh, like '89 we moved to California.

Norie Guthrie: '89, okay.

Sharon Mathews: Yes, and then when my son joined in kindergarten of course, you know, get on the team so PTA, okay, uh, treasurer, uh executive, you know, uh, I, I, I got on the board and, and, uh, you know, they asked, they were havin' carnivals and asked me to, uh, play, and I was just like, "Well, I only play in the closet. I'm really good in the closet." And they said, "Oh, it's okay. You'll just play to some kids." And by the time I got home, the next day they said, "We're building you a stage; renting you a P, PA. How many people are in your band?" and I was like, uh oh, my God, so I got on the horn, and I just said, "Andre get who you can from UCLA, and I'm gonna go down to the end of the block and see if Annie Wardlow will be our, uh, blues singer." And, and we played that one thing, and it ended up for years. From one gig, people would say, "Please, can you play my anniversary party?" "Please, can you play this joint?" Every time we played people would come up and say, "You're too much fun. Woo! Can you play at our party?" And so I never had to look. It was just, was just handed.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: It was just a blessing.

Norie Guthrie: And that was, was that primarily during your time in Los Angeles?

Sharon Mathews: Yes. We –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: – played all over California, and we played in, you know, um, uh, all Hollywood and herm, uh, uh, huh, uh, all right, Huntington, Long Beach, Seal Beach, Hermosa Beach, um Laguna Niguel. We played in, um, um, going the other way, come on, um, uh –

Norie Guthrie: San Diego?

Sharon Mathews: Yeah, nuh, uh, right, Santa Monica.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: All up and down there. We played in Torrance all the time, and one gig le-, went to another.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: Hmm.

Sharon Mathews: It was amazing.

Norie Guthrie: Did you, um, did you guys do cover songs or write your own material or both, or?

Sharon Mathews: Well, I only did Richard Dobson and Lucinda songs.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Sharon Mathews: That's it. That was like, that was, and then I wrote my own –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: – starting in 2003. I started writing my own and with a partner, Jocelyn Callard, and we started another band 'cause it wasn't the Roadkill Band. It was, uh, Sharon and Joce, then we went into, um, we went into Bandera Highway and then we had this bass player that was symphony bass player, and he played on the cruise ships. He could walk in and play anything, and he was married to us because we had beautiful women following us. He was like, "I'll sit wi, I'll do it for free." Eric Burke, and he would fly to Texas with us 'cause we would come back every year to go to the Spring Fling or a party, and, you know, we, and then we started bringin' the entourage with us, ye, Rick Dinsmore, and, wu, uh, Rick Dinsmore, uh, loved Andre. Yeah, absolutely adored Andre; loved his guitar playing. He would come and when we were playing with Bandera Highway, and just sit there on the, uh, on the, uh, speaker and just watch Andre. All of a sudden, one day he noticed Jocelyn, and I swear to God, while we were playing, I noticed him go, "Oh," and walk over, and he never left. He sat there, he fell in love. They're married now. I mean, fell in love and actually they moved, they moved to Texas 2 weeks after we did. We sold our house and then they came here, and we had the time of our life. Jocelyn and I were so, we, I taught her how to play guitar. I mean, but we were so, we were on a writing roll, and when we wouldn't, I would, uh, I would like, um, get gigs, and we'd play at Anderson Fair. We'd do, go to, um, to Galveston and play, uh, the Old Quarter and then we'd, uh, and it was in, if we would, we, it was so, and we would go and play, uh, Franci's Party in, in Austin –

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Sharon Mathews: – so like one of the trips, and this was before Rick, but, um, but, uh, we wrote six songs on the road writing, you know, just writing, writing, writing. And they, a lot of the songs were about her boyfriend then, Alan Stuart, and then she was so in love with him, and he passed on, too, and, but wu-, we have 10, 12, maybe 14 songs about him, and they're all fun, good, loving songs. They're great songs, and you'll see 'em on some of those CDs I, I –

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Sharon Mathews: – had sent you, yes.

Norie Guthrie: Okay, great.

Sharon Mathews: Yep.

Norie Guthrie: Um, we didn't end up, oh, 'cause I wasn't sure exactly when California happened, so if we go –

Sharon Mathews: 1989.

Norie Guthrie: 1989. So if we go back, um, you, you're, you're one of the first wives, that I've interviewed –

Sharon Mathews: Uh huh.

Norie Guthrie: – and like where you were, you know, you were kind of on the, you were part of it, but kind of on the outside looking in and so when you were with Rex Bell, what, what was that like? Kind of like being over –

Sharon Mathews: What –

Norie Guthrie: – here and kind of watching everything.

Sharon Mathews: Well, I am a motivator, and so I would get people to come to the gigs because –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: – at that time you'd have to either call or send out flyers, you know, and so I was the one saying, "Hey, you have to come, come on, come on. You can get in the car with us, come on, come on," you know, and so I would get people there, and Rex loved that about me. He was, you know, I, and so does Andre because, uh, Andre does, ne-, needed me for that part, too, both of them, and, um, and, uh, I would get dancers on the floor, and, and, and meet all the strangers, and then those strangers, I love you –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: – become part of it, part of the show. We're all part of the show. With Rex it was so funny, you know. Rex, when he did the, just Mickey and Rex show, you know, we had, he had Pup, and I had Jessie, two dogs, and then we had a duck, and he would put the duck on me, yeah, and do a whole comedy routine with the duck, and, you know, and, uh, the dogs, too. The dogs would play the part. Everybody was trained even me. "Pass the tip jar now," you know, I mean, and everybody loved the act. It was funny, hysterical, really funny, and, uh, so I was, uh, a, uh, a help with ha, gettin' people there.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Sharon Mathews: And making the crowd enjoy the, the act.

Norie Guthrie: Did you work on the mailers?

Sharon Mathews: Of course.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Sharon Mathews: I, you know, I helped.

Norie Guthrie: Can you talk about that process?

Sharon Mathews: Well, the boys would do all the writing, and, you know, Rex used to always hold the little, um, you know, a pa-, uh, a pad and write down jokes, and he would, he would work them out with Bruce Henry Davis. He would send jokes back and forth because Bruce with the Ooze Brothers was using jokes, too, and, um, and they liked playing off each other, and Bruce, wou-, used to drive to anywhere, you know, and it didn't matter where it was. He would get a convertible and come on in with his glasses. He was real cool, you know, and, and, uh, a great supporter, yes.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so you, uh, the, I didn't catch the year that you ended up leaving Houston for Austin before California.

Sharon Mathews: Houston to Austin – that was about eighty, '85, '86, yes, yes. We'd come back a whole lot. Andre, Andre, um, when we got to Austin, you know, he was supposed to play a gig with Sean Walters when we first got there, right, this big, big, gigantic party out in the middle of the cows. There was, I mean, you drove to, it was, it was, you know, in, um, in Bastrop, but it just seemed like there was nothing there, and, uh, you know, we, Sean got a bigger paying gig in Houston, and so he called Andre and said, "Listen, I'm not gonna make that gig, buddy. You know, go to the party anyway. Lemme call the people and tell 'em, you know, you should go to the party and meet these people. You just moved to Austin, right?" And I was pregnant. I was so pregnant with my son, Ray, and, but we said "Yeah." They called us Bright and Sherri, uh, called us and said, "Yes, please come," so we drove all the way out there, and, uh, we're walkin' in with a crock pot full of spaghetti, and, um, and uh, and, uh, you know, we're walkin' in, and Andre's holdin' the crock pot, and all of a sudden he sees this guy, and he goes, "Oh, my God, oh, my God," and he puts down the crock pot, and I'm lookin', and I'm seein', he goes "Charlie Higgason?" It was a guy that he started a band with when he was 16 years old in Kansas, the first band he's ever been in, and, you know, Charlie goes, "What are you doin' here in the middle of, you know, uh, the cows?" And, um, and Andre said, "Well, my band cancelled." And he goes, "I'm on next." He goes, "I'll go talk to my band leader. Your chop's still up?" And Andre said, "Holy shit, ah, yeah," and so he played Donnie Green's band. It was second time around. Donnie Green said, "Okay, Charlie, you know, you're the lead guitar player. You wanna give him half of your licks?" And they were so opposite, you know. Andre never plays the same thing twice. Charlie played it to the T off the record, you know. He was like the one note for note, you know, and Andre was like, you know, it's like he played brilliantly all around it, all around, and then they would both get off playin' to each other, same with, same with, um, with Mickey and Andre. Those two would play. They'd get off to playin', you know. They'd throw each other licks ba, I mean, you know, "You take it," and then, "You take it." They'd go back and forth, and it was brilliant. It was absolutely brilliant. You'd never hear a bad note. That's the amazing thing because it was like, you know, I listen to other guitar players, and I'm like, oh, boy. You know, you can hear the bad note. You never hear the wrong note. It was, he was brilliant, both of 'em, all of 'em.

Norie Guthrie: Uh, um, leaning in that period of '85, '86, um, during that – so from '78 to '85, '86, did you see a change in the Houston folk scene?

Sharon Mathews: People would pass on. New people would come on. You know, that's the way the, the game works and you leave a legacy, you know, with, uh, with what you wrote and, you know, and, and if you were a big performer, if somebody played your music, that was the biggest honor that you could get. Of course, there was just a constant flow of new music, as it should be. And now, you know, look at all the bands that are out there. You, I can't keep up. Uh, I can't. It's too much. I ca, I don't have enough money to go to those places. I don't have enough of time. I'd need 17 drivers to get to all those places. There's, there's just, it, it's, it was a magical time because it was so small and so, you know, um, unique with, you know, John Carrick, you know, all those, the, the Ringer Band, Mike Edwards and all the Andy King bands. He played Lightnin' Hopkins as Rex did too. Billy Joe Shaver, you know. And he played with Lucinda too. You know, I mean, all those people, they seem to, you know, one fades out, another comes in. It was always, uh, a good player.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. If, you guys ended up leaving in that '85, '86 period which is about the time that the scene started to, the scene that, you know, all this homegrown talent kinda started to shrink up.

Sharon Mathews: Gettin' smaller and smaller, yes.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Sharon Mathews: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: And so I, I've always been tryin', I, I've been thinking about, like, what were the things that were causing that? Could it have, have been like people, you, you know, you had, um, you guys had gotten married. Um –

Sharon Mathews: That's what, uh, married and kids.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Sharon Mathews: Married and kids. And that's, that changes a lot of the things. You have to have a babysitter. You know, and that was the thing with, with us playing in California is I had a babysitter for my children until they were 16. One time I had a gig and I, I had – I like gigs that are constant. Every 2 weeks, you know, and I love being the happy hour gig. Playing right before whoever wants to go on next. "Lemme warm you up. Okay? All right. Look, we're gonna have a good time here. We're havin' a couple drinks. Let's get warmed up and we're gonna, well, you know, get ready." And so, um, with, with my children, they knew 6 to 8, mom was down the road. I mean, one time Andre forgot his guitar and I came back. There was 75 children at my house. And children on the roof of the house.

Norie Guthrie: Uh huh.

Sharon Mathews: And I had to say "Hey, hey, hey. Everybody outta here. No way. Come back at 8 when we're done and everybody can get in the pool." You know? But raisin' children where, you know, just changed the, the – you have to pay the mortgage note. I'm playing music. The only one, Richard Dobson was into, okay, those guys. They made it, you know, Lyle, to pay the mortgage note. Andre, you know, uh, had to work a job. I, we worked jobs and music was a hobby. Even that we did it all weekend long –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: – you know, it still didn't pay \$1,700.00 a month for just the mortgage note. You know? And, and everything else comes, you know, on top of that.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Sharon Mathews: You needed a big check.

Norie Guthrie: What were some of the jobs you had out in LA?

Sharon Mathews: I had my own cleaning business and I hired all my own, my girlfriends. And, um, we had, either took the children or wait, uh, you know, or we were in a mother's group. So, you know, we, you know, worked off babysitting times. We would go back and forth. And they would babysit for me when we played at night.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Sharon Mathews: And that was a long night. I mean, for a \$100.00, you don't know how hard you worked for \$100.00 for the four sets and you have to go and drive an hour out there, set up the PA, I mean, you know. And then get everybody else who were walkin' in with one little thing. Here we go and they walk out, you know. Takin' home the PA. And then puttin' the PA in the garage. You know, you don't get home 'til 4 in the morning. You know, and then the kids get up at 6. I mean, you had to, you had to be tough. I didn't think I'd ever make it but I did. It's amazing.

Norie Guthrie: So you had, it was hard kinda balancing that.

Sharon Mathews: You had to be a jack of all trades. Yes. And, you know, that's why mothers are, can multitask. And, you know, and gettin' your husband to work. I had to get up at 4 in the morning just to say, "Come on, baby, you gotta go, you gotta go, you gotta go. Here's your coffee. Here's your, uh, lunch. Get out the door." You know? I mean, seriously, if I didn't do that, we wouldn't be sittin' where we're sittin'.

Norie Guthrie: So why did you guys end up moving back to Texas and then going to, um, Elgin?

Sharon Mathews: Well, um, Andre, you know, we used to write songs about this. We were only supposed to be there 1 year, and then UCLA offered Andre a, a godly amount of money that, you

know, we said, "Yeah, I can't refuse that." So, you know, that's why we started bands out there. And everybody from Texas used to fly out. We had concerts for Richard Dobson at my house, you know. We hung out with Lucinda in California. Doug Lacey, you know. We did that whole thing. We, we were, you know. Went to, we, the music venues that had rock and roll and folk. You know, they had 'em all. And we, we, uh, definitely were a part of supporting our friends. Supporting them. And then we would come to Houston. I mean, to Houston and Austin. And Galveston. We'd do all three with the trips. Least, at least two times a year. Sometimes three; sometimes four, you know. It's, it was depending if Andre was playing with Sean Walters, uh, you know, or w, uh, Hemmer Ridge Mountain Boys or anything like that, or if any of our friends had a gig. We had enough money that we could do it. And that was the thing. If, you know, even if it was a little gig, you know, they were making \$100.00. Cost us thousands to get there, but you know what? So what. It was so worth it. We were a No. 1 fans. Yay. And that was important.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: That was really important.

Norie Guthrie: When you were in California, this was the time that, um, were you also there for the time when Lucinda started to –

Sharon Mathews: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: – make the, kind of her rise?

Sharon Mathews: Yeah, Lucinda and Clyde, yes, yes, yes. Yes, I remember one gig; it was in Hollywood. And, um, and I just brought old pictures, you know, and, you know? 'Cause we go back.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: Lucinda and I go back to when she was really having, you, in the beginning days of the ride. A, E, and D, you know, and strumming, st, staying in time and everything. It was cute.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: And, um, you know, and she just had a talent. She had, she was so – she was gonna be a star. She was gonna be a star; you could feel it. She, she, um, she just had it. And, um, you know, when we were in Hollywood and, and, uh, it was after the show and, and everything, and, uh, she had, the place was packed. And she was looking at the picture, and she said, "Hey, everybody. Just be quiet for a sec." She goes, "I want you to know that this girl knows me longer than any of you in this whole room," you know? We, you know, you've lived the life. And experiencing those new beginnings are a powerful thing. And I'm glad that she remembers, you know? Because I sure do. And, you know, these are stories from my side of the s, of, of the plane, but, you know, I'm glad that, you know, people still do remember. You know?

And I'm, I'm very proud of you that you're doing this for the folk m, music, for the scene in the '70s and '80s. And thank you for doing that.

Norie Guthrie: It's a lot of fun.

Sharon Mathews: Yes, yes.

Norie Guthrie: It's a lot.

Sharon Mathews: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so, um, okay. You kind of, you've mentioned it before, you have this kind of community center. In a sense, there's a whole group of you that now live together –

Sharon Mathews: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: – in Elgin.

Sharon Mathews: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: And, um, can you talk about that?

Sharon Mathews: W, well, we're all, uh, you know, most of 'em musicians. And, um, you know, uh, Lyse and Franci bought the land, um, many years ago. And they keep on telling me, I can't remember dates as well as those two. They, those two are phenomenal. They're, they remember everything. Um, and I always wanted Lyse's land. Always wanted that piece of property. And I loved Franci, and I would come into Franci's house, and Franci and Steven always rolled out the red carpet, you know? As we did for everybody who came to California, too, for our 1-year stay. And, um, t, turned into 18 years, that one. And, um, you know, um, the, a property came, uh, for sale across the street, and Lyse wanted that 15 acres. She's, 'cause she had horses. And she, she really wanted that acreage. And she had 68 acres out in Nashville still, too. But she wanted that property, to be near Franci, and to be near Tom Cranston. Tom Cranston and Donna McNees bought the property next door. And so, you know, we watched Tom build his house. We're still watching Tom build his house, but it's still, you know, it's a process. It's a process, is all. It's all good. Um, but, uh, we, uh, she called me, and I was out in California, and Lyse said, "Do you want that land?" And I said, "Yes. Yes." So I properly, formally asked Stephen and Tom would they mind me living next door, because, you know, I, I'm a force to be reckoned with. And I cook. I have cocktails. So, so, of course Stephen – 'cause, uh, Stephen loves me; Tom loves me – he said, "Yes, we'd love it." But Andre said, "Hell, no. I don't want that." He goes, "You buy it with your money." I said, "Okay. You die. I'm gonna have the land here. I know where I'm going." And so out of my business, I bought the land. And I made a couple payments. And Andre says, "You really want that. Okay, all right. You want that? Anything you want. Okay." So we took out a, a bunch of money and just paid off the land, and he, he said, "Okay." And Deborah, Deborah Bower came to California and Andre, she got a new Lexus off of her, her, one of her relatives. And so, um, we're looking at the Lexus out in the, in the driveway, and it's, like, spectacular, and Andre pulls up in his Nissan Altima and climbs out of the car and gets out and

he stretches his back and he goes, "God, that job's killing me." And so I said, "Go jump in the pool. Go jump in the pool. We'll, we'll have a cocktail in a minute, you know. We'll be inside." And so he walks in and Deborah turns to me and she says, she says, "Did you hear what he said?" "What?" And he go, she said, "He said that job's killing him. He could retire now, can't he?" I said, "Yeah, but I like my job, and I'm, I'm really booming now. I'm, we're doing so well, and I'm almost on the Ellen DeGeneres show and I got a great band, and, you know, what about me?" And she goes, "Do you love him?" I said, "Of course I love him." He go, she says, "Sharon, let him retire." So I walked in the house and I said, "Andre, you can retire." He went, "What?" I said, "Today. Tell them tomorrow. You can retire. We'll go back to Texas and we'll build this house. Swear to God, this is the God-honest truth." I never lie about anything. Stretch the truth, but, you know, not lie. But anyhow, so, 2 weeks, he told me. He says, "I'm here for 2 weeks, and then I'm retire me. Retiring." It took 2 months for me to sell my house. He went into UCLA and designed this B-52 bomber house. And off of CAD drawings and their things. And he had fun playing with it. In 2 weeks, did this. And then it was just, it was meant to be, because everything that I wanted happened immediately. I would say, "Oh, you know, once, once" – my house and Jocelyn's house were the last houses to sell in the booming market. So I went ho, home to Texas with my son Clinton and Andre and the dog, Leo. And started clearing the land. My son's not with us anymore, but his twin brother helped us frame the house. You know, helped us build the house. Franci and Andre, when we first got there Franci called me, and she says, "You know, you have a bulldozer here bulldozing your road." She goes, "You better hurry up and get here." I said, "Okay." We, we made it real fast, and took us 9 months to clear the land. Took us 14 months to build the house. To move in. And, amazing amount of time, you know. Nobody builds a mansion in the sky that la, in 14 months, and we did it. And it – actually it was 14 months in total. In total time. And I invite you to come to my mansion in the sky. I'll cook you dinner.

Norie Guthrie: So, um, since you're kind of in retirement phase now, sort of, sort of –

Sharon Mathews: Sort of.

Norie Guthrie: Sort of.

Sharon Mathews: Sort of.

Norie Guthrie: Um, what are you doing now, and what are your upcoming plans?

Sharon Mathews: Actually, I'm having a blast. I'm having a blast waitressing. I'm having so much fun. I do it whenever I want. Whenever I want at an Italian restaurant. So I get to talk to everybody, you know –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sharon Mathews: – you know, in my Italian, New York, you know, kind of thing. I have so much fun. And I get to do it whenever I want. And it's something different. Musically I am not writing right now. I've kind of took a back stage to where I was being the audience for my husband. And, you know, all my friends, you know, they're wondering when I'll come out of the

closet again. You never know. I, I'll play parties and stuff like that, and I'll have pickin' parties at my house. But I, I, it's, it's a lot of work. Eight hours, 10 hours. And all that work putting into playing a gig that you – I played for 7 years every other Friday. S, five-, six-piece band for \$60.00. So we did that for \$10.00 apiece. I mean, you know, it's a lot of wor, it's a labor of love. It's a hobby. You know, we had tons of people. We made the pl, cu, the place lots of money. And, you know, which I went there Tuesday night and spent \$100.00 on just buying people drinks. But, you know, it's, it's a lot of, it's different. I'd rather sit in for one and, or two songs than have to book the gig and tell everybody, "Come on down, come on down, come on down." It's a lot of work. It's hard work. I, uh, am good at it, but, uh, I'd rather be making, you know, everybody have a good time in the bar, and clap to, for the songs, and, you know, be appreciative of whoever is playing. There's lot of great new musicians. And since I am in retirement, I can enjoy it this way. It's not a stress. It's not pressure. And, you know it, whenever I say, "Party," people come. People come and everybody brings a dish, and we sit there and play and play. And you hear amazing music. And you should come to Andre's 70th. It's Thursday – I just – Thursday, July 19th, at, at 12:00.

Norie Guthrie: Oh.

Sharon Mathews: We're, uh, filming. We're having a filming crew come in for one of Andre's songs; for one of the Patrons' songs. And I'm choreographing the 75 people to, to sing and dance, and we're gonna, I'm gonna have them ho, lock arms, and brothers and sisters, you know, "We are together and we're gonna heal the world." It's gonna be am, you will see the video when it's done. It's gonna be amazing. Andre's a little scared because, you know, he's like, "You're not, you're, you're not in the band but you're taking over the video shots," but I'm good at this, you know? I can make everybody turn, dance, you know, on timing, you know?

Norie Guthrie: And do you feel like there's anything that we should cover that we haven't?

Sharon Mathews: I think that, you know, I've gone the full spectrum of life in the music business, that I am so content that I played so many different places, that I even had a \$2,000.00 gig one time. You know, I mean, I feel like I've, I've done it for myself. And this is only really for me. People had a good time with me, but the main thing is I've enjoyed it. I've enjoyed this ride. I've been blessed with such amazing, talented people that always wanted to play with me, or ask me to play. I feel very grateful that I was given a chance to be a part of the music scene. To, even if it was on the sidelines, you know, that they really appreciated me coming in to that, I feel very honored. I feel like I've had the golden, front-row ticket in my life. And I am so grateful for it, if I die tomorrow, I know that I've done it all, I've seen it all, I've drank it all, I've danced it all, and, you know, the other band that's waiting for me on the other side, we're gonna do this more. That's how I feel. So I'm grateful. Thank you for letting me do this, and share my story.

Norie Guthrie: Well, thank you so much for coming in.

Sharon Mathews: Thank you.