

Interviewee: Richard Dobson

Interviewer: Norie Guthrie

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Interview Transcript

Norie Guthrie: My name is Norie Guthrie from the Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University. I am interviewing singer/songwriter Richard J. Dobson. Today is November 4, 2016. This is part of the Houston Folk Music Archive oral history project. So could you tell me a bit about your early life?

Richard Dobson: I was born in, in east Texas in, uh, in Tyler, Texas, but I don't have any connection to the place. Uh, uh, my father was a Shell engineer and, uh, and, uh, in Kilgore which had no hospital, which is why I went to Tyler, why I came out in Tyler. And, uh, he, uh, he joined the navy after Pearl Harbor and was gone for a while. And he came back, uh, um, we grew up in Houston, Corpus Christi mostly back and forth.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I went to parochial schools in Fairlane. A lot of moving around, but, uh, other than that pretty much a normal upbringing. And uh, let's see, where did we, I guess jump to high school.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: I went to, I went to St. Thomas High School for 2 years here in, here in Houston, and uh, and then my father was transferred to Indonesia.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: To Sumatra.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: Since Shell was a Dutch company and Indonesia was originally or at one time a Dutch colonial possession.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So, uh, he was out there for about 2 or 3 years. So, uh, there, there being no schools there, uh, my sister and I went to New Mexico where my mother is from and I went to boarding school in Santa Fe. It was St. Michael's High School.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Where I graduated in 1960. And, uh, uh, my parents came back from Indonesia about, sometime in 1960. That was when Kennedy was inaugurated.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: I was, I went to Georgetown University for a couple of 3 years. I, I think it's worth noticing or mentioning, uh, that I watched Kennedy get into a limo and go off to be inaugurated that day.

Norie Guthrie: Ahh.

Richard Dobson: Bitterly cold day in Washington, D.C.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So anyway, I didn't too well at Georgetown, but I did get into music there. I was a, I didn't even have a guitar yet but I became profoundly influenced by folk music and bluegrass.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: Very big there in Washington, D.C. area with coming out of Virginia and I listened to the band called the Country Gentlemen. And actually I think that, at the end of the day that was more important to me than Georgetown education. So, uh, after I left there I went to, then I went to South America and I was living in Colombia with a family down there. And I was there when Kennedy was assassinated.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Down there. When I came back from Colombia, uh, the, I wasn't really too academically oriented but, uh, the Vietnam War was kind of heating up and if you didn't, if you didn't want to stay in university you had to take your chances of going to go fight a war. And I, you know, like, most, a lot of people in my generation I was not into that. And uh, so I enrolled at the University of St. Thomas here in, here in Houston, and, uh, I mean, I, um, I think I was 2 and a half years I guess at UST.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I graduated in '66 from here.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: And then I went up to, uh, uh, went up to Michigan to, I was trying to, I was already very much into writing at that time. I did the, I edited the school literary paper but magazine at St. Thomas, and I, I was really wanted to be on my way to become a writer already being one.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I, and I married my college sweetheart from, uh, Georgetown, up in Michigan. And we went into the Peace Corps together.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And we went to Chile and served for about a year and a half. Came back, uh, taught school for a year in Michigan.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: That was the longest I ever had a job. And then my wife and I split up. And I went to New York City to be a writer. And I stayed in New York for about a half a year or a little bit less.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And then I came, I, uh, had a little bit of, a little bit of encouraging news but maybe not quite enough to make me want to stay in New York and I came back. I was back down here in Houston, and I wanted to start on another book and, uh, I don't know, I kinda wanted to go back out to New Mexico.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So I did. I went out to New Mexico and I started, started to work on another literary project. And I was living out in the country and I threw in with a bunch of hippies. And we, you know, the things that hippies did, and I kind of had, I went through some transformations and I became more confident of my playing, guitar playing.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So I'd started late, you know, than most and, um, with the time and then I had also, I had also heard of Kris Kristofferson.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Who was the first person, university educated person to make a career in country music.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And I thought, you know what? I think I can do that. So I went to Nashville.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: In 1972.

Norie Guthrie: So when you moved to Nashville in '71 by that time were you already kind of writing songs or was that a place where you really started to kind of hone your craft.

Richard Dobson: I had a half a dozen songs written.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: About that many. But I thought it'd be better to over there on the spot.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: You know? I hadn't done a lot of songs. It was more just feeling a little bit more confident.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, I had good luck when I first went there. Guy Clark was one of the first people I met and –

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And, um, he kind of took me under his wing and, uh, demoed one of my songs the first. I'll play that song later but he demoed one of my songs after I'd been in town about 2 weeks. I thought oh this is going to be okay. I was on my way. I thought.

Norie Guthrie: So you got there in '71 and then you kinda traveled. Did you stay there from '71 until about what time?

Richard Dobson: I think I, well, I got married again in Nashville. I stayed there till about '74 but, you know, it's kind of hard to, you know, like, you did mention there was an awful lot of going back and forth and nowadays it takes two days to get to Nashville but back then we would go straight through and, you know, usually had more than one driver.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Or we had something to help keep us awake.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: But, uh, it was a lot of back and forth, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Right. Was that, do you think that that kind, the kind of moving back and forth between Nashville and Houston. Do you think that there was advantages to doing that for you for your career or was it more just –

Richard Dobson: I think it was more just, it was just more. For one thing, my parents lived here in Houston again by that time.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: So that was our, kind of our home base was here so it was natural to come back more often.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: But other than that I, we would, we just kinda traveled around on a lark, you know. Gas was cheap. We didn't really have too much responsibilities so it wasn't no big deal. We'd say oh let's go to Texas, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: Hang out for a few days, and go to the Kerrville Folk Festival and hang out and then go back. Things like that.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. So around I guess filming for *Heartworn Highways* started around '74, '75, is that correct?

Richard Dobson: I think it probably started after '75.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: The reason I know this is because I was with Townes Van Zandt and Rex Bell and Mickey White and a bunch of people. I was on the road with them up in Jackson, Wyoming.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Uh, the New Years. And I don't think that film had been started then.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: So it must have started after '75.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. Well then, let's track back then to the trip through the Rocky Mountains. What was that like?

Richard Dobson: Oh it was crazy. Uh, I think even then I had an idea that what was going on was noteworthy, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I never had really given up my idea of being a writer, a prose writer and that kind of storyteller.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, I had even in the back of my mind then it would be cool to write a book about this or at least take some notes.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: So I had a little cassette recorder, one of these little tiny things, you know, from that time. And I, I, until I ran out of cassettes I taped a lot of conversations on the bus, on the motorhome that we were all staying in.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, well it was a pretty, it was, it was wild and crazy because Townes was a notorious hell-raising, you know, heavy drinker and so was everybody else of a like mind so it was just kind of a, it was a magical mystery tour with, it was a little bit heavy overtones of, you know, you know, crazy.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Crazy, hell-raising.

Norie Guthrie: Right. But did, from what I remember reading from your book is that on that tour you also became a lot more comfortable playing live.

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm, mm hmm that too. I was kind of served an apprenticeship under, you know, Townes. I opened those shows or sat in with him.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And yeah, it was great experience for me.

Norie Guthrie: So then after that when you're going back to Nashville and then the documentary is kind of started what was that, did you at the time, what did you kind of think about that experience, about being part of that documentary?

Richard Dobson: There was this fellow who died really young named Dennis Sanchez who was a friend of Townes'. No, sorry, he was a friend of Guy's mostly.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, and he was my roommate for a time in Nashville. We had a house there and he actually didn't stay in Nashville very long. I lost the thread of my conversation.

Norie Guthrie: Um, you were, we were talking about the documentary.

Richard Dobson: Oh okay. Excuse me, excuse me.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah. That's okay.

Richard Dobson: He knew a friend named Jim uh

Norie: S

Richard Dobson: Szalapski.

Norie Guthrie: I'm not exactly sure how to –

Richard Dobson: I can't remember how to pronounce it

Norie Guthrie: Szalapski

Dobson: But we know the fellow, the producer.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: The producer of the movie knew Dennis Sanchez so that was the connection. And through him he, uh, I believe the film crew was French come to think about it.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. Yes, yeah.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, and then we just heard the rumor okay well Dennis had already gone. He may have already been dead. And, uh, so we just heard a rumor that there was gonna be a

movie crew in town and they just wanted to, they were interested in the music and they wanted to shoot it, a movie.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And so everybody's, like, okay, hey, cool. But I think everybody was really nervous and everybody was, everybody was – this drinking thing. In those days drinking was cool.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: It was cool. You didn't try to hide it. It was, like, shit, let's go get drunk. Like, so, you know –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And nowadays it's kinda the opposite. Everybody's, like, oh. Now everybody wants to kind of hide it but in those days nobody bothered. So when the movie came in everybody said oh there's a film crew coming and, you know, people do what they did anyway. So they just got drunk or got drunker.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: So there was a huge table and, uh, these bacchanal scenes going on.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I think everybody was petrified of the cameras but they, they just kind of.

Norie Guthrie: Ahh.

Richard Dobson: So it was, like, Rodney and Steve Earle and me and Susanna and Guy and another fellow.

Norie Guthrie: Was Steve Young there?

Richard Dobson: Yeah Steve Young, yeah. You know, boy, we was, like, it reminded me of the Rolling Stones' *Beggars Banquet* cover if you remember that.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Just kind of a lewd display of craziness but there was still some nice music and really nice performances came out of that too.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: So it was a pretty good picture of life in those days. A little bit, you know, of crazier side of it I guess.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. No I mean those, some of those scenes in the movie I think have maybe just with time, they have kind of, like, a, or the way that he made them, how he filmed them, they seem to sometimes can have a little bit of, like, a magical quality to it.

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: Especially, like, the, uh, the “Silent Night” scene around the table.

Richard Dobson: Uh huh.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Richard Dobson: Uh huh.

Norie Guthrie: Which, you know, was probably just, it just kind of happened but in the movie it's just, like, oh gosh it's such a beautiful moment.

Richard Dobson: I believe it was just kind of a spontaneous thing. It may have been Rodney who did that, who started that.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah. Many of the people that you hung around with, um, Guy Clark, Rodney Crowell, Steve Earle, etc. that were there in Nashville stayed there.

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: In a sense, and you still kind of did that moving back and forth and then also coming back to Houston to record beyond shrimping boats, etc.

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: So what was it, I guess I kind of asked this before but since when you really started to kind of move back to Houston.

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: What was that like? Kind of knowing that world existed in Nashville and that you decided to stay in the folk scene that was still happening in Houston.

Richard Dobson: Well it was, it was really kind of the same. I mean the business is there in Nashville.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: The people over here, it's more of a scene, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And there were two scenes here, at least that I was involved in. One was the Old Quarter, the original Old Quarter downtown.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And then the other was Anderson Fair which is still kind of running to this day.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And those were the two places that I gravitated to. And then also down in Galveston we played, Rex and I, I can't remember. I get my years scrambled up. Okay, let me think. Well Rex and I had a place down in Galveston for a while and we were there with our wives.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, and that's when we started working on the shrimp boats.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Yeah. That's, that's the connection.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So I don't know, Texas, because of my family being here and because of, I guess just growing up here. I really bonded to Galveston.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: I like the salt water and, and, uh, they'll say what was it like. Gosh Norie, I don't know. It was, oh I know another reason that drove me out of Tennessee was kind of like it was when Dennis died.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And then I broke up with my wife again.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: You know, and that kind of ran me out of town a little bit. I didn't like being in Nashville after that, too many reminders.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: So and that's, that has happened, that happened to me again, you know, the next time I split from Nashville.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. So your first song, if I have this right, that you sold was "Piece of Wood and Steel"; correct? Or did you sell one before that?

Richard Dobson: Hmm, well the first song that was recorded was "Baby Ride Easy" actually.

Norie Guthrie: Oh okay, okay.

Richard Dobson: And that was, uh, that was actually the same song that Guy Clark recorded the first time I went to Nashville.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: And as it turned out this is a song that I wrote before I ever went to Nashville was one of the three or four songs that I had. And it's, it's ironic because that's the one that the Cash. That Cash ended up recording. So it's kind of a circular thing.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Coming back.

Norie Guthrie: Would you feel comfortable playing that song?

Richard Dobson: Yeah, yeah. It's especially funny because I wrote it on a drilling rig out in the Gulf, offshore Louisiana. And it was just, it's kinda dull and drudgery being a roustabout out there and, uh, and, uh, I tore off a piece of sack from a drilling mug and wrote it on the back of that. And it was a joke.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And it's still a joke. But it, it brought me more than all the serious songs I was trying to write, you know. So the first verse is a truck driver and a waitress and the second verse is a bullfighter and a señorita, and the third verse is the president and the first lady. It's called "Baby Ride Easy."

*If I drove a truck, you were a waitress
I asked for coffee, you poured me some
Then I'd stop by on my way sometime later
When we'd arm-wrestle, could you say that you won*

*Ieee my baby, ride easy, ride high in the saddle all day
If your lovin' is good
And your cookin' ain't greasy
Hitch up the chuck wagon, we'll ride away*

*If you were a winsome pale señorita
And I a bull-fighter down in the sand
While the band kept on playing that old Paso Doble
Would you throw me a flower?
Would you give me your hand?*

*Whoa
Ieee my baby, ride easy, ride high in the saddle all day
If your lovin' is good
And your cookin' ain't greasy
Hitch up the chuck wagon and we'll ride away*

I sang this one for a lot of presidential inaugurations. Ford, Nixon, Reagan, and god knows who else.

Well if I ran the country

*You could be my first lady,
You could fix up the White House while I was away
Waiting while I'm passing time with world leaders
And later, together, alone we might lay*

*Ieee my baby, ride easy, ride high in the saddle all day
If your lovin' is good
And your cookin' ain't greasy
We'll chuck the chuck wagon and we'll ride away*

*Ieee my baby, ride easy, ride high in the saddle all day
If your lovin' is good
And your cookin' ain't greasy
Hitch up the chuck wagon and we'll ride away*

So.

Norie Guthrie: Thank you. Thank you so much. So when you were in Houston actually what was it like to sell that song?

Richard Dobson: Well, when they say sell a song, they don't normally sell them. They get a, a publishing contract.

Norie Guthrie: Publish, okay.

Richard Dobson: And that song was published by a company, the same company that Guy was writing for.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: When I first, that first week I went to Nashville so it wasn't really sold but it was, like, it belonged to them. It's there and that company was called Sunbury-Dunbar. And after that I didn't, I no longer owned it but I didn't really sell it.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And all those years it's been that company's.

Norie Guthrie: Right. So you get a percentage every time they sell it.

Richard Dobson: We normally, the uh, the uh, a copyright if it's a whole pie, you know. Normally, the publisher is getting half and the writer is getting half.

Norie Guthrie: Oh okay.

Richard Dobson: So if the writer, well it's pretty fair but that's the ideal situation. But how it works in reality can be different.

Norie Guthrie: So when you moved back to Houston you said that you played at the Old Quarter.

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: And at Anderson Fair.

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: Can you talk about those kind of different scenes?

Richard Dobson: Sure, sure. Uh, it's kind of a, well those were, those were the hippie years, you know, the drug years, you know. The Old Quarter was a little bit darker and that was where the heavier drugs were actually.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And so there were people who would go, who hung out at the Old, and that the Old Quarter was downtown, old, dilapidated, it was kind of dark and scary.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: It was bikers around, a lot of whinos around. It was kinda, it was kinda a little bit slightly scary.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: I mean I wasn't scared but I mean, you know, women could be scared, girls. I mean it was like, it was kind of a creepy neighborhood in a way.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, like, in, sometimes people were nodded out in the club, you know. So it was a little bit of a darker scene.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And Anderson Fair was, well a little bit more in the Montrose area which was a little bit better, a little bit better neighborhood. It was kind of a Bohemian neighborhood but a little bit cleaner. And the people there were, uh, were, I think, I didn't know them all that well but they were quite more, more middle class or –

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Or a little bit more affluent or it was just a little bit different scene but they were, they were not, there was no heroin around.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: That might've been the difference. But the kids were, not the kids really, the people were, there was quite a bit of pot smoking going on there.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: A lot of wine drinking and some alcohol but there was no hard drugs, psychedelics there were.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: But there, to my knowledge there was no heroin around there and that kinda seemed to make the difference.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: That was one of the big differences. But the music was pretty much the same except that at the Old Quarter, the original Old Quarter a lot of visiting bands from out of town would go down there.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: You know, whoever happened to be playing at Liberty Hall would go down to the Old Quarter afterwards.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. Okay.

Richard Dobson: And that wasn't really so much true at Anderson Fair.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: You know.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah, like, it seems kind of like Anderson Fair was more perhaps a little bit more insular.

Richard Dobson: Could be.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Richard Dobson: They were political. They were kind of a progressive left-wing kind of folks. Walter Spinks was one of the owners and he's still to this day is pretty.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah, yeah. We're friends on Facebook. Yeah.

Richard Dobson: So, uh, he's typical.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. Okay.

Richard Dobson: And uh, I got in with that crowd because I later, I became friends, actually she became my partner for some years was Lyse Moore. And then when I started going with Lyse then I got to know the people at the Fair better.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: You know, and fill them all a little bit of the background that I didn't really know about. At first it was just kind a more a place to go play.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And then I got to know the people better when I got with her.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: So when did you start contributing to “Omaha Rainbow”?

Richard Dobson: Wow. Let's see if I can get this trail. Uh, I was in England.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I was visiting, I was visiting a guy named Mayo Thompson. Do you know about him?

Norie Guthrie: Yes.

Richard Dobson: There was another very seminal band here but it was very avant-garde. He would hate me for saying that. Experimental music, the Red Krayola. So I was at his house in London. No he was in Banbury.

Norie Guthrie: Oh okay.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, and he told me about Peter O'Brien. And Peter O'Brien is the English man who, uh, started the fanzine “Omaha Rainbow” and I got to meet Peter. And then about that same time in the late 70s I was, I had started my, uh, newsletter.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Which was “Poor Richard's newsletter” at the time. So after I met Peter over there in England, we became friends and then I started sending him my newsletters.

Norie Guthrie: Oh okay.

Richard Dobson: And he put them in the “Omaha Rainbow.” Well it was through Peter that I met another writer and, uh, poetry performer mostly, Roxy Gordon who lived up in Dallas. So I, I actually met and I became very tight with Roxy but actually I met him through an Englishman. So, and so, where were we? I keep getting on these circular things and I forget where I began.

Norie Guthrie: You're fine. You're fine. I was just asking about contributing to “Omaha Rainbow.”

Richard Dobson: Oh the road to Omaha. Well “Omaha” went on for a good number of years I guess of printing my stuff there.

Norie Guthrie: Oh okay.

Richard Dobson: And that was very, uh, very, uh, advantageous to me at again circular sort of the way because European music fans were reading “Omaha Rainbow.”

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And after I, and then when I made my first record, my first LP here in, here in Houston with Rock Romano and then I put it out myself and then, no it was on Buttermilk actually. It was on Buttermilk and I started getting these overseas record orders and I was selling records in Europe. I was, like, hey but that was the seed I think that started my European fan base sort of. Or that's how, and the, our music is really not really all that popular. It's pretty much niche music. At least it was and still is I think.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: But the people who communicate about it, people like David John –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. Right. Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: The fella who's staying with them, and they network a lot and that's how the word got out and that's kinda the beginning of my, my own making and selling records touring, eventually touring over there.

Norie Guthrie: Right. Yeah so I guess the newsletter through “Omaha Rainbow” and then just your own private, your personal newsletter was a good way to connect with the fans.

Richard Dobson: Yeah and it was a good way to keep 'cause I was really wanting to play music and learn music and write and maybe come up with a hit country song or something, you know, and that was my main game plan but it was the way of keeping the journalism and the prose going.

Norie Guthrie: Oh okay.

Richard Dobson: Kinda keep my, keep my practice a little bit.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And it just developed into its own thing and, uh, now it's a lifetime habit.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Um, let's see. Can you talk about those early records that you made, those first two?

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: That you made here in Houston.

Richard Dobson: I made them both with Rock Romano.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, the first one was, I can't remember, I can't even remember the studio. I think it was in Bellaire.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: And I just, I just kind of did it like I'd seen my friends do them in Nashville with the demo sessions and, you know, it was just, like, let's get a band together, teach them the songs and roll the tape. You know, we did them mostly live and it was a learning experience totally. Still is. And the fascinating one it just that point where the song becomes a record that you can put on and reproduce the sound. And it really, it fascinates me to this day, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, let's see the second record was, well the first one went pretty good. I said okay; let's make another one. So we started, we started the next one –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: – with, uh, with Rock. And, uh, that was called *The Big Taste* and that was, uh, big taste was slang for real good marijuana by the way.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, okay. Okay. All right. That makes sense.

Richard Dobson: It was code.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: And I started out with Rock and then he got busy and I ended up finishing it out at Sugar Hill Studios with a man named Mickey Moody.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: And he kinda, and, and we got it finished and then we, we put that one out the first, that one we, uh, try to make it kinda like a little art project. And we, uh, we, uh, friend of mine in town named Tom Bridges was, uh, was, he was doin' color Xerox and kind of messin' around with that. And I said well let's, we'll get, we'll, we'll make ca, color Xeroxes and hand, uh, hand paste 'em onto the LPs.

Norie Guthrie: Mm.

Richard Dobson: Then have 'em shrink wrapped and he said and then number and sign 'em.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And then have 'em shrink wrapped. And we did that with the first 200. So it was, that was kind of, like, a little art project at the same time.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: I was livin' in Galveston when we put that one out.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. And you were also working, um, offshore –

Richard Dobson: Uh huh.

Norie Guthrie: – during that time. Was that –

Richard Dobson: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Was it kind of – 'cause it seems like there, it's two dif – very, uh, in my mind it seems like two very different worlds, right?

Richard Dobson: Really.

Norie Guthrie: Coming into Houston and playing and things.

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: And also working offshore.

Richard Dobson: Uh huh.

Norie Guthrie: Like, were there, we-were there a lot more connections?

Richard Dobson: Well it was kind of, uh, it was schizophrenic existence I guess, but –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: It was two things. Uh, one is, one is I really, like, I'm kinda outdoor person and I'm not really a, I never could work in an office and I never could really work in, for organizations too much, and, but I liked bein' outside.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I liked the ocean. I liked the Gulf. It was just, like, mm.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, and that, uh, that provided me the opportunity to work out there in a, in a place I liked. I hated the oil rigs but I loved the boats.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: But it was, it was all, it was a money thing too. You could make –

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: – pretty good money out there in those days.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Probably still can because you work 12-hour days. So after you've – and you usually work 7 days, so after about, if, after your third day, pretty soon you're all, you're after 40 hours.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Just a little after 3 days you're already on overtime.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So your checks were pretty good. And, and another really interesting thing was you're clean out there.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, okay; yeah.

Richard Dobson: You're workin' hard and you're clean and it's really good food and really good food and, and it's, it's, it's – people who, who live here would just continually drinkin' and druggin' and partyin', uh, don't ever get a break.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And I think it gave me a break.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So in, in the end it made me more healthy in –

Norie Guthrie: Mm.

Richard Dobson: – workin' out there.

Norie Guthrie: And then was that time usually very productive for you creatively?

Richard Dobson: Not too much. Occasionally some stuff like that “Baby Ride Easy” song –

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: – occasionally that, I, I would try to keep some kinda journal or notebook but I was usually too tired to really do anything.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: But I, I, I used to carry my guitar out there but I never really had much time to use it and you'd be too tired anyway, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Right. When, um, why did you make a more permanent move to Nashville in '85?

Richard Dobson: Mm, are you sure it was '85? Think it's a little bit earlier.

Norie Guthrie: It's a little bit earlier?

Richard Dobson: I think so.

Norie Guthrie: That's fine; yeah.

Richard Dobson: You can, you can check it. Uh, well, that time, by that time I had, I think I just wanted to give it another shot.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: The music business; yeah. Uh, I may have had some luck with somethin' too. May –

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: – maybe “Baby Ride Easy” got recorded by Carlene Carter and –

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: And, and I think it gave me a little shot in the arm.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: Carlene Carter and Dave Edmunds recorded “Baby Ride Easy.” That might've had somethin' to do with it. Uh, and I, uh, I just wanted to do more, and then I, uh, by that time I was with Lyse.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And she was kind of at loose ends, so she said she would go. She would go to Nashville with me.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And we did. We went out there and tried to make a new start together. And I got jumped back in the music business and, and, uh, gave it a pretty good shot, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Uh, still wasn't that, I still didn't have much commercial success but I was, you know, I just felt like I, I felt like I belonged there.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: You know, I felt like I had a shot, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Can you talk about some of the music that you made there?

Richard Dobson: The music?

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm; the music that you made, the songs that you wrote.

Richard Dobson: Let's see, what did I? Uh, after, uh, the next record was, I think the next record was *Save the World*, I made with Jim Rooney.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And Jim Rooney was a – well, he's a, he was a Yankee but he's okay. No, he's from up, he's from up, up back east and he has roots in the, in the folk world that was just amazing. He's been involved in a lot of festivals and –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: – just a very, very central guy. And he ended up workin' with Jack Clement.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Famous producer also who did some, lotta work with Townes and other people. And, uh, uh, so we went and made a record at Jack Clement's studio.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, I should-a had some of those records around me so I could remember some of the songs I was workin' on.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: Generally at the time I was hopin' to write songs that would be picked up by commercial country artists.

Norie Guthrie: Right. And then did, um, some of the work that you did in Nashville, were those songs picked up?

Richard Dobson: Mm, not, not so much.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Not so much. A, a fe, a few, uh, well you, you mentioned earlier in the interview, uh, "A Piece of Wood and Steel."

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: That was picked up earlier on.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: By David Allan Coe.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And then, and then in this time, uh, uh, in the '80's and then another song was picked up by Nanci Griffith.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And that was called "Ballad of Robin Winter-Smith."

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Another, another off the wall song. It seems like I have more luck with off the wall songs than I do with when I try to get serious, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Uh, and, uh, let's see. What else was goin' on then? I went there time, I, I, uh, I met Pinto Bennett while I was there.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: I used to go out there and tra, travel around with him in Idaho and –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And that was, that was another part of my musical education.

Norie Guthrie: What did you take away from working with him?

Richard Dobson: Oh, honkey-tonk, honk, honkey-tonk experience.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: I was mostly a folk singer but I got to sit in with a real, real western honkey-tonk band. And that was with pedal steel and –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: – that was, that was part of my education too.

Norie Guthrie: Did you ever use that kind of influence for some songs later on?

Richard Dobson: Sure, I would try to write, write, try to write in that, in that genre and that venue, you know, in those, in those ways, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Yeah that was a – very much so; yeah. Western swing a little bit.

Norie Guthrie: Right. So why did you eventually move, you did work in Nashville, and also you did, um, an album of Townes' music while you were there, correct?

Richard Dobson: Okay, yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Richard Dobson: That's an interesting story. Uh, I was, uh, I have to be careful about this. This gonna be a history of my, my marriages rather than the music. Uh, so I was, I lived with, uh, with Lyse Moore.

Norie Guthrie: Mm.

Richard Dobson: And we lived outside of town and, um, in Will, Williamson County and, uh, when I started touring in Europe and then, uh, I was, I hooked up with this girl named Susie Monick.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: I played banjo, mandolin and she would, she had been in one of the first all-girl bluegrass bands.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And we got together so then, uh, and then we had a little, little band and then, then we toured, made several tours of Europe and this band was called State of the Heart.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Instead of State of the Art. And then, uh, I got into an altercation with the, uh, with the bass player.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, and he, he ran the rent car over a thing about that high and, and gutted the rent car and ended up, we, we ended up with a huge bill.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And we never did get along after that. And the, the band kind of split up.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I was just, I was just furious and I, I just, I just wanted to put my head into some other project.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Something completely, it didn't have anything to do with me directly.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I, and then one day the idea came to me. You know it would be really cool to make a record of Townes songs.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So I got Jimmy Gray and, and, and, uh, and Danny Rowland, two people that used to play with Townes.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And Susie and me. And we went in the studio and we went a long day. We cut all those songs.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, gosh.

Richard Dobson: And it was, that was great fun.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I'm real glad I did that.

Norie Guthrie: Did Townes Van Zandt work with you on it all or?

Richard Dobson: No.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: I just showed it to him one day. He was, yeah, he was pretty surprised. Yeah, he was, yeah. I think I was the first one that ever did that.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, okay.

Richard Dobson: I didn't get much credit for it. Nobody knew about it but it came out on Brambus, the –

Norie Guthrie: Yes.

Richard Dobson: In Switzerland. So nobody ever knew about it.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, okay.

Richard Dobson: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. And then I, I know that he's pretty popular, he also has kind of a, a large fan base in Europe.

Richard Dobson: In Europe.

Norie Guthrie: And so I assume that the record did pretty well.

Richard Dobson: Well, they knew about Townes on his own. He toured quite a bit in Europe.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: He, yeah, he was, had devoted, loyal, people cared about him a great deal.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: The more literate fans.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: You know. Naturally I guess.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. So then when did your time in Nashville kinda come to an end?

Richard Dobson: Okay, well, I think it was, it was in about the mid 90s.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: And then by that time the story telling traditional country stuff was, it was gone.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. Right.

Richard Dobson: The scene had changed yet again.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Garth Brooks was in ascendancy.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: The big money was rolling in. I mean it was, it was, it just wasn't, I didn't feel like it was my time anymore.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And then, uh, you know, was like another relationship had busted up.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: By that time, I knew I wanted to get back to writing prose.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: I was saying I wanna write a damn book.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So I, and my parents had a place in Jamaica Beach so, and they were getting old.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, I had a chance to go live there and it let them use that house for another couple of years because I was there keeping it up and I, when they would come I'd carry their stuff upstairs and –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: – you know, it was a good kinda like symbiosis going on where I could use the place and have a place to live and write.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And then the woman that I'm married to now.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And we had known each other for over 10 years.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And she, exchanged photos and stuff like that and, uh. I didn't, I, I wasn't really trying to encourage it because I didn't see any way it was gonna work.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: But a long story short, she ran away and flew to Texas, flew to Houston.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I picked her up and we lived together on the beach for almost a year. She had to go back once or twice.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And we lived together on the beach for about a year.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: At the house. And then, uh, so anyway I was no longer in Nashville.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: In other words.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: So it was late 90s when I left Nashville. So when I left to, uh, come to the beach house I didn't go back to live in Nashville again.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: And is that when you were starting to work on *Gulf Coast Boys*?

Richard Dobson: That's when I worked on the *Gulf Coast Boy* manuscript. I wrote that in Galveston.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: On Galveston Island. It's kinda my, it's kinda my symbolic home anyway.

Norie Guthrie: Right. So was that, was that an easy process? Was it difficult? Um, 'cause I've, in your journals it looks like you've gone back through them and made marks and picked out pieces that you might –

Richard Dobson: It could be you might have run across, uh, some notes that, of stuff I was pulling out of my, see I used the journals for newsletters.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, oh, is it for newsletters. Okay.

Richard Dobson: Well, or, maybe not so much for newsletters but I may have gone back to those journals to pull out, uh, uh, things for the book.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: And so was that kind of an easy process to work through or?

Richard Dobson: No, no, it, no, no, yeah. Yeah. I didn't have any problem with that.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Richard Dobson: No, I, I really liked working on that book.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: And how long did it take to write?

Richard Dobson: Uh, I don't remember. It couldn't have been too long maybe a few months.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, okay. Okay. And then when did you go ahead and then move to Switzerland?

Richard Dobson: Well, there again it was kinda back and forth. You know what I mean?

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: It's the same thing that, you know, like leaving Nashville for Texas.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Sometimes it would take three or four moves back and forth before I realized, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Uh, when, uh, uh, Edith had to go back to, to Switzerland to take care of business and stuff. She, she was, she had grown kids. I mean, you know –

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: – it was like a, a big shock, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: She, it shocked her. Her whole family and everything just, just ran away to, just got on an airplane and flew to Texas.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So there was a lot of business to take care of and then there was a divorce and then there, and then, then that cost a lot of money and, you know, she did, she said I don't have the money to pay this lawyer and, uh, she went to the social, somebody said well look. There's a social agency that can help you.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And then, and then she went there and, and talked to them and the guy said, uh, I think we can use somebody like you so she came home and she said they gave me a job. So now, uh, I go, oh, okay and I thought well it's just, I think I'll just, we're not going back to the

beach, uh, you know. By that time, I think my parents were getting ready to sell the place anyway.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: So I said ah okay we'll live together in Europe. It's a new adventure, a new wife, a new, a new partner anyway.

Norie Guthrie: Right, right.

Richard Dobson: And we'll still together now.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, so that began my European chapter. Like a new life, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: This is a song that, uh, I wrote in the, in the 80s.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: When I was in Tennessee I was, this isn't one of those, uh, country songs that I was trying to write. This is one that came to me from a book. You know Thomas McGuane?

Norie Guthrie: I don't.

Richard Dobson: He's a writer, a novelist. He wrote a book called Nobody's, Somebody, Nobody's Angel.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: And it was a woman, and he described a woman in, in there, uh, who, a Cheyenne Indian woman whose body was stuck up with thimbles on the fingers.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: And it was such a striking image that I came back to me about 6 months after I read the book and I just got tears in my eyes and so I wrote the book. I made, kinda made up the story. This one was recorded by a few people.

When the wind blew off the mountain, when the clouds were sweeping low / When a ragged band of Cheyenne Indians stopped along the road / And among them was a young girl who lay dying of fever / Just about a hundred years ago.

Whooooo

*The light was swiftly fading, and the night it promised snow
They wrapped her in an army coat to keep her from the cold
Placed silver thimbles on her fingers so someone's god would know*

She was a useful girl who could sew

Whooooo, she could sew

*And darkness swirled around them like a curtain on a stage
Like the closing of a door or the turning of a page
They say a lifetime's over in the twinkling of an eye
It don't hardly count for nothing as the ages roll on by
While kings and queens and princes have left mighty works in stone*

*Just to let somebody know
Whooooo, somebody know*

*That's how the workmen found her when they were widening the road
Wrapped up in an army coat where they laid her long ago
Silver thimbles on her fingers she slept beneath the snow*

*A useful girl who could sew
Whooooo, she could sew*

*The darkness swirled around them like a curtain on a stage
Like the closing of a door or the turning of a page
The wind blew off the mountain and the clouds were sweeping low
When a ragged band of Cheyenne Indians stopped along the road
Among them was a young girl who lay dying of fever
Just about a hundred years ago.*

*Whooooo, hmmm
Whooooo, and she could sew*

Norie Guthrie: So since you're now in Switzerland how would you describe being a Texas singer songwriter overseas? That experience. What is that like?

Richard Dobson: Well, it has a, it has a certain, uh, it has a certain, oh, I can't remember the word. It has a certain advantage I think in a way because Texas is quite well known.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: You know Texas, the image of Texas is almost as well-known as McDonald's arches and the cross so I, uh, uh, and I'm not, I'm not, you know, I'm not really adverse to, I'm not a professional Texan and I don't really –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: – write songs about how great it is to come from Texas and stuff like that but I'm not beyond taking advantage of the, of the, uh, the, of the fact that Texas music is appreciated because I'm part of that scene and I –

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: – and, uh, so I'm entitled to it.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Yeah, and so, yeah, uh, it's, it's kinda funny, uh. One of my favorite, one of the best songwriters I think working in the English language would, is, uh, David Olney.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: He has the misfortune of coming from Rhode Island which is the tiniest state in the country and he don't get much, uh, mileage out of that.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: I mean coming from Texas just kinda of a little bit of a natural, uh, a little bit of a natural, uh, boost.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm. So.

Norie Guthrie: Is there a difference between the fan bases in Europe compared to here in the states?

Richard Dobson: A little bit. Uh, the, the way, I got into, uh, into the, the, the, you know, when Americans go to Europe, uh, it's, it's kind of funny. They get adopted by different countries.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And those, and the fans over there there's huge music fans in, in the Netherlands.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And in England and in Germany and in Italy and in Switzerland but they don't communicate with each other.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So if an American artist lands in the Netherlands, uh, let's see there's a guy, I can't think of his name there. He lived there for years.

Norie Guthrie: David, David Rodriguez?

Richard Dobson: Rodriguez, yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Richard Dobson: See I mean there's a good example. He landed in the Netherlands.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So he, he's pretty well known there.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: But, and nobody in Switzerland knows about David Rodriguez.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: Kinda like that.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: I landed in Switzerland because of, uh, Edith and, um, but that, they had a group of, uh, they had a group of, of, of very knowledgeable people about, about our music who, appreciation of the, the art of songwriting and the crafts, the craft behind it and the st, and the history and they know all this stuff.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: And, uh, and those were the people that were kinda like in my fans and this is, this is about 20 years ago or 20, in Switzerland it existed. Okay. You've gotta also figure there's, there's people who are country fans who like to dress up and play cowboy you see.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And when we first went over there and started touring we were like oh look at that. You know, you could see people that, with six guns and, and actually in England it got so bad that you would be doing a concert and people would be firing off blank pistols and uh, ba buh. And I see people in confederate, uh, in confederate officer's uniforms throwing around a.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: It's kind of a make believe.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Dressed up costume kind of a thing.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So to me, uh, that's different.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: I mean when you go, people, people wear boots and hats here in Texas 'cause it's just regular part of the apparel you know. It's not a conscious, it's not a style, a statement of, of style necessarily.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: Or not so much. So there's that and, uh, lately, uh, which is not, which I, I really I mean I, I don't despise it but it's, it's really, doesn't have much to do with the music and it, it works against the songwriters, is the line dancing, and they like to dress up and they like to line dance and I'm sure, they have a lot of fun with it, you know, but they're not music fans and

they don't really care about songwriters because they have choreographed, uh, routines that they do with the country music.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: So country music performers kinda pretend to become a, an adjunct to the dancing scene and I don't have anything to do with that.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: You know, I'm a songwriter or a folk singer, uh, you know. That's, it gets too far away from me so that's, that's kinda what you've got there as fans in your Europe and they could go either way. You could get, you could get really knowledgeable people who know about your scene and, and about the songwriters and stuff.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Or you get the yahoos who like to just dress up. It can run the gamut.

Norie Guthrie: Right. That's really interesting.

Richard Dobson: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so what are you working on now?

Richard Dobson: Right now I'm, I'm still working on, on my music. It's, it's kind of, well it's frustrating, um, you can't sell your CDs anymore and that was about half our income, or that, you know, you get the, the money. You get paid for a gig and then, then the CDs is kinda like your gas money.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Or your motel money and that's kinda vanished so it's, that's, that's tough. But I still like to make records and, uh, you know, I'll be 75 in a few months so, you know, I can see that this isn't going to go on forever, you know, and I don't really have the power to tour so much as I used to.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: But, but I'm working on another record with some Swiss guys. Yeah. And I'm working on a novel and that's, that's been, that's been a source of tremendous, uh, excitement to me, uh, very challenging, different, different than the other work.

Norie Guthrie: Do you wanna talk about that?

Richard Dobson: Different than memoirs.

Norie Guthrie: Do you wanna talk about that?

Richard Dobson: Sure. Uh, yeah, it's about Galveston and, and it's about the 1900 storm. I could do you a long song about tell you what the, what the, uh, uh, what the, part of the book's about.

Norie Guthrie: That's fine. Yeah.

Richard Dobson: Is that all right?

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Richard Dobson: Well, I hope I can remember it. I didn't prepare for this because it was too much to prepare for. I thought I'd just kinda do it off the cuff and –

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: – hope for the best.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And also I didn't bring my pic so I'm kinda naked fingers here.

*Twentieth century just begun
And I'm marrying my first husband, Tom
He was my brave engineer
Railroad man and my sweetheart, dear
Court me in Baton Rouge
We swore our love forever true
Followed work to Galveston
Settled there and built a home
Wood frame cottage near the beach
On the hottest days there was still a breeze
A place that we could call our own
Supper on and work was done*

*We were young then
Those were good times
On the island
There was sunshine
And our baby
Daily growing
And the knowing
All of this was mine*

*What came one dread September morning
A warning of a coming storm
Tom was called to work that day
Mend the bridge out on the bay
When the winds began to shriek
And the rain came pouring down in sheets
Orders to evacuate
Leave the house without delay
On the second floor Tremont Hotel
All around was roaring hell*

*In that ...
I began my labor pains*

*With the midwife
On that wild night
Came my first born
By kerosene light
What a bad time
To be born in
In the morning
We were both alive*

*That afternoon when I came down
Carrying my baby son
I walked out through the ruined town
Passed the bodies of the people drowned
The storm had blown our home away
In the railroad bridge across the bay
Cars and locomotive gone
With my dear husband, Tom
All our lives gone out to sea
All our simple hopes and dreams
With my baby in my arms
I said, "Child, your name is Tom."*

*We were rescued
Went to New Orleans
I never found
My husband's family
Lived with my sister
I met a fine man
He was kind by us
And waited patiently*

*Well so began another life
Children came and the years went by
Looking at my oldest son
I would often think of Tom
My sister had a coffee shop
Where the people like to stop and talk
Through the door a stranger came
With a story from the hurricane
He told a tale how he survived
By clinging to a railroad tie*

"Is that you, Tom?"

*I can't believe my eyes
Your wife and baby
They are still alive
We'd thought you long gone
She took another name
I could swear
That boys got your eyes."*

*Well, at a boathouse by the lake
A clandestine, secret meeting place
Tom came walking up the path
Embraced me and held me fast
Smell of jasmine in the air
Brushed my cheek and he touched my hair
Told me he was also wed
Avowed our love and then we said
We must go on with our new lives
It's for this reason we survived
"Tell me about my first born son"
I said, "His name is Tom"*

*"Are you happy now?"
I said, "Yes, I am"
"I am too I guess
This must be God's plan
Promise me one thing
I can see my son"
I said, "Of course, Tom"
And it was done.*

*We were young then
Those were good times
On the island
There was sunshine
And our baby
Daily growing
And the knowing
All of this was mine*

So that's the kernel of the, of the novel.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And, uh.

Norie Guthrie: Are you enjoying work, do you enjoy, have you enjoyed working on it?

Richard Dobson: Yeah, it's been, uh, uh, an incredible, uh, I, I always, way back when I wanted to write novels and I ended up writing memoirs. I didn't quite know the difference.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: About writing an autobiographical novel but I, I have since learned that there are things that you have to do in a novel.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: When you're telling this type of story and you have to, you have to build towards a certain climax and, you know, and there's got to be a bad guy and I don't know who the bad guy is in my story. It might be the storm. I don't know. Yes, it's been a tremendous challenge and, and just getting to know these characters has, has been fascinating.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And I, I've had some help too because, uh, I should mention this in this context. Uh, lately in the last 10 years, 10, uh, I've met two people who, are actually pulling off more or less what was, has always been my dream.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Which is to, to do the music and make music and make CDs and, and play, play shows.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And at the same time write books.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: And publish them. And those two people are, uh, Mike Blakely, uh, who's a very accomplished songwriter and a novelist, award winning novelist and, and the other fellow is Blakely's friend, W.C. Jameson, with whom I, I went ahead and made, made a record.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: So these new people in my life have been kind of, of late role models in being able to, to, to balance, uh, a prose writing career with a music career.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Richard Dobson: And I, I, I believe they feed off each other.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: That's interesting.

Richard Dobson: It's a good, uh, I'm glad you brought that up.

Norie Guthrie: Well, I, is, I guess if you, as you look back on your career –

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: – are any things that maybe we didn't discuss that stand out?

Richard Dobson: Mm.

Norie Guthrie: Collaborations or?

Richard Dobson: We haven't talked about that but, uh, that's just kind of a natural thing, collaboration. I like to do them. I still do.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: It's a good way to, uh, well, after you've written a, a couple of hundred songs maybe. I don't how many I've written all together but –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: – you kind of run, run out of ideas and then that, that, then you can go and, and write with somebody else and you come up with fresh material and I know that Guy Clark did that almost exclusively at the end of his life.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: They would only, he's one of the most brilliant songwriters and he collaborates a lot and I've been doing it too. It's just a different, I enjoy that very much too.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Is there, I guess there's just, does someone kind of come up with an idea or you guys work together at the same time or you kind of email each other, that kind of thing?

Richard Dobson: Everyone, everyone is different. Uh, in Nashville it's, it's, it's, it's, in Nashville they expect to, to write a song. They, you met, you have a 10:30 writing appointment and they, when you, for a couple of hours and you, you're at the end, uh, at the end you expect to have a, a song. Maybe demos.

Norie Guthrie: Wow.

Richard Dobson: Yeah, it's, it's, it's, it's that intense.

Norie Guthrie: That seems like a lot of pressure.

Richard Dobson: Mm hmm. But for me, no, I, it's, it's, it's more like, uh, it's different every time.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: I have a, a have a co-writing friend in, in, uh, Germany that I work with and he sends me melodies.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Richard Dobson: If I hear something, I say oh that sounds like, listen, and I make up a story. We've done a couple that way.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Richard Dobson: Yeah. You can work all kinds of different ways.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. Okay.

Richard Dobson: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Thank you so much and thank you for, um, doing some songs and everything.

Richard Dobson: Okay.

Norie Guthrie: It was really nice.

Richard Dobson: Thank you.

Norie Guthrie: All right.