

Interviewee: Linda Lowe

Interviewer: Norie Guthrie

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### Interview Transcript

Norie Guthrie: My name is Norie Guthrie from the Woodson Research Center at Fondren Library at Rice University. I am interviewing Linda Lowe. Today is December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018. This is part of the Houston Folk Music Archive oral history project. Can you tell me about your early life?

Linda Lowe: Whoa, how early?

Norie Guthrie: Wherever you wanna start.

Linda Lowe: Wow. Uh, you wanna start in high school?

Norie Guthrie: It's, it's –

Linda Lowe: Or –

Norie Guthrie: – totally up to you.

Linda Lowe: Early life, well, I was born in Hot Springs, Arkansas at the Army/Navy Hospital. Turns out that the doctor who birthed me was the grandfather of Kip Millwee, who I wound up taking to Houston who was my guitar player, uh, when I first hit Anderson Fair in 1976 or '77, and we didn't have any idea of that until we were on the road together and we men-, I mentioned that I was born at the Army/Navy Hospital. He said, "Well, my grandfather used to work there," and sure enough he's on my birth certificate. So that's sort of the story of my life, because it's all connected in that way. It just seems like everybody who's ever crossed paths, or it's just, seems like it's been like that – serendipity.

Norie Guthrie: So can you tell me a little bit around what first drew you to music?

Linda Lowe: Probably my first stepmother, who played a lot, uh, in San Antonio. I was raised, uh, when I was 5 years old. My, my mother left when I was 2, and my father was in Japan, and so, uh, we lived in foster care for like about a year or two 'til he could get back to the service. And then we moved to, um, San Antonio, Texas, Brooke Army Medical Center, uh, where he was one of the founders of, uh, the lab there. He was a laboratory technician for the burn ward. So we lived on the base for a while, so I'm an Army brat which is why Nanci Griffith and I got along so well because she's also a service brat, when we went on the road briefly to go to Arkansas and Tennessee. Um, but, uh, so yeah, we live, I lived in San Antonio and, and the first,

uh, stepmother, Betty, she, she played a lotta Glenn Miller and a lotta country songs and she just loved music. So I heard a lotta music at that point. Uh, at that time my dad was in Africa.

Norie Guthrie: And then, um, did that, kinda that love of music continue through into high school, etc.?

Linda Lowe: Well, what happened was I was riding my bicycle on Goodhue Street headed to the stables where I worked, horse stables. You know, every little girl likes horses. And I, to ride for free, I would walk the horses. And Ricci Ware who's a, a DJ for KTSA Radio somehow – I don't know how I met him there, but somehow I did. He asked me to come down and, uh, do a, a commercial, a radio commercial on bicycle safety, and then I got to be friends with a lotta the DJs at, at, uh, KTSA Radio, and I started babysitting for them, and then they started givin' me box loads of 45 records, uh, along with some pay I'm sure. And, um, so, '60s, I mean, gosh, mid-60s, there you are. You're at Motown. Uh, I got a lotta Motown, Sandie Shaw, lot of, um, uh, you know, the current hits back then, and I had 'em right off the press. So I got to be the first ears of a lotta the up-and-coming music of my time, when I was that young. So it inspired me to become a, a writer. I wrote a lotta poetry back then, even in my early, you know, before my double digits I was writing poetry.

Norie Guthrie: And then, um, so you, when did you first, um, begin playing music and, like, actually crafting songs and, or moving kind of from writing poetry to, um, lyrics?

Linda Lowe: Well, so in high school I worked for Rockefeller, and I went on the road with him, and in tiny towns of Arkansas. Winthrop, that is, and, um, I met Skeeter Davis. So I kinda got into, you know, firsthand into musicians on the road, and she let me ride in her limousine with her band members. Um, it was a lotta fun actually and I didn't, like, ride in her limousine to the gig, but she always had me sit in the, in the limousine and talk to them a lot. It was a lotta fun, and I, and I got to feel very comfortable around musicians. Um, but I, I didn't start hearing music with my lyrics until I was working with Jimmy Dean as his national time buyer, and he used to read poet, my poetry. He loved my poetry. That's why I got a job there in the first place, and, um.

Norie Guthrie: What is a, a national time buyer? Uh, what is that exactly?

Linda Lowe: Uh, I bought all of his radio and TV time along with Lila Sadler –

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Linda Lowe: – um, for commercials.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Linda Lowe: And I would go to the studio while he did commercials. By the way, Jimmy Dean, he just did it straight off the cuff. He didn't have anything to read. He was such an amazing person to – he was a great mentor to me. And he, and he told me when I started hearing music that I was cursed and that I had to go buy a guitar. So he's the one who talked me into buyin' my first guitar, which was a Guild Mark IV that I got at Boyd's Music in Little Rock, and it was a

classical guitar and I taught myself how to play. And within a year, I was playin' professionally all original songs in Little Rock.

Norie Guthrie: Did you draw upon the poetry that you had written before to help craft the lyrics, or did you write new music?

Linda Lowe: No, they, the new, it just came, the new, uh, poetry came with completed composed-of melodies.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Linda Lowe: Yeah, it was amazing. It was, it was completely – I had nothin' to do with this gift, you know? I didn't really, I didn't set out to do it. I never set out to be even a poet or a songwriter. I just was one.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Linda Lowe: Which is kinda weird, but Jimmy, Jimmy – I had a lotta fun with Jimmy Dean with writing songs.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. So did you, did you, I mean, did you, uh, play songs to him, or uh?

Linda Lowe: Oh, all the time, yeah, at work, yeah. Well, he, we read poetry to each other all the time at work too, yeah. He was a great mentor.

Norie Guthrie: And just to make sure that I understand this, this is Jimmy Dean as in Jimmy Dean, the country singer?

Linda Lowe: Yes, and the sausage maker.

Norie Guthrie: And the sausage.

Linda Lowe: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: I wanted to avoid the sausage, but yeah.

Linda Lowe: And, and also, I was there when he – one of the reasons that I realized that you don't have to go work a 9 to 5 or 8 to 5 is because, uh, one of his team members, he decided, Jimmy donated a lot of his, uh, uh, skin from, um, pig skin –

Norie Guthrie: Oh.

Linda Lowe: a – to the burn ward at Brooke Army Medical Center, uh, the Brooke Army Medical Center and other hospitals to help burn patients, and then he started a line of, uh, coats. I don't think it went over very well, but, but we, I had, I did meet his staff of people that were designing the coats, and they would come in at like 10:00, 11:00 and stay 'til like 12:00 and I'd

say, "Why weren't you here early?" And they'd say, "Well, you don't, you don't have to be here at any certain time, do you?" And I said, "Well, yeah, I do." They said, "No, you don't." You can, you know, it's better to work late at night when nobody's here 'cause then the phones don't ring. You get a lot done, and sure enough he was, they were right and, and Bill Holland allowed me to do that. So I started changing my hours to more nighttime hours where I would come to work, um, 9:00 or at the latest 10:00. But it was pretty good since my job was a lot to be wined and dined by reps from radio and television stations.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so can you kinda talk a little bit more about what those early days performing were like for you in Arkansas?

Linda Lowe: Well, I guess I knew a lotta people doin' what I was, bein' in the ad agency. I think Jimmy probably used to pay people to come hear me, or they'd draw straws at the office, 'cause I, because I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. I was a terrible singer, but I hooked up with Mary Gwin who played a Martin, uh, 12-string. She was awesome. She had a gorgeous voice. So she had the voice and I had the songs and together we were able – she, you know, she helped me learn how to sing, I, I suppose, and hit notes. But I never sang be, I sang because I had to, to get the songs out. I didn't sing because I was a singer. I became a singer but only, only because I felt the songs warranted being heard.

Norie Guthrie: Um, what were some of the venues that you played at during that time?

Linda Lowe: The Leather Bottle in, uh, in Little Rock, which is, it was a great place to play. A lotta politicians and, uh, movers and shakers ate there. And then they had this holding area with a living room no bigger than this room and couches in a, just a, like a, half-circle couches, and you basically – it was like this. I could talk to the audience like I'm talkin' to you, and I learned how to deal with an audience very easily because there all the barriers were down. You just had to be real or it could, you know, it was, it was quite an experience and I'll never forget it. And I really do compare a lotta the, the things I do now to that room by bringin' it more personal.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. So why did you decide to move to Houston? What, what happened to precipitate that?

Linda Lowe: Substation No. 1 when I didn't have a home was, uh, Bill Hayems's house and, um, he knew and played at Anderson Fair, and he knew Lyse Moore and she was stayin' at his house and so was Stephen Jarrard who – you know who Stephen and Franci are, I'm sure. Um, and so I met Lyse and she said, uh, "Well, there's a cancelation at Anderson Fair. Why don't you come down and play?" And so I did. This is before Tim took it over. So I did and, uh, with Kip Millwee, my guitar player, and we were booked for 2 days but we stayed 6 months. And it was a real bizarre thing because I was very green, straight arrow, I don't, I think I may've, may've smoked a little cigarette sometimes, not my, but I wasn't totally addicted even to cigarettes. But when I got, came to Anderson Fair, um, they just had this ritual. I don't know if you've heard about the ritual or not. It was called hot knives.

Norie Guthrie: I've heard about the hot knives.

Linda Lowe: Well, so I'm on stage, and then all of a sudden they start shutting all the doors and the crowd stayed. They didn't leave, but they were locking the crowd in, and I didn't know it but that was, like, an initiation and you became a tribe member when they pulled out the hot knives. So, um, yeah, 48 hours later, I never repeated a song, um, but I, but I played music 48 hours straight.

Norie Guthrie: Oh wow.

Linda Lowe: And then I went to Rock Romano's house, Dr. Rockit, and he let me stay on his floor next to his heater where I burnt my guitar by the way, Louise. Um, she's okay, but she does have scars from it, but Rock was awesome. He lived on Crocker Street in a real fine house. We all hung out there actually, and then Franci and Stephen – uh, actually then it was Franci and Roger Ruffcorn, owners of Anderson Fair, lived in the garage apartment. So it was just a constant, music, music, music, I mean, and then we wound up in Wellborn, College Station, and I don't know. We just kinda wound up everywhere. It, it was a 6-month whirlwind.

Norie Guthrie: Can you talk about the vibe at Anderson Fair when you, when you got there? 'Cause you, you said that, you know, there was the hot knives, but what was it like –

Linda Lowe: Pure magic.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Linda Lowe: You know, uh, An, Anderson Fair was just a mecca for songwriters. I felt like immediately – see, I thought I was the only songwriter because in Little Rock, a lotta people were doing, uh, copy songs. They weren't playing original songs. But I didn't play music to play other songs. I played music because I was writing music. So it never occurred to me even to play a whole lot of other songs, although I did play some people that I like a lot. Um, so when I went to Anderson Fair, everybody was a songwriter. And then after we did all of our other gigs at La Bodega and, and Houlihan's and places in, in the Montrose, um, then we all congregated back at Anderson Fair to hang out and play music all night long. So it was, um, it was pure magic.

Norie Guthrie: Who was there at the time?

Linda Lowe: Uh, in the audience? Well –

Norie Guthrie: Or just, or, um, yeah.

Linda Lowe: Well, in the audience, well, first of all, I announced to the audience that I was gonna perform a song. I had no idea who the author was. But if anybody knew, could they please tell me because I'd like to give the author credit for having written this beautiful song called "No Place to Fall." Of course, the entire audience yelled out Townes Van Zandt and I then went, "Wow, you guys know who this person is?" And they said, "Yeah, you're at Anderson Fair." So Lucinda, I think, was in the audience. I know Eric Taylor, Don Sanders, Bill Cade. Bill Cade wound up on stage with me for like 3 days, um, just a whole, whole lotta people who – Lynn probably, Lynn Langham was most likely there 'cause Lynn and me and, Lynn and me and

Lucinda and Nanci were and, and Connie Mims back then too were five of the women who performed a lot at Anderson Fair. And that's something, because women didn't often at that point get Friday and Saturday nights, you know? It was, in fact, when I was on the road with Townes that's what he said. He said, "It's a shame you're a woman." I said why and he said, "Because it's harder on you to get Friday and Saturday nights." And I said, "Well, yeah, but I'm with you. So hey, I got Friday and Saturday nights."

Norie Guthrie: What, what was it like being, um, being a woman there?

Linda Lowe: At Anderson Fair?

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Linda Lowe: Well, considering Franci and Lyse were runnin' the place, it was awesome. It was, it was a beau – the Anderson Fair was a beautiful experience, um, for the most part.

Norie Guthrie: Okay, um.

Linda Lowe: There were some trials and tribulations at Anderson Fair. I mean, I crossed three, three state lines to get away from it at one time.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so then, when did you actually end up moving to Houston and making it your home?

Linda Lowe: Um, well, that 6, well, hmm, at that time I was, uh, my roommate was Dorothy Palmer, who's Robert Palmer's sister, and Robert Palmer became my producer. Dorothy was the music critic for, um, the Arkansas, it was either the Democrat or the Gazette. I can't remember which one, but, and I know I paid rent at the, our house for a long time. She used to send me letters sayin', "Are you ever coming home?" Because I kinda got stuck in Houston. Malcolm Smith used to – who I would travel with and he played violin with me – he would say, "Let's don't get to close to Houston. We'll get that magnetic pull, and the black hole is gonna engulf us, and we won't be leaving. We won't be able to get outta there in time for winter. We gotta go," you know? So Houston had that pull because there was a lot of camaraderie going on at the time, um. There was a, there was a big music scene in the '70s in Houston, and it wasn't anywhere else. Uh, we didn't have that going in Arkansas at the time.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. So maybe you ended up here around '76, '77?

Linda Lowe: Yep.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Linda Lowe: And you know what? The day I arrived, uh, it was this, and this is just the way things happen to me a lot, but the day that I arrived, uh, I think Hobart Taylor was doin' a piece on the music scene in the Montrose. And so he took a picture of me and Kip and Bill Cade and, um, and so we were in the Lifestyle and Entertainment –

Norie Guthrie: I know that article.

Linda Lowe: – on, like, a Sunday, you know? Or Sunday edition or it or something and it said, "Linda Lowe, the new girl in town."

Norie Guthrie: We have that photograph.

Linda Lowe: Oh wow.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Linda Lowe: The actual photograph? Wow.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Linda Lowe: I'd love to see a copy of that. I'd love to get a copy of that.

Norie Guthrie: Where is –

Linda Lowe: Wow.

Norie Guthrie: – it?

Linda Lowe: Now that was –

Norie Guthrie: I don't think –

Linda Lowe: – that was the very day –

Norie Guthrie: I don't have it, yeah.

Linda Lowe: That, that, that was the very day I hit, well, no, I lied. That's not true, because prior to that I was in Houston on the road with Wildwood.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Linda Lowe: But that's the first time I performed in Houston, but I, I went on the road with Wildwood in 1975 and we performed at the Railhead.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Linda Lowe: And my husband, of all of 8 months, was the manager and I was the sound person, so I worked their sound at the Railhead.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Linda Lowe: So I was here, but I was in, in a different capacity.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. Um, so when you went ahead and settled here, um, we've talked a lot about Anderson Fair. What were some of your other place, favorite places to play?

Linda Lowe: I liked Houlihan's. Um, I liked Corky's. I liked La Bodega but ... and the other very strange performance that I had that I think made a marked difference and totally sea change in my life was when, um, after Tim Leatherwood took over Anderson Fair, he booked me into the Jefferson Davis Psychiatric, uh, Convict Ward to, to be the, the Christmas program. That was quite an experience because when I got up there, I had a bodyguard next to me and they were as close as you are and they were sayin' things like, um, "Linda, play Bahama Mama." I mean, that was my audience.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Linda Lowe: And so I kinda freaked out about that to know that, "Whoa, what am I doin'? I'm playing to all these people who, wow." I wouldn't wanna get off the stage and have conversation, I don't think, with convicts. Plus, you're, you know, you're leaving at 2:00 in the morning by yourself.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Linda Lowe: But I had, I had Roland the Wonder Dog so I had a bodyguard but, a saint in a dog suit, but still it was, and then they were writing me notes sayin', "I'm just like you. Get me outta here." It was the only time I was ever on stage where I really felt uncomfortable. So I literally stopped performing for a minute, and I decided to go back to Arkansas, and I read *The Alexandria Quartet*. Got a job building, uh, football bleachers and swimming pools with one of my high school friends –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Linda Lowe: – just to take a break and recalculate. Look at all of my music and say, "What, what is it that I'm doing to attract? I'd rather attract more family-oriented audiences." So I, I, I took anything that had to do with drugs or alcohol outta my, uh, song selection and started writing different songs.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. About what year was that?

Linda Lowe: Well, I think that had to have been probably, uh, maybe in the '80s?

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Linda Lowe: I'm not sure when, though. It all, it's a blur.

Norie Guthrie: That's okay.



Linda Lowe: It's a big blur.

Norie Guthrie: So, some people are really focused in on dates and remember those, and then some people are not.

Linda Lowe: I never had –

Norie Guthrie: And it's all okay.

Linda Lowe: See, I never had a plan. I just went wherever. I mean, I remember one time I was in a, I went out to get a pack of cigarettes in Arkansas and I went to this store and ran into another music critic, Jack Hill, um, with one of the newspapers there, and he said, "Hey, we're goin' to, uh, St. Louis." I said, "You are? What're you gonna do?" He said, "We're gonna go see a group called Squeeze. Have you ever heard of 'em?" I said never. Asked, "Do you wanna go?" I said sure, and I just jumped in the car and took off and went, you know, to see some group named Squeeze and, and they got, um, we weren't even able hear them because there wasn't enough power in, in the building to accommodate that group.

Norie Guthrie: Oh.

Linda Lowe: We wound up partyin' with them in the hotel that we were stayin' in, and they turned out to be Townes Van Zandt fans and I think they were Willie Nelson fans. And so, I, I picked up a really good vintage Townes Van Zandt album at one of those vintage stores. So to me, that's the reason I went was to get that album.

Norie Guthrie: That's okay.

Linda Lowe: So I, so there was no plan.

Norie Guthrie: That's okay. Uh, so since you just mentioned, um, Townes, um, what kind of influence did he have on you and what was he like?

Linda Lowe: Wow. Um, I met Townes through Darryl Harris, who I was dating at the time, and Phyllis Ivey in Clarksville and, um, it was – he just became, he was like a brother to me, and he kinda took me under his wing. He was the kindest, most considerate, sweetest person in the universe. He was just a doll. I mean, he, he did so many things for so many people that nobody ever talks about, which I can't believe nobody would talk about how sweet and kind he is. But, um, well, maybe they do, you know, but some of the things I've read, they didn't. Um, I never even saw Townes drunk for the first couple years I knew him. Uh, he, he was just an awesome person. I remember him putting money into Phyllis's purse when she wasn't looking. Like, he'd go do a gig and then he'd come back with a \$100.00 bill and stick it in her purse. He would just give you the shirt off his back. In fact, he did give me his pick bag. Uh, I think that, oh, did I give you that, did I ever give you the, uh, um, DVD?

Norie Guthrie: Yes, mm hmm.

Linda Lowe: It's that little pick bag that's in that DVD. Um, when he gave me that – I didn't know it at the time but – he actually had given away just about everything. He gave Blaze Foley, I know, all of his, uh, cassette tapes which included Emmylou Harris and Rodney Crowell and a bunch of rough mixes and stuff at the time. At the time I think, uh, "Pancho and Lefty" was just now beginning to take hold for him. But, uh, touring with Townes, the reason I toured with Townes in the first place was because Darryl called and asked me to come get him because he was, I guess, actin' up in Austin.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Linda Lowe: So me and Lyse took off in my LTD. I can't believe we made it there, gas-guzzlin' car. Um, and we, but we got him out of, uh, Austin, took him to my house on Millwood Street and, um, then to his mother's house so he could get some glasses, but he was kind of in a really bad shape at that time. And then I went ahead and I thought, "Well, the only thing to do is book him on a tour to get him out of this funk." So I booked him into Arkansas, and he and I and Mickey White and took off and, and did a tour of Arkansas that ended at, uh, UALR Fine Arts Concert Hall which didn't turn out so well because, um, he kinda fell, he started getting drunk but that's another story. But we survived it, and during the whole tour he was a prince.

[inserted video clip from a performance in 2017.]

So I had the, uh, privilege and pleasure to go on the road with Townes Van Zandt. He sort of adopted me and I became kind of like a little sister to him, and it was like one of the most beautiful times in my life and I'll never forget it, and he taught me a lot. Um, one of the things he taught me was detuning. So anyway, I wrote a song for him, many songs, but this is one is called "Skyride."

[Linda Lowe with Becky Smith, Judi Messina, and Aura Lee Emsweller perform song.]

Old friends are patient  
 With you in your prime  
 They listen for music  
 And you make it rhyme  
 But the whiskey and women  
 Will use up your time  
 Everyone's lookin' for the right high

Words like rain drop from heaven  
 Thru hell the strong ones will climb  
 You move right on time with your guitar yeah  
 Lead kind gentle eyes out the dark

If I had the power to cease pouring rain  
 Lord knows I'd ease your brand of pain  
 I'd build you a tower of silver and gold

Shield your good will babe from the cold  
 Lay Tennessee down on a platter  
 True love soon would arrive  
 Without all this troublin' matter, yeah  
 No one but you on her mind

Becky Smith

Lay Tennessee down on a platter  
 True love soon would arrive  
 Without all this troublin' matter, yeah  
 No one but you on her mind

I'd keep Satan's black cup  
 Away from your tongue  
 If I was a savior I surely would  
 Mold you a body to tackle these times  
 And a white flyin' pony to help you glide by

Lay Tennessee down on a platter  
 True love soon would arrive  
 Without all this troublin' matter, yeah  
 No one but you on her mind

Yes, with you on a high sky ride  
 You on a high sky ride  
 Yes, with you on a high sky ride

[end of video clip]

Norie Guthrie: Um, so in 1980s, you began releasing albums. Can you talk about your recordings?

Linda Lowe: Oh, yeah. So *Gamblin' with the Wind* is the first one. Um, that album, I'm tryin' to figure out how I even got started on that album. I don't know. Oh, I guess people were asking for, some people were asking for my songs, and I didn't have an album, and back then you either had a record album or nothing 'cause there wasn't anything else. There wasn't a cassette. Well, maybe there were the, uh, the little cartridges that – but, so I just, um, I want, I wanted to do it in Hot Springs, Arkansas because I wanted to go where I could be still, 'cause I was never still. I was just everywhere all the time. And, um, I knew that if I could, you know, stay at the lake house or whatever and be, I could probably get a lot done, and I did. I found a recording studio there, and then, um, Robert Palmer, I talked with him and he wanted to be on it too. So I took the masters around with me. I took it to New York and Robert Palmer got the Talking Heads' studio in New Jersey, Edgewater, and we went over and put his parts down, and then I took it to Ronnie, uh, Rebstock, my, at the time he played banjo in my upstairs band, um, and he helped me in Houston find a studio and so he, he produced that part of it. So it was kind of a collaboration between a lot

of, uh, musicians that I worked with and I really loved doin' that album. It was great. Only I never was in voice because I was constantly having to do the work of putting an album together, to be a producer, to get the money, the studios and organize the travel and all that, I didn't have time to actually sing until I got into the studio, and so I'm not real happy with a lot of my vocals. But in the end, you either release it and go on and mark the time or it never gets released. So I released it.

Norie Guthrie: Um, can you talk about some of your others?

Linda Lowe: Let's see. What came after that? I don't know the order that –

Norie Guthrie: That's okay.

Linda Lowe: – half of 'em came but, uh, probably it was so far, it was either *Even the Moon* or *So Far Apart*, probably *So Far Apart*. Uh, because I won the Kerrville Folk Festival with a song called "Blow Out the Light", and the reason I wrote "Blow Out the Light" was because I got really tired of singing "Irene Goodnight." There are some lyrics in there that are questionable, and if I was gonna clean up my act and try to –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Linda Lowe: So I, so I decided I'd rather leave people with a happy thought, keep your spirit bright, uh, rather than "Irene Goodnight," although I love "Irene Goodnight." It's a wonderful song, but I just wanted to flip it and leave people with a, a happier thought.

[Performs "Blow out the Light"]

Closing time

Tell everybody good night

Blow out the light

But keep your spirit bright

Even thought at times

We reach in our pockets, bone dry

Settle up for a dime

But kiss those blues goodbye

Cause time is here and gone

She's a rolling sun

At the break of dawn

For the dreamer

Be a dreamer

And may you never lose that shine

Well, Lord you've got those eyes

I love how they sparkle and shine

You got a lot on your mind  
 But your hearts in line with mine

Back in my hometown  
 I jump off the merry-go-round  
 I take the ups with the downs  
 Both feet on the ground

Time is here and gone  
 She's a rolling sun  
 At the break of dawn  
 For the dreamer  
 So be a dreamer  
 May you never lose that shine  
 May we never lose that shine

Anyway, so that's where I met, uh, Steve Gillette, at the Kerrville Folk Festival when I won that. And then, uh, he and I got together and put together a tour, uh, on the East Coast and the West Coast. Played Gerde's Folk City in Manhattan. I think it was near Halloween 'cause people were in costume walkin' around. We wound up in Woodstock where I met Tony Rice, who also wound up in one of my other albums. No, he wound up on that, *So Far Apart*. So that's pretty cool. Anyway, *So Far Apart*, my husband Karl Caillouet, uh, produced it and we recorded it at Height Sounds Studio. I wasn't married to him at the time but, uh, later married him, but, but he got involved in that album. And then *Even the Moon* I recorded after I met La, uh, Loudon Wainwright, because I was, I had put down music for a while 'cause I had a baby. I had Michelle, my wonderful joy, joy of my life, my hero. Uh, so I was opening, I was the opening act, one of 'em, at Rockefeller's in Houston. So I met Loudon Wainwright and Donovan, Bonnie Raitt, Jesse Colin Young. Got to open up for some killer people. It was the best gig ever, because you could stay in the music business, raise a family, play your best 20 minutes, get paid handsomely, to a full audience and hang out with the best people and have a blast. Wow, and then be home by 10:00, it was awesome. It was really – man, I highly recommend bein' an opening act to anybody who wants to do it. It's great. Takes the pressure completely off of you, but Loudon Wainwright and I used to talk all night long when I would open up for him. Uh, and he told me, I told him I didn't think we could, I could continue to record and, and actually get out and tour because of, you know, the family. And he said, I said, and then my husband at the time was an engineer and he was touring with a group. Um, and Loudon said, "Oh no, me and my wife, we, you know, we have a little girl and when she tours, I take care of the little girl and when I tour, you know, she takes care." So, so they worked it out, and he told me to go put my name on a studio and start recording *Even the Moon*, 'cause he loved that song and I was too talented, he said, to just not record. But I, I, I'm fond of that song. I'm fond of that album actually. It's a good album. *Even the Moon*, I enjoyed it. Uh, Rick Gordon played a lotta guitar on that album too. There's a lotta good people on that album. Sisters Morales, I think, um, I, I'm pretty sure Lisa was on it. Anyway, there's some good people on that album.

Norie Guthrie: So what is your writing process like?

Linda Lowe: Hmm, well I write every day because I, you know, I, I teach kids, uh, well, not just kids, I teach everybody. We have, uh, Writers in the Round, uh, which is started in 1990 and, um, the purpose of that, after having talked with Townes and lots of other people who became alcoholics. Um, I knew that, back then, it wasn't a matter of bringing a songwriter through and song-, songwriters, it was a matter of venues that were appropriate for songwriters that were listening rooms where people actually listened to the song, and, back then, we were playing clubs where the focus was mainly on selling alcohol. And then you were, sort of, encouraged to write songs that compelled people to wanna drink. And, so, the focus wasn't on the songwriter so much, so, except for Anderson Fair, of course, and some list, every, every city had, at least, one listening room but, but there should be more, you know, there should have been more listening rooms for songwriters. So, a lot of songwriters and not enough venues. So, I was, sort of, involved with a movement to help songwriters, um, play more wholesome venues where it's fam-, we were beginning to have families and getting a little older at that time, too. And I just, we, I, I don't know, I got together with, first the Mucky Duck for a while, and then Main Street Theater, I just became, um, a series at Main Street Theater. Um, we formed a non-profit called Writers in the Round and a concert series, and it really did help. We got, uh, involved with a lot of other people who had like minds that were doing the same thing and house concerts, and then Uncle Calvin's and Jefferson Freedom Café in Dallas. Um, uh, there were just qu, quite a few other, even the Cactus, I think, sometimes, but I think this was even before I started playing the Cactus. But, anyway, it, it was, uh, it was a project to, to change the way, uh, people could go and hear music from songwriters, anyway, um, from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and, so, that we wouldn't have to play bars so much. Because not matter what, if you are raised in a bar and you're 14, 15 years old and you're playing music 'cause you love it, uh, a lot of times you just wind up, people tip you with a beer or a drink. Ev, even if you don't drink, they still, they still tip you drinks. I remember, one time, I had, like, ten alcoholic beverages li, lined up behind at the Leather Bottle that I didn't touch, but they were just lined up. So, I started ordering Grand Marnier and coffee and, uh, then I just started not drinking at all because it was ridiculous.

Norie Guthrie: So, what were some of your favorite Writers in the Round shows?

Linda Lowe: There's so many of them – anything Trout Fishing America did. Uh, in fact, I brought you a present for our daughter. Uh, I went to see Trout with my daughter, Michelle, at Mucky Duck and, uh, they gave us a, a Christmas album.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, okay, cool.

Linda Lowe: So I will, I'll give it to you for your daughter. Okay? Um, of course, any, Townes, that was cool because Townes played every year for me. We had an agreement that he would always be sober after the Little Rock gig and, uh, and he, and he honored that too, and he always came with a dozen red roses, a smile on his face, and a stuffed animal for Michelle. So it was just fine, anything that Townes did. I think I put him with – who did I put him – Vince Bell, I think, once and I think I, I know I put him with Robert Palmer because I wanted Townes and Robert to meet because Robert, when he was working on a book for the Rolling Stones, um, I turned him onto Townes. I said, "Hey, listen to this." This is in Arkansas. I'm going way back now, but, um, out of context, I guess – but that's how I got the Round, how I put Townes and Robert Palmer together. They were anyway, Robert just fell in love with Townes ' music, and he was

gonna, he would have written something really cool for Townes and the Rolling Stones or, or the *New York Times*, but it didn't happen, passed away, but he passed away, actually, during the time that we were actually working on one of my albums that he was producing. Um, it was a very sad time, but, anyway, Townes passed, he passed, and so did Malcolm; all three people that, at the time, I was kinda working with. It was a very sad time for me. Um, but that's how I got Townes and Robert together is through, uh, turning Robert onto all Townes's. I mean, he just really listened to every album. He loved 'em. So that was a really cool Round.

Norie Guthrie: Um, can we, uh, I didn't – earlier, when you mentioned Malcolm Smith, I didn't ask you any questions about him. Could you, um, talk a little bit about him?

Linda Lowe: Malcolm Smith? Oh my god, another, he's another brother. Malcolm played violin with me and Flamenco guitar on the road, and he became my truly brother. Uh, his whole family, we were an extended family. Becky Smith's, I still play with Becky not the road with Women in the Round. I love Becky Smith. She's so amazing. She made her mandolin. She's an amazing player. Uh, but anyway, so Malcolm and I toured together a lot and, um, I guess they lived in Montrose way back in the 70s, and, and then he played with a group called, uh, Cypress Swamp Stompers. They were awesome. Do you have anything on them? Boy, you should, if you don't.

Norie Guthrie: I don't. There's no audio. Um, they pop up on calendars and things like that –

Linda Lowe: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: – but beyond that, no.

Linda Lowe: Becky might have something. I'll talk to her for you, or you could talk to her, but I'm sure she's got something somewhere, but yeah. So Malcolm, Malcolm, I guess, he was also my arranger because I didn't know it at the time. I didn't know there was such thing as an arranger, but apparently, I had one because he sure did do a lot of arranging for my music on stage. I just didn't know what to call it at the time.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so you mentioned the Women in the Round. Um, so why did you form that group?

Linda Lowe: Because we were always on the road. And we were always playing in the same places, but never at the same time and even if we were in the same town – like I remember Lucinda being in the, around the same time I was around, but we never got to see each other because we were always playing somewhere else. So I just feel that we needed the camaraderie, uh, to get together, and I just chose my favorite people to play with. I missed, I never miss not, I never miss performing. I miss the camaraderie of sharing music with people who love music, my friends, and new people as well too, but, um – so being at a Writers in the Round concert back then was like being a fly on the wall. It was great. It was a good place to be, I think. We did some really fine shows, and it turns out, it was igniting a lot of, a lot of other people were thinking of the same thing, which is why “Songwriter's Paradise” was written for, uh, you know, the, what, *Texas Highway Magazine*, uh, was to show all the new venues popping up to help musicians get through, uh, Texas and, and, and play some really wholesome, uh, gigs and

performances. Now, I think one of my other favorite ones was, um, introducing David Broza to Townes. Uh, David already knew, David Amram, and Townes already knew David Amram. We all know David Amram. Who doesn't know David Amram? But, but putting them together was just pure magic. It was amazing that the – but you'd, I guess you would've have had to have been there, but it was a fine night to remember. A lot of cool things happened after that, too.

Norie Guthrie: Do you want to talk more about that?

Linda Lowe: Well, it wound up that, that, uh, David wound up, after Townes passed, uh, recording Townes's unpublished poetry. And one of the reasons for that is that when Townes was, uh, on his way out of this world, I talked with him several times on the phone. In fact, he was scheduled to perform at Writers in the Round, but he passed away. Um, wow, this is so heavy, but anyway, uh, he was reading me his poetry over the phone, and I couldn't tell if it was actually a song or just poetry. But because, back then, I had a thing called Call Notes, and every time I'd talk to somebody to try to get 'em in the Round, I was, you know, you have to orchestrate the logistics of getting these people together when they're so booked and, and at the same time, it was, it was a juggling act, you know, with, uh, working on schedules and stuff. So I would type all the things that they were saying and I was saying, and I noticed that Townes, a lot of what he was saying was reciting poetry, so, uh, I read it to, uh, David Broza over the phone 'cause I was trying to get Townes and David back together. And, um, I did mention to Townes that if he wasn't feeling strong enough, that maybe David and him can, that, you know, 'cause David did that with American Poets. He got with America Poets and he, and he composed music and worked on their songs and, I think, *Time of Trains* is, um, one of the amazing albums that David wrote that we released at, uh, Main Street Theater. Anyway, so Townes was kinda up for that. Um, any, anyway, it wound up happening 10 years later, but it did happen.

Norie Guthrie: Um, why did you begin teaching music to children?

Linda Lowe: 'Cause somebody asked me to, and I could not say non to this person. They were tight, tight, tight friends. Um, one of 'em was Patsy Graham asked me to teach, uh, Sara Graham, her, one of her kids, I wound up teaching both of hers, and Patsy Graham was a tremendous mentor and a person who supported a lot of musicians and had helped give a lot of 'em their start; uh, had Morgan Sterns and College Station. She's an amazing – but she wound up being a partner of mine and Mike Sumlers later, uh, but, um, also, um, several of the, uh, families in West U would call. They'd say, well, you know, can you – I had a record company then and, and a publishing company with Patsy, and they asked me if I would teach their kids, and I said, "Well, okay," and I did it, and then all of a sudden there was 50 of 'em, and then all of a, and then I realized there's no music at schools. They weren't teaching music at the time. They were kind of eliminating art and music. Don't, don't you remember in, did you ever have like the flutes to teach you how to play music when you were going to elementary school? We had flutes.

Norie Guthrie: The, the recorders?

Linda Lowe: Yeah.



Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. They, I had a complicated elementary school thing where I ended up transferring in around fifth, fifth grade to a school. I think the previous year, they did recorders in fourth grade.

Linda Lowe: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: And I come from a private school where we didn't really have much music instruction, rather than –

Linda Lowe: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: – just singing, and so, um, so I never got to do the recorder, but I did, like, pick up an instrument when I was in seventh grade.

Linda Lowe: Yeah, I, I mean back then, you, you had music, and you had art. I mean, you had a well-rounded, I thought, back then anyway. What, what that? So 6, 50s and 60s. Um, anyways, so I did say yes, and then when, when, when it became too much for me, there's too many, too many, and they were incredible. These kids were really hungry for music and, and not only that, they were gifted and talented, and they learned fast. Uh, they were passionate about it, and I loved doing it. It was a lot of fun to teach. So I started calling my friends, uh, I know, Joe, Joe Romano, um, and then I got, uh, Susan, um, Elliott to, to come in to teach voice, and then Bill Cade and, um, Henry Darragh and – wow. Man, there, there was a, a lot, there's like 13 teachers. Erin Wright, she's an amazing bass player, but when, whenever anybody would ask, well, can you, do you know anybody who teaches upright bass, I would call Erin and say, "Okay, come over here and teach upright bass," and she did. And most of those people now are teaching in colleges. They didn't want to teach at the time because we don't think of it, but then when there's a need, then they were good at it too, so. Mary Ann Willis who, uh, she was married to Greg Harbar, and you probably have his ar, his archives here, I'm sure.

Norie Guthrie: Greg.

Linda Lowe: Um, with the Gypsies.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, okay, yes, yes. Okay.

Linda Lowe: And Mary Ann, I think I gave you Mary Ann's, uh, collection of books she wrote for Mel Bay. He came and picked 'em up at Writers in the Round, uh –

Norie Guthrie: I don't –

Linda Lowe: – violin books.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, okay. Maybe they are in –

Linda Lowe: 'Cause I took pictures.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Linda Lowe: That's the only reason I know. I'm a picture-taker. Uh, so yeah, so she started teaching violin, and then Dave Zeger came in who worked with the ballet and Ruth Zeger teaching cello, so just turned into be this thing. It's, it was a organic growth that happened out of a need, and I just kept saying, yes, but it became a runaway train, and I just, and it was just a lot, lot. It's a lot to do. So I still love it though because every morning, I get up and I, I get to write songs with the purest of hearts, and they come up with amazing songs. I love it. I have a blast with them. And, plus, you don't have to deal with a record company. You don't have to deal with the music business. It's great. You just go in, write a song, and so I write songs every day, and it's easy. To me, writings songs is like breathing is. It's, it's not a, it's never been hard.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Linda Lowe: It's not a discipline. It's just something I do and I've always done.

Norie Guthrie: So do you think of the tune first or the lyrics?

Linda Lowe: It just comes however it comes.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Linda Lowe: But, uh, they generally come together, but usually, for me, it does all come together, but sometime, uh, once in a blue moon, a melody will come and I don't have a lyric for it and sometimes, I'll collaborate a little bit, but for the most part, but it all comes together.

Norie Guthrie: Do you like to write about personal experiences, or are you inspired by other events?

Linda Lowe: Well, for me, writing is like a conversation but put to music, and so it's just a moment in time, and it's whatever thought processes you're going through at the time or whatever is going on in your life at the time, and it's just a little piece of history there in that little moment, and then, sometimes, uh, it gets on a record.

Norie Guthrie: Before I kind of ask my final question, is there anything that you want to talk about that I haven't asked about? Anything you want to go into?

Linda Lowe: Um, um, well, I, I do have quite a few albums coming out that I'm ready to release now. One of 'em is called, um, well, *Barbwire Heart*, well act – okay, I'm 'spose to be in the studio this weekend with Rock Romano –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm?

Linda Lowe: – to get this thing out, but Fitzgerald's is closing. You know about that, right?

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Linda Lowe: So, of course, Dr. Rockit has to play that, so we have to cancel my session because I put all the spotlight band members from Writers in the Round together to, to sing on “Let Him Go Gently” which is a song that I wrote to help people get through the death of a loved one, and, uh, it's a duet with Hans Theessink, um, and it's gonna be on this album, and I really want the spotlight band on it because I feel like these kids have, well, they've been a big part of my life. Helping them to become singer-songwriters, not have to play clubs, showing them you can put concerts together, and you can play listening rooms, but you can do it on your own terms, and you could still go to college, and you could still be a musician, and you can be a great writer, and you can do songbooks. You know, all that, uh, we put together for them before they even go to college, so by the time they go to college, they've already done a lot of what college teaches you to do. But, so that, but the other thing is that they're, uh, we're doing our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary for Writers in the Round, uh, starting next October through the following October, and I've called quite a few people to see if I could get an okay. I am trying to get a hold of Mickey White, by the way, if you happen to know his number, but, um, um, Trout Fishing said that they would do it, and Ray Wiley, if I could schedule it around his schedule 'cause he's everywhere now. Uh, David Broza is gonna do it. Um, let me think of who else. Bill Haymes is, is gonna do it. The reason that I sta, decided we better do it because I want, I wanted Steve Young there, and he passed away. All these people are passing away that are, uh, wonderful friends who I miss and I just can't believe they're not here, you know, so I said better late than never, I better do this and, at least, and we're, and we're doing it at Main Street Theater. They remodeled. They just went all, uh, you know about that? They just went down to the concrete, basically, and rebuilt it. It's awesome. So we're gonna go back there, which seats maybe 100 people and, uh, if I, if I did anything bigger than that, it would be hopefully Hammond Hall 'cause I would love to go back there. Arlo Guthrie was another great show that I really enjoyed, and Loudon Wainwright at, at, uh, Main Street Theater. Did you, did you ever go to any of those?

Norie Guthrie: No, I, I, I've only been here for 10 years.

Linda Lowe: Oh, okay. Well, well, you're gonna go to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Norie Guthrie: Yes.

Linda Lowe: I'll give you a season pass. You'll have to go. Anyway, uh, it's, I'm really excited about getting together and sitting down with everybody and playing music again. Wildwood Reunion will be there and Sean Walters. Um, there's gonna be a lotta cool people. I'm, I'm gonna, I'm really en, enjoying the process of putting it together, but I realize it, that it's, it's gonna take me a whole year because everyone's schedules. Carolyn Hester too because she tours with her daughters now. Uh, and what, um – you know what? All I can say is what a magical ride it's been and it's been a pure blast being a songwriter in this day and time. Oh, I love it.

Norie Guthrie: I want to thank you so much for coming in and sitting down and telling me your story.

Linda Lowe: Well, thank you. And you know what? Thank you for what you're doing because, you know, you're really bringing to light something that has made a difference. The 70s, what a,

what an amazing time to be a songwriter, especially in Houston, Texas, and what you're doing by, by archiving so many songwriters who a lot of people, you know, once, you know, what, 10 years down the road would have never have heard them and their songs are timeless – so, thank you.