

Interviewee: George Enslé

Interviewer: Norie Guthrie

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Interview Transcript

Norie Guthrie: My name is Norie Guthrie from the Wisdom Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University. I am interviewing George Enslé. Today is May 5, 2017. This is part of the Houston Folk Music Archive oral history project. Can you tell me about your early life growing up in Houston?

George Enslé: Well, I was born there, uh, on September 6 of '48 and, uh, in St. Joseph's Hospital and, uh, at first we, uh, my parents had a home in Bellaire on Mildred Street and, uh, we lived there for a few years and then we moved to, uh, a house on Rotan Street and then a house on Parano Street and a house on Springwood Drive and then we, um, we had a transition I think, oh Spriggs Way after that. We moved a lot.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: I lived there 17 years. We lived in about eight or nine or ten different scenarios.

Norie Guthrie: Wow.

George Enslé: Mostly Spring Branch –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: – Memorial and Sharpstown area at the end of the, my stay there.

Norie Guthrie: What, uh, high school did you graduate from?

George Enslé: I graduated from Robert E. Lee High School. I went to Memorial High School first year they opened for 2 years and then the last 2 years went to Robert E. Lee.

Norie Guthrie: What first drew you to music?

George Enslé: My dad. He was a professional musician before I was born back in, uh, Syracuse, New York. He worked during the swing era playing in a swing band. He played all the woodwind instruments, the saxes and flutes and clarinets and traveled up, up into the Borscht Belt where the, of the New York Catskill, uh Resort, uh, up, up in that area and he also played a lot of, uh, Speak Easy's and colleges and, uh, even the dance marathons and whatnot. So, after he had moved to Houston and I was born there was always a lot of instruments around. All different

kinds of instruments. So, you know, I would always kind of sneak in and open one up and play with it and this, that and the other and when it came time to, uh, get in band in junior high school I, uh, picked up the saxophone. I played alto sax, um, in the Spring Branch Junior High in the marching and the orchestra band and, uh, when I went to high school I switched over to tenor sax, um, and played in a couple of R&B bands. The Squires is one of them and the Wild Childs was another one, but in the meantime when I was 14 we were living over off Westview in an apartment in kind of an interim situation between houses. Uh, my mother found, uh, I was, I was, uh, guitar wise I was, I was influenced by my brother's friend Ross Gentry and he, he came over to the house. My brother was 8 years older than me and Ross would come over to the house and, um, he played, uh, folk songs, he played show tunes and, you know, things like "They Call the Wind Mariah" and, uh, I was, uh I said that's what I want to do, you know, and, um, and then, uh, shortly after that when I was 13, uh, my parents gave me a guitar and, uh, then, uh, by the time I was 14 I had been trying for about a year on my own to learn how to play and, uh, I wasn't having a whole lot of luck teaching myself guitar and so my mother cut out this ad for a free guitar lesson at a place called Telshick Studios, which was literally across the street from the apartment we were living at so, uh, I went over there for my free lesson and low and behold when I opened the door and, and met, uh, my teacher he was a bonified full-fledged beatnik. I mean this was before the times of hippies. This was 1962, you know. Had the Huarache sandals and had a beard and, uh, his name was Darryl Harris and, uh, he sat down and played classical guitar and I said that's what I want to do. So, I started taking lessons from him and, uh, if I learned the classical lesson I went home and practiced it and came back and was somewhat proficient he would show me a folk song because I would see him play folk songs, you know, before the lesson and after the lesson. I said that's what I want to do. So, I learned how to play folk music by, uh, performing and learning the classical, uh, technique and songs and so by the time I was 16 or so, which would be like 1964, 16 or 17, he introduced me to the Sand Mountain Coffee House scene, which was the folk scene at the time in Houston and, uh, introduced me to Townes Van Zandt to Guy Clark who were friends of his and Don Sanders and so I just, I saw Townes and said that's what I want to do. So, a long story short, um, if that's possible, um, I started, uh, soon thereafter, uh, playing at the Sand Mountain Coffee House myself when I was like, uh, 17, 18 I guess. Let's see, 1967 I guess was the first time I played there so I was just, I hadn't quite turned 19 yet I guess.

Norie Guthrie: Um, what was Sand Mountain Coffee House like?

George Enslé: Well, it was a, it was a folk coffee house so it had all the fishnet candles and, uh, you know, dimly lit room and, uh, the little circular tables and they served coffees and teas. I don't think they had any alcohol at all. I mean it was a coffee house. And Guy Clark lived upstairs and Guy, uh, worked on Volkswagens and guitars. He was, uh, like a master mechanic and also a master luthier or he was working on it. He had the idiot's manual. I'll never forget that because back in the '60s everybody that had a Volkswagen had the idiots repair manual, which was this great illustrated, um, and somewhat comical manual for, uh, the care and feeding of your Volkswagen, which was a pretty temperamental critter and, uh, he lived upstairs with his first wife, uh, Susan I guess her name was.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And she played. She played, uh, she was quite good if I remember, uh, at Sand Mountain. Don Sanders was booking it at that time because Mrs. Carrick was in the hospital with some heart issues and, uh, John Carrick was kind of in and out of the picture, her son, and Don Sanders gave me my first gig.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: He was booking the Sand Mountain Coffee House and, uh, Carolyn Hester would come through there sometimes and I think, uh, um, you know, the regular folkies that were on, on the circuit would come through there.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Um, and, uh, I'm not sure if Jerry Jeff Walker was, was down in town yet or not, but at some point I think he might have played there too, but it was a very neat and very, uh, uh, quiet listening, you know, listening environment and sober audience.

Norie Guthrie: So, what was that first gig like?

George Enslé: Scary. I had to sit down when I first started playing because my legs shook so much.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: So, I would always play sitting down and then finally I conquered that and, uh, but, uh, at that time I remember I had a Harmony Sovereign guitar. That was the first steel string guitar I got and I bought that, uh, through Charlie Gistantis [sp?]. Charlie Gistantis was like the classical guitar guru for uh, for Houston and he had a store, he had a shop and it was, it was just, uh, an absolute mess. I mean it was, it was, it was beautifully, uh, messy, you know, but – have you done, have you gotten any interviews or remarks about Charlie Gistantis?

Norie Guthrie: No. I haven't heard of him before.

George Enslé: And he was like Darryl's, uh, mentor I think.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Darryl Harris's mentor who was my mentor. He was over, I think it was on Westheimer I'm pretty sure and, uh, he was just this big kind of an overweight fella and, uh, uh, he was very eccentric and, uh, it seemed like he spoke with an accent too. Gistantis now I don't know what kind of, uh, what derivative that would be, what nationality, but anyway, I think he was the one that sold me this Harmony Sovereign that I had and when I played at Sand Mountain, you know, it was, the first steel string guitar I got was a Gibson and when I started taking classical lessons, um, you know, I had to get a gut string guitar so I got a gut string guitar and then when I started playing folk music I needed to go back to steel string so I found this Harmony Sovereign and when I played at Sand Mountain I remember how, how good it sounded

to the point where there were some of the artists that were playing there wanted to borrow it who had Martin guitars. It was a beautiful sounding Harmony Sovereign from the '60s, you know, and it was, uh, it was just a really cool – they had a, they had a front room, which is a large room and then they had a back room, which was a smaller room and it was kind of a shotgun shape. Uh, the front room was more, was more square shaped and, uh, from the stairs up to Guy's apartment, um, and it was, I guess it was on Shepherd or – where was it? It was –

Norie Guthrie: Was it Richmond?

George Enslé: Richmond.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

George Enslé: Yeah. That's where it was. Yeah. So, uh, that's what it was like.

Norie Guthrie: Um, what other clubs did you play in Houston early on?

George Enslé: Well at that point, um, I moved to Austin in '66 so at that point I would just come back in the summers typically at first and I was playing at, uh, La Bodega, um, Theodore's, um, Houlihan's. There was a place called something like Sunshine or Sunflower or something. It was a little hippie place. Houlihan's of course and La Bodega and Theodore's were bars and, uh, clubs and restaurants, um, and then the Sa-, and then the Anderson Fair, started playing there in the mid-70s.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: So those were the first – and then the Old Quarter after that.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

George Enslé: But those were the first places I can remember playing.

Norie Guthrie: Um, no one really talks about La Bodega very much. Could you describe? Do you remember?

George Enslé: Well, that was a long time ago. I'm sorry to say I don't remember all that much about it. Um, all I know is it was a place I used to play.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

George Enslé: And it was in the Montrose –

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

George Enslé: – area.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Ensle: Houlihan's and Theodore's I guess lasted a lot longer.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Ensle: And, uh, but yeah, La Bodega I hope I'm not making that up.

Norie Guthrie: You're not. You're not. I, I just read it is a place to attend to hear folk music in like 1970.

George Ensle: Uh huh.

Norie Guthrie: There was an article I feel it was like from '76 and it's listed on there.

George Ensle: Uh huh.

Norie Guthrie: Like no one really mentions it too much and I saw it and I was like okay, La Bodega. Okay.

George Ensle: If you, uh, if you ask, if you ask – are you going to do one of these with like Bill Kay probably? Well, I know Bill's still around and he might remember it. Gosh, I don't know. Vince might remember it if you ask him, but, uh, yeah. Those were the main places I had come back and then at that time I had picked up a bass player, Greg Valdespino –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Ensle: – uh, was playing with me so we would do a duo and, uh –

Norie Guthrie: So, what kind of venues did you enjoy playing? Did you kind of like places like Anderson Fair or was Theodore's more your style?

George Ensle: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah?

George Ensle: Well, Anderson Fair at first was just, uh, it was a spaghetti place, you know and it was just a little shotgun room, that first room when you first, uh, walk in now and they had like spaghetti specials and pizza and beer and, uh, if my memory serves me, when you went in the stage was just right there on the left and it was just filled with tables and kitchen in the back, but, uh, I met a lot of people there. Pete Gorisch, um, Vince Bell, um, probably Eric Taylor, probably met him there. Uh, there was a fellow named Rebel Smith.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: People talk about Reb. Um, and Bill and Lucille Cade and, uh, of course then there was like Bill Stains and Bill Hearn, uh, not Bill Hearn, Bill Haymes. Bill and Bonnie Hearn must have been playing at Austin then, but, um, kind of really enjoyed the camaraderie and the fellowship and the, you know, we were all sort of doing the same thing.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: You know, doing our own music and, uh, playing acoustic, you know, folk music and, uh, then they had the block parties, which was, you know, a big festival, fun festival, but I met a lot of really fine people there, Steven Jarrard and Franci and Pete Gorisch and, um, then the owners who were like a collaborative, you know. They kind of was an interchanging sort of group of people.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: But the Old Quarter, that was more of a listening club and that was a notch above because it would have touring acts in there like Mance Lipscomb, uh, Lightnin' Hopkins and, uh, David Bromberg. That's where I met David Bromberg and, uh, he actually came and sat in with me and I, I got to know his, his clarinet player Billy Novick pretty well and, and, uh, uh, he would come over to the house when he would play in Austin and we'd hang out and play together and, uh, when Bromberg, Billy Joe Shaver, uh, and, you know, so the Old Quarter was downtown. It was totally different than the Montrose, you know, hippie kind of, uh, pot smoking, uh, you know, psychedelic thing. It was like a hard core next to the transient hotel, the DeGeorge Hotel across the street from the police station.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And so it was, it was kind of a polar opposite from Anderson Fair and those kind of coffee house, you know, Sand Mountain Coffee House say.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: But on the other hand it still had the caliber of, of songwriters and performers that, uh, there was, it was just top shelf all the way and the owners were all about, you know, the music, the lyrics and, you know, not really about the bottom line and, uh, you know, raking in a lot of money. Next door in the DeGeorge Hotel is where Sinbad lived and, uh, he was an ex-merchant Marine, an elderly character who, uh, had throat cancer or something and he had his larynx removed. He talked like this, you know, and, uh, uh, drank white port wine. He's the fellow that inspired Guy Clark's song about, uh, the whino.

Norie Guthrie: Oh.

George Enslé: Um, I'm 99 percent sure because that was, um, one time I sat down on the curb with, uh, Sinbad and, uh, I'll never forget. I was having kind of down time and, uh, and he sat down next to me and he handed me his bottle of white port wine that he just drank like a, just carried a fifth around and drank it, you know, and I saw it. I was like maybe 22 years old or

something, you know, and I thought I was pretty tough and I took a big swig and gagged and handed it back to him, you know, and he said, "It speaks with authority, doesn't it?" But it was a completely different scene.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: And it was a, and I know Eric Taylor and, and Vince Bell were playing there pretty regularly. We all played there pretty regularly and we made pretty decent money, you know, for that time period and, uh, then we played like U of H, uh, the coffee house at U of H and, uh, and then we would do the, uh, the *Friends* TV show and that *Little Ol' Show* that Bruce Bryant produced.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

George Enslie: And we'd do some of the, uh, the, uh, muscular dystrophy I guess it was, the marathons and Bruce Bryant was a real big supporter of what we did.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: And his *Little Ol' Show*. I think Ron Stone was involved with that.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: Uh, as well.

Norie Guthrie: I think so.

George Enslie: So those were, those were most of the, most of the gigs were down in, you know, in the downtown in the Montrose area and the Old Quarter was the heart of downtown.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. So, to kind of backtrack a little bit, when you began playing in Houston, you know, you mentioned Guy Clark and Townes Van Zandt and it was right before they made their move to Nashville and, no Townes kind of already done a little bit of work perhaps, but, um, how did you view them at the time as a young, young person starting out?

George Enslie: Well, Townes was like 4 years older, but he was like 30 to 40 years older as far as where he was in terms of his, his, uh, psyche. I mean his, uh, he had been, he had been – I don't know that Townes ever worked a day gig.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: So, he had been doing music and he was, he was in it for a penny, you know for a pound. I mean, so by the time I met him and he used to stay with Darryl sometimes down on Truxillo Street. Darryl had an apartment where a lot of guys and gals came through, uh, and stayed there. Dale Sofar at one point was his roommate and I used to go hang out down there and

Townes would come through and stay there and, uh, he was a, he already had, uh, his first record. I think it came out like in '68 or something like that.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: And, uh, so he had already been picked up by an independent label. He already had, you know, an album under his belt and even though he was 4 years older I mean he was, you know, he was knee deep in, you know, or up to his neck in, in his career and it was going full bore and he was playing all over the place.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: And Guy was, he had a gig at the *Chronicle* I think. He was doing some graphic artwork stuff for his bread and butter and, uh, he actually got when Jerry Jeff recorded, uh, that kind of a seminal album that had like four or five of Guy's songs on it that's what kind of catapulted Guy on to the songwriting scene and I think that's when he got his publishing deal and he moved to, uh, LA.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: But Townes, uh, he didn't move, well first he, I think first he moved to Austin and, uh, so I got to know Townes, uh, pretty well when he was there and, uh, in a couple of different places and then I went up to Nashville and stayed with Townes after he moved up there on several different occasions.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: Guy, the only time I went up to Nashville to hang with Guy he was on the road so I just, I spent the day with Susanna and, uh, but she taught me a lot. She had just gotten, uh, hit with that, uh, song, um, "Dance Like Nobody's Watching, Love Like You'll Never Got Hurt, It's Got To Come From The Heart If You Want It To Work." That was like the no. 1 I think for Kathy Mattea. She had some real insight into songwriting and so it was, and I really enjoyed her company, but, uh, I, in retrospect I mean I was, I spent a lot more time with Townes and Townes mentored me a lot more than Guy did.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: But they, uh, in the 70s they both I think went their separate ways out of Houston.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. Um, in the summer of '69 you spent some time in New York, working on music.

George Enslie: Yeah. I went up there, I went up there in '68 and, uh, I had met Paul Simon. He was really one of my biggest outside influences. I really loved his work and Simon and Garfunkel's work. It had so much, especially the guitar work and, uh, so much more than a lot of the, uh, the, uh, the more popular, uh, acts and, and a lot more depth to, to his songwriting too.

His lyrics and their harmonies of course just everything was very appealing and I, I used to cover a lot of his songs and, uh, one of them I couldn't figure out very well. I mean, I was having a hard time figuring it out. It was an instrumental. It was called "Angie."

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And it was, uh, it was a real difficult song. It was a, uh, it had a walking base progression and, um, it was written by Bert Jansch who was, uh, [plays guitar] and I had a really hard time [plays guitar] and, uh, there was a, um, there was a spot in there where it was, uh, [plays guitar] and I had, I had a hard time figuring that out what he was doing and so they were coming to Austin and, um, my friend Sabra she, uh, she said, uh, well why don't you just go, go to the gig, you know. They were going to be playing at the auditorium or they called it the auditorium, yeah, the Austin Auditorium. This is 1967 probably and so I just got there early. I got there like about 5:00 and right after I got there they pulled up in a limo from, uh, from the airport and I just introduced myself and, uh, they said well come on in, you know, and so I went backstage and I mean the place was empty and, uh, I asked Paul, how to, you know, what he was doing there and, uh, he showed it to me and, uh, we just kind of, they kind of befriended me and, uh, so I went to see them when they were playing at the, uh, TCU. They played a lot of college, uh, concerts, like TCU and, um, uh, uh, I guess it was, uh, College Station. They played at A&M College Station and they would invite me backstage when I went to these different venues and just really loved their concerts. Well, Paul said, you know, if you ever come up to New York look me up so in '68 he gave me his address and in '68, uh, in August of '68 I flew up there from Houston just to go hang with Paul Simon for a while in his own turf and, uh, I just got to see him for one morning because he was, that was right after *The Graduate* had hit and I mean it hit big and it put Dustin Hoffman, you know, on the map and it was really big, uh, cult picture, you know and had Simon and Garfunkel's music to it so they did really well financially and as far as exposure goes, but at the same time that was when they were splitting up.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: So there was a lot going on. And anyway, I met some folks when I was up there and then in '69 I went back and spent the whole summer up there and I was working with a cab driver, uh, there was a place called Apostolic Studios and that's where the guys from *Hair* used to hang out that wrote the musical *Hair*.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And a lot of the, uh, a lot of the New York, uh, scene was there including a guy named Bernard Purdie who was drummer turned producer and he played with everybody from the Philharmonic to Aretha Franklin. I mean he was a phenomenal percussionist, a drummer and, uh, he said he wanted me to do a record with him so I supported myself working with this cab driver, uh, Johnny Sound was his, was his, uh, his stage name. His real name was, uh, Escevedo I think. He was a Puerto Rican. Drove a cab by day and, uh, was a bartender on the upper east side, uh, singles bars by night and, uh, so, uh, he would get material from, from, uh, Bernard Purdie and I would take the songs and work with him during the day and transpose it to find the

key that he could sing it best in and work with him on, you know, making the song his own and demoing up, you know, his stuff so that's the way I survived in '69.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Then I went to, uh, while I was up there I went to the Newport Folk Festival and then I went to Woodstock, uh, during that summer so it was a, it was a fun time for a 19-year-old kid.

Norie Guthrie: So you later played the college circuit. Could you describe that experience?

George Enslé: Uh huh, well in, uh, in '78 I guess, uh, I'm not sure if I was doing it by then or not, but in '78 I had a grant from the federal government to be an artist in the schools in Beaumont.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And, uh, Eric Taylor had, uh, the reason I found out about it was he had met someone and was doing one in Palestine, Texas. He had met an artist. I think he was a poet and, uh, it was, it was very lucrative to say the least for, uh, guys that were doing what we were doing. To get paid a stipend it was like \$1,000, I think it was \$1,000 a month or something like that. Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

George Enslé: So anyway, uh, it was through the federal government because after the, uh, Civil Rights Act had been passed, uh, the segregation was slower in a lot of areas and Beaumont was one of them and Palestine, east Texas was probably another one and so federal government pretty much mandated that these school districts that weren't allowing these underprivileged kids to have, you know, the opportunity to be in a more elevated, you know, cultural environment in a better school, they would send in artists of all different disciplines to go in there and at least give the kiddos some kind of a cultural input and some kind of nurturing for, you know, their creative needs inside and show them there's something else besides, you know, the hard time living in the, you know, in a poverty kind of environment so I found out about that and I inquired through the, uh, Texas Commission on the Arts and I got a grant to go to Beaumont and, uh, when I was down there I garnered enough money to make my first album, which was *Head On* and it was about that time that I was doing the college circuit. Uh, that was like a 4 month, that was a semester long, uh, then I did a tour in Colorado, but about that time I started playing the college circuit and I got together with, uh, Lindsay Haisley and Nanci Griffith and a fellow named Steve Caruthers who was one of the guys that actually booked the, uh, coffee house at Lamar in Beaumont. Um, he retired from that gig and he, he wanted to start booking us, the three of us and, uh, we started booking agency at Sugar Bear Booking. Sugar Bear was one of my dogs, my big dog and, uh, we went through NECAA, which is National Entertainment and Campus Activities Association NECAA and they had these regional conferences.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And, you know, you would pay to attend, you'd pay to be a member and you would pay to exhibit and pay to submit, um, to do a live showcase at the conference. They were really well attended, um, but they were mostly all college kids so there was a whole lot of partying going on.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Uh, a lot of the, the deal making so to speak as far as getting gigs and stuff went on in the motel rooms when people were just ad hoc kind of just sitting down and playing, you know, and Allen Damron was the best. But anyway, uh, we tried to go with that and it was so, we, we showcased in several different regions and wound up out like in the north central and we went up to Omaha and, uh, I think there was one in Dallas and we did about three or four of them, but they were quite expensive up front investments, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: We'd have to rent the video equipment to play our, you know, our videos on our table. You know, everyone you paid to have a table in the exhibit hall. And so, uh, we got, we got, uh, a lot of work, I got a lot of work and uh, after that, that, uh, agency went down and everything, but I still got a lot of work in Texas and somewhere in the mid-'80s, uh, so I would play like Beaumont, I'd play Texas A&M, I'd play, uh, University of Houston Clearlake, I'd play University of Texas in Cactus Cafe, I'd play Amarillo College, I'd play in Lubbock at Texas Tech, which is a great coffee house. San Angelo had a great coffee house, San Angelo State and even Levelland where they have this school – I don't know if you're familiar with Levelland, but it's called South Plains College and it's a school that's dedicated to getting degrees in all different disciplines of music including songwriting and banjo and I mean it was amazing when I played there. Out in the middle of nowhere. It's west of Lubbock about 50-60 miles and, but it's, uh, still going strong and it's, it's all about music, but it's, it's very remote and, uh, then in the mid-'80s something happened where the way I understood it was prior to that time colleges and universities were not considered profit-making institutions and therefore did not have to pay performance royalties to the performance royalty organizations, the PROs, which is ASCAP and BMI.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And now they're SESAC.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Well, they went after the universities and they said well you've got a college stadium here and you've got 15,000 people there listening to someone perform a song on the field with the band marching to the song. We want you to pay us for that.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: We want performance royalties and when that happened the entertainment budget, all this money had to be thrown at the, uh, BMI and ASCAP and, uh, SESAC and so all the coffee houses started folding.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And these universities and colleges because that was the first thing to go was considered the most expendable was the folk singers, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

George Enslé: So, that just dried up, pretty much just dried up in like the mid-'80s.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: So, but I, uh, I did, like I said, I garnered enough income from being at artist in the schools to make my first album *Head On*.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And Willis Alan Ramsey had built a studio in Austin, from what I understand from the royalties he got from, uh, “Muskrat Love” cut that Captain and Tennille did –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: – that garnered him like a great deal of money and so he built this pristine studio over off South Lamar called Hound Sound and we recorded the first record there and we recorded head on.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: That's where the, the title came from, which meant that you recorded straight to, um, tape, the finished master tape.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Live with everybody playing the song at the same time.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, okay.

George Enslé: And, uh, if there were any mistakes or any glitches, uh, Bill Blachly was the producer and he'd have you just go back and redo that, just that part –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: – and then he would take the, the, uh, all the tapes and edit with razor blades, would edit the bad part out and the new part in –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: – with seamless edits. It was amazing. Bill and Bonnie Hearn had done a project with him through BF Deal Records and Nanci Griffith had done the record that kind of put her on the map –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: – with, uh, *Light Beyond These Woods*. She had done, uh, a record with him so I chose him to be my producer and that's who recorded it in 1978.

Norie Guthrie: And so, um, you recorded the first album and then what happened next?

George Enslé: Well, after that I had to get the, the finances together to press it up –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: – and do the artwork and, um, I found a really great artist there in, uh, in Austin. I can't remember his name, but he did, uh, the graphics layout and, uh, my wife, uh, girlfriend at that time she took the front and back cover shots and, uh, then I had Wakefield press them up and, uh, which was all, I mean it was, it cost almost as much to make the record as it did to press the record back then. It's the way it was. And then, uh, I just continued doing clubs in the, you know, in the Texas region mostly at that time.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Um, and I had a standing residency at a place called the Hole in the Wall there in Austin. It was on the drag and it was, uh, Nanci Griffith had played there. She had a night and my friend Lindsay Haisley was playing there. He had a night and he had me do a guest sit and the guy hired me on the spot, Doug Cugini and so I got a Sunday night slot. I had, I held that slot when I was in town, which was most of the time, um, for like 15 years.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: From, you know, '76 is when I started playing there and there was clubs that opened and closed there, too. There was one really great place called The Other Side and there was a place called, uh, Emma Jo's – yeah, Emma Jo's – a place called The Alamo Bar downtown, uh, and there was a place called, uh, The Checkered Flag, uh, which is where the real folk singing was there in Austin.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And Rod Kennedy had a, a classic car, well, not classic, I guess, I don't know what they were, but they were like Thunderbirds and Corvettes and whatnot, a little car exhibit –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: – and a folk coffee house, and that's where and that's where Fromholz-

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

George Enslé: – Bill and Bonnie Hearn and Peter, Paul, and Mary, whoever was folk people that came through town would play there at the Checkered Flag. I didn't get a chance to play there because it had transitioned over to, uh, Castle Creek when Rod Kennedy sold out and started the, uh, Kerrville Folk Festival with Nancy.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Um, so I played the Checkered Flag a lot and that was, um, that was a really, really great venue because they had a lot of touring singer-songwriters. You know, that, that term, singer-songwriter, sort of, uh, came into being, you know, in like the, the, the late '70s and '80s. Before that, we were like folk singers.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And then the singer-songwriters just sort of, so there was John Prine and there was Tom Waits and, you know, all these guys and Ramblin' Jack, I used to open for Ramblin' Jack when he played at Castle Creek, and then there was, uh, the Red Lion. There was a place called the One Night, um, and where I played my very first gig was called the 11th Door, and it was on Red River, and I was all of 18 years old and, uh, uh, Big Bill Moss was holding forth there. He had this, this, it was a piano bar and he had this, a real bawdy show that he did with a 12-string guitar. He was a big fella and he, he was a real boisterous and, and, uh, uh, he let me do a little guest set.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: It was the first time I played in public for anyone, and I was like 17 or 18, I guess, and that was called the 11th Door.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: But there was some, there was like a handful of clubs. Then Armadillo happened.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

George Enslé: And the whole, and Willie happened.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: And the cosmic cowboy thing happened and it was, uh, uh, long-haired cowboys and, and, uh, hippie rednecks, it was just, just the whole melting pot of characters, and when I first went into Austin in '66, I mean, there was, there was the goat ropers, there was the cowboys, you know, the rednecks, and there was the hippies, and like you didn't go into a redneck bar.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: Unless you expected some trouble, you know. So that whole thing got just watered down and, and melted together when, when Willie Nelson showed up and did the outlaw thing and Michael Martin Murphy was doin' his cosmic cowboy thing, you know, and –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: – and it was a, quite a, quite a transformation.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: You know, during the '80s and '70s, late '70s and '80s there.

Norie Guthrie: So when you, um, would you mind actually playing a song from that first album?

George Enslie: No, I think I can remember one. Um, let's see. I'll do this one, uh, one I wrote, Let me find the capo. Uh, let's see. This is a song I wrote for my dad, um, it's called “Fishin' Lines” and, uh, John Grimaudo played guitar and did just a stellar job. Um, I told you earlier my dad was a musician.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslie: But not, by the time I, I met my dad, he, he really wasn't playing at all. He was really steeped in building an insurance company in Houston and so he, uh, he had a, when he hung it up, he hung it up. He didn't even play recreationally at all, so I never really got to hear him play, and I miss that.

Yeah, I know it's been quite a while.

I got a job to get me through the winter.

Yea, I've lost some weight, but you know how music is.

Sometimes you're standing proud. Sometimes you're running.

No, I don't need any money.

Yea, I saw your new car. Dad, she's a beauty.

What's that you ask? Oh, spending most my time

Writing on some songs about the Rockies.

Remember sleepless nights you'd play

Until the morning light

Slipped through the window shade?
Hey, remember back that time when you were down to your last dime?
You know I'd really like to hear that one again,
'Cause in a crazy way, old man,
I kind of wish we'd known each other way back when.

No, I didn't know that she's remarried.
I guess it's best she found herself that kind of man.
No, I haven't made any plans myself.
But you know I think I've finally figured out what the old love is.

Remember the way you'd play your clarinet
When you needed momma's smile,
When no matter what was wrong, when you'd finished with your song
She would roll you in her arms and understand?
In a crazy way, old man,
I kind of wish we'd known each other way back when.

No, there's no way you can reach me.
I'll be staying with some friend's dad. I don't know how long.
Yeah, I'll keep in touch. Yeah, maybe Christmas.
How's old John? You know I wrote a song for him.

Remember how you'd feel when some stranger'd say,
"Would you play that one again?"
And all them backseat songs
Hell they always last too long,
But they're never quite the same the second time.
Well, it's a crazy thing to say, old man,
Kind of wish that I was driving way back when.

I guess I'll pack it up for now.
Don't look like the fish are biting anyhow.

"Fishin' Lines."

Norie Guthrie: Thank you.

George Enslie: That's from the first record.

Norie Guthrie: Can you talk about some of the other albums that you've recorded?

George Enslie: Well, we, uh, we recorded a, in, uh, gosh, I don't remember when it was, but it was, I think it was like 10 years later in '90, in '88, uh, was it '88? Gosh, I don't remember, but yeah, I went to a, right about that time, or '90, I think in 1990, I went to a there was a, a young fella named Will T. Massey and he was a very precocious, uh, songwriter and performer, and he

used to hang out at this place called Chicago House in, in Austin, and he was, he was too young to even drink and, uh, but they, they let him slip in and stay in the shadows. Um, he was only like 16 or 17 years old, but he was, uh, maybe 18. Uh, but he was very, very talented and he's from San Angelo and, uh, I befriended him and, and sort of mentored him a little bit but, uh, um, he was already well on his way to being, you know, very powerful singer-songwriter.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And, uh, at, uh, about, well, that was in the '80s, like the mid '80s, and, uh, late '80s, and, uh, he, uh, eventually he found a lady to represent him and we went out to Lubbock to Caldwell Studios where Lloyd Maines was holding forth there and, uh, produced some records and, uh, although Lloyd was a producer, he was also a phenomenal multi-instrumentalist and, um, the Maines brothers were kinda a mainstay, if you will. You know, all over Texas and, and, uh, Lloyd played with Joe Ely and a lotta different, uh, other folks, but most notably Joe Ely, I guess and, uh, we recorded this record for Will, and I played on it, and, uh, he flew me out there to play on it and everything, and, and he surprised me by one, uh, it was about a week-long session. He had Paul Percy was on the drums and Roland Denny I think was on the bass and, uh, Lloyd just kinda took him under his wing and kind of helped him like take these songs that were already, you know, crude masterpieces, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And really polish 'em up and, and do a great presentation, um, and, uh, Steve Meador, I guess, was playin' drums, and he kinda surprised me one morning he came, we were havin' coffee before the session. He said he wanted to record one of my songs called "On the Sofa Outside."

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: I was really flattered and, uh, he did a really good job of it. Uh, so anyway, he had done that and, and then she, her name was Diane Scott I think was her name, and she, uh, she underwrote the whole project and she, it was really a great project. Uh, Jesse Taylor played electric guitar on it and there was some Lubbock legends.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: A lot of great players on it and, uh, she garnered, she garnered a deal somehow. She, somehow Will got heard by a publisher, um, I can't remember his name, but he wound up getting him a deal with MCA Records.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: He got a seven-album deal with MCA Records and Bruce Springsteen's producer was gonna produce him and, uh, he was on Austin City Limits and, uh, he made this really, really powerful but very Los Angeles type, West Coast record.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And, uh, I was playin' in a club in Austin. He got, uh, a pretty good chunk of change up front to sign –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: – with MCA, and I was playin' this club in Austin, and when I took a break, he said, George, you need to make another record. I said, well, yeah, you know, I'd like to do that. He said, no. He said, I wanna pay for it. I was like, what? Yeah. You know, I only have one stipulation, he said. Ya gotta let Lloyd Maines produce it, and I said, well, that's not a problem. So he just chucked out, you know, several thousand dollars and so me and my bass player, Keith Karper, and Scott Neubert who was my lead player –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: – multi-instrumentalist, uh, at that time. Uh, we went out to, uh, Lubbock and recorded the record *Heartwood* in, in 3 days.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Three 10-hour days we knocked it out, just did a little bit of overdubbing back in Austin after that. So that's where *Heartwood* came from, three magnanimous and generous contributions of Will T. Massey.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And, uh, so that was, at that time, that was a cassette album is what it wound up being. It never did go to vinyl cause cassettes were popular then.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: It's funny because, you know, when I had *Head On*, people would say, do ya have a cassette of that? I'd say no, so one, on the next album I made, uh, *Heartwood*, people would say, uh, I'd made a cassette out of it, people'd say, do ya have a CD of it? No, I was just gettin' into the, gettin' into cassettes here. I was just, I thought I was on the cutting edge. But anyway, it, it did real well and sold real well but, and it was a great, a great project. Uh, Gene Elders played fiddle on it, he's a phenomenal, uh, fiddle player, he's been playin' with George Strait since almost day 1 for like 50 years.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Well, not 50 years but anyway, Gene did some beautiful work on it and, um, uh, so yeah, and, uh, my flute, flute player, Beth Galiger, she did some beautiful work on it, too so. That's how that came into being.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: *Heartwood*, yeah.

Norie Guthrie: What came next?

George Enslé: Well, next I had a project that I've never released. Uh, it's kind of a long story but it was a concept album called *The Old Highway Café*, and I had a benefactor outta Lubbock that, uh, had seen me play out there at a place called the Cody Cattle Company, I think is what it was, and, uh, he was in the oil business and he said, uh, he wanted to make a record with me, but I, unfortunately I took, I tried to, to, uh, uh, how would you say, I tried to basically poor-boy the whole thing and, as a result, I had a friend that was at UT that had access to the studio there, and they had a state-of-the-art, 24-track, um, the same rig really that Willie Nelson had. It was a, I forget what it's called, but the same 24-track studio setup. Um, but he said, we'll just hafta do it when I have time to do it, 'cause he was still goin' to classes and he was just have, he just had the studio for part of, part of the time.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: He was a, he was workin' on his bachelor's degree or something and, uh, he was a musician buddy friend of mine. Bobby Roberts was his name. He had a group called Rat Creek. And so I said that's fine, you know, we'll do that. Well, we were kinda over our heads because he had never done that, recorded in that kind of a sophisticated scenario. I mean, he was like, I think he was actually taking a class in recording at the time.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: So this was kinda like his lab time or whatever. So, and I produced it myself, um, which, um, you know, so I, I got my friends to play on it and I kind of settled for, uh, you know, um, I wasn't, I wasn't, typically a producer has gotta be the one to say, you know, that's not gonna cut it, you need to do it again.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Or can you do, can you do this, can you do that, can you, can you go here or there, you know. I mean, a producer has got typically a concept in their head as to what they want, you know, the record to sound like.

Norie Guthrie: Right.

George Enslé: And each song is kind of a piece of that. Well, we did it in such a piecemeal manner that, you know, we had to stop and start. We'd go in and we were, we were still kind of, uh, not really serious enough to where we were still like smokin' grass and, and partyin' a little bit and, and so we got through, through with the project and, and, and actually Bobby was like, and it took a long time because we had to just go in like on a Wednesday night when he'd have 2 or 3 hours and work on it then, and I'd hafta bring, bring my buddy in and, and, uh, play and

party and, but when we got through, the real kicker was when we got through with the whole thing and I was just sayin', you know, I don't, and we weren't spendin' very much money.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: From this investor's money, you know, because he said I've got this much, what can you do with it, and he was just wantin' me to cut a couple songs that he really liked. Well, I said, no, we can do a whole record with that. Well, um, and he kept ponying up more money.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And, and he liked what he was hearin' and he said, well, if you need more, you know, and we wound up with a, with an album cover and goin' to a graphic artist photographer and, and, um, but when we finished with the, the recording at that point, um, he was no longer gonna have access to a studio and there was a, a noise reduction that was, um, it wasn't Dolby but it was the other noise reduction, um, technology.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And I can't think of what it was, but you couldn't just take this – this was a 2-inch, 24-track tape. You couldn't just take it to the studio and mix it.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Ya had, DBX is what it was, DBX, whatever that is. So I had subsequently met, uh, a producer, a musician named Steve Meador and, uh, so he got into the picture and then he, uh, he found a studio in San Antonio, and then one in Houston. Oh, no, up in Dallas at the, at the, oh, forget the name of the place, but anyway, uh, so it just started gettin' real complicated.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And in the end, you know, it was like, we got a single outta the deal. It was a pretty good single, but in the end it was like, what it'd originally started off to be and, you know, this is like 2 years down the line, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And I had grown in terms of my songwriting, I thought, you know, and it was just not strong enough, you know, product in the end. So it's still in the can, so to speak, and so the, the next product I guess that came out was probably the, uh, *One Gentle Hand*, which was, um, a compilation that I did along with some recordings that I made with a fellow named John Casner who was a, a fellow musician but also a producer and had a home recording studio, and, and offered to give me some pro bono, all the pro bono time to record –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: – my songs, and so there again, you know, it was, it was, you know, a, an angel, so to speak and, uh, so I recorded like five or six songs and, at that time, that was '98, and at that time I had been, uh, subjected my, my family and I were subjected to a flood at our house and we got like 2 feet of water. We lived on a creek. We got like 2 feet of water throughout our whole house and –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: – it was, it was devastating, and, uh, Rod Kennedy had heard about it and he, um, the, the producer of, uh, Kerrville Folk Festival.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: And he had a, uh, at that time he had a, uh, a special festival. It was called the Phoenix Fund, and it was a festival that was held in October, um, of every year, and it was a, it was a, a fund that was, uh, allocated to musicians who were in need of medical or, you know, some kind of financial bind, uh, no strings attached. I mean, it was, it was like a gratis, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: Hand up, and he sent me some money when he found out about my flood and everything and asked me if I would play the Phoenix Foundation Festival, you know, to raise money for this good cause, and I said sure. So that's when I, I put a compilation called *One Gentle Hand* together, which was like songs I had recorded with John Casner and then with a couple off, two or three off of *Heartwood*.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

George Enslé: So, uh, that was like nine songs I think in '98 and then after that, um, I guess the *Live Set* probably happened after that and that was a, that was an album I did with my, my pickers. That live set was a very, uh, I mean, how do I say it, I mean it was like top of the line folk show that was on Saturdays in Austin through University station there, KET and Larry Monroe was, like, a, the DJ's DJ. I mean, he was an incredible musicologist and just a very good, knowledgeable and great interviewer and all around guy, and he st-, started doing these folkway shows on Saturday, uh, these live shows –

Norie Guthrie: Um.

George Enslé: – and I mean it, it captivated the, the whole town. I mean anybody that was into singer/songwriter folk, you know, blue grass, whatever would listen in and so we got a live recording of that. For the *Live Set*, CD Walter, uh, uh, I want to say his name was Walter, um, I can't think of his last name. I'm sorry, but anyway, he was a great engineer and he engineered it and he edited it and put together and I had a CD, you know, and I had Beth Galiger and Greg Whitfield, and who I was at that time playin' with and still am, and Greg Lowry who I'm still

playin' with and my bass player Keith Karper who's passed away and Beth, I said Beth, yeah, so we had a five-piece –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: – and it, uh, that was my next project, was the *Live Set* and I didn't need a whole lot to underwrite that 'cause the recording was free.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: So, um, then after that I did *Build a Bridge*, I think, and *Build a Bridge* is, is more inspirational and faith-based. I did that in Tommy Byrd's studio and I had some contributors for that album as well. Uh, and, uh that's when the, I got affiliated with the Build a Bridge Foundation which is a, it's a, a faith-based organization out of Philadelphia that sends performers of all different disciplines, artists of all different disciplines, all over the world to, uh, these troubled hotspots where people are in need of some kind of a healing. Healing through the arts is, is their byline, Build a Bridge, and so they adopted the song and they, uh, sent it around to several locations. It was on their web site for a while, translated to some different languages. I know I went down to Guatemala, it was translated. That was, that was really rewarding to see that happen and to see it was doin' what it was supposed to be doin'.

Norie Guthrie: Hmm.

George Enslé: So that was a, that was a faith-based, uh, project and then, uh, I think after that was another live project, *Live at the Brauntex Theater* which is New Braunfels, with just me and my guitar player, Greg Whitfield.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: And there again I didn't need a budget and I had, uh, Randy and Julia Sulsar recorded and videotaped the program, so I got a DVD out of it as well. It was a beautiful old theater. It had been restored, uh, and, uh, seems like I'm leavin' one out. Oh, *Small Town Sundown*, then I did, I think I did *Small Town Sundown* before, yeah, before the *Live at the Brauntex*, and that was a concept album, uh, and I'd, I'd always pretty mu-, pretty much look at songs as being little movies, and I thought, well if I put several songs together, you know, I have one big movie, so, I had some songs that had already been written and some that I wrote specifically for the story that I came up with –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: – which is about a small hill country fellow that's raised by his grandparents. When he's like two his parent were killed in a car wreck and, and his grandparents, farmers, raise him in this little fictitious town called Windmill, Texas, and, uh, well I really called it a movie in song because I had, I had this whole story written which I later put out in, in a booklet form and, uh, I did that at Tommy Byrd's studio and I had, uh, Merel Bregante, who was, he, I'd done a show with his wife, Sara Pierce, uh, over here at the Main Street Theater in Tomball and, uh,

after we did this round it was her and I and Connie Mims. I think Connie invited the two of us. After I finished there Merel Bregante said, "You need to make another album," and I said, "Well, I don't have a budget," and he said, "Don't worry about it. Come over to my studio." And, so he had a state-of-the-art studio at his place in Austin there at Crib Works, is what it's called, and so, uh, at his convenience, and when he had time, I went over and started recording and got all the guitar and all the vocals to all 12 songs done –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: – at his studio and it was completely pro bono. I mean, and, and you know we're talkin' about, you know, \$3,000.00 or \$4,000.00 at least, probably worth of recording studio time –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: – that he just gave me, and in the hopes that, you know, he wanted to, to produce and flesh out the whole album, but I didn't have, I didn't have a budget at all, but I took the vocals and guitar and I pressed up a limited edition of the 12 songs –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: – you know, in sequence and I used that as a tool to raise money from my supporters, fans, and what, and friends to finish the project and, uh, I didn't go through that, uh, GoFundMe and all those Internet kind of things. I just got the word out, you know, and took 'em to gigs and said, you know, you can have, uh, you know, this limited edition. You can have as many copies of this as you want signed, whatever, but it was just me and the guitar, and, uh, you know, I didn't stipulate any, I don't think I put down that you needed to contribute any particular kind of amount or anything, but, you know, enough people came, came forward and, and ponied up enough to where I, I finished the record but I finished it at Tommy Byrd's Byrd House Studio.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: So I had the guitar and vocals already done and I finished producing it at Tommy, at Tommy Byrd's studio which was uh, uh, and he gave me a real good deal, too, so, and Merel meanwhile had, had gotten real busy with Sara and with other projects. So that was *Small Town Sundown* and then the Brauntex happened after that and then, uh, I guess that's, uh, the one that happened after that has been, uh, the *Song Swarm* which was produced by Taylor Pie.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: And that was me and her and four other artists, each with two songs apiece in a live venue recording, uh, original songs. So that's seven or whatever.

Norie Guthrie: Do you wanna play, um, something from, um *Sundown*?

George Enslie: Yeah, yeah, I'll play. Uh, let's see if I can do the title cut. This is kind of a, a centerpiece where it all started. But, I travel a lot in the hill country, all over, in Texas hill country playin', you know, playin' different gigs in cowboy churches, and, uh, get a lotta windshield time. And uh, this character sort of climbed into the shotgun seat 'n, his story, you know. It's, it's very much a, one of the reviewers said it was, it was a Hallmark movie.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: It's very much about God, family and country, you know. But this character, uh, this is kinda where it all started with this character, and his story, you know, and it sorta sums up, I think, the, the whole theme of, of the album and it's uh, this is called "Small Town Sundown," the song.

Bought that blue '62 Bonneville
Off a Fort Worth showroom floor
Paid cash for it with the money I'd saved
Working summers on the rigs offshore

Sometimes I still put the top down
Go cruisin' cross the countryside
Just to feel freedom's wind flowing through my hair
Thank the good Lord that I'm alive

She was built in the days when this country
Took pride in doing hard work
I had made in the U.S.A.
On the tag of my blue collared shirt

I've been married to the same fine lady
Since 1952
Our loving has just gotten stronger
With all of the livin' that we've been through

She still keeps the letters that I sent her
When I was off fightin' in that Korean War
Tied up with her yellow hair ribbon
With her Bible in her nightstand drawer

You know we still go out dancin'
Most every Saturday night
These days we don't take quite as many steps
But we hold each other just as tight

Had two beautiful twin daughters
Back in 1958
They've given us six grandkids

They've given us three greats

The young ones still spend summers with us
They love mamaw's dewberry jam
She takes them out in her garden
So they can know the feel of dirt in their hands

You see, they was all raised in the city
We try to show them a simpler way
Sometimes we lay in the yard
Try to count all them stars
Catch dinner out of Blue Cypress Lake

I've been going to the same little white church
Since the Sunday after I was born
When I die, they'll plant me in that church cemetery
Overlooking McAllister Farm

It's the closest thing to heaven
On this earth that I've ever seen
That creek winding through shimmering cottonwood trees
A thousand shades of green

I'm not much on Bible pounders
I believe Jesus was a quiet man
And forgiveness and love were the biggest part of
What he tried to help us understand

I bought this filling station
Back in 1964
I'll still clean your windshield
I still check your oil

At the end of the day when my work is done
Drive to my house just outside of town
I sit on the back porch with the love of my life
And watch a small town sun go down

George Enslé: So he's the, uh, in the movie he's the, uh, the guy that runs the, uh, ice house –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: – where the characters go play dominoes and the, and the young protagonist goes to hang out and, uh – well

Norie Guthrie: So you, um, play gigs in and around Austin and throughout the states, so, how has touring and the venues changed throughout your career?

George Ensle: Well, there's still not a lot of listening rooms, uh, and I find, although the, the Texas singers-songwriters sort of garnered itself into a genre now, I think. Uh, over the years there's been, you know, a lot of folks that have emerged as Texas singers-songwriters or come here and, you know, uh, started their career. Uh, but there's not, you know, we don't sell, we don't sell booze and, and if you don't, I mean that's really where the money is for a club owner, is alcohol because, you know, the percentage of markup is, you know, exponential.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Ensle: So we don't sell booze and, so, if you want to really have a profitable kind of scenario, uh, I guess they haven't, there's not a lot of 'em that, that, uh, can do that. Uh, and so, it's really difficult. I mean, frankly, it's just, it's really difficult. I've, I've started, uh, finding other ways like, like, uh, I've started portrait songs which is something I really enjoy doing anyway, is writing character portraits of people and so it occurred to me that, uh, the way you hire someone to paint a portrait of someone, uh, you can hire me to write them a song and so I sort of went through the mechanics of it and the logistics of how I could make it happen and, uh, so, we, I have a web site to that effect, portraitsongs.com and I've already successfully done like about eight or ten. It's only been less than a year in the, in the making and uh, and I have a, a few, uh, I have a grant for, to do some for people in hospice now –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Ensle: – um, through Swan Songs (they're in Austin), and, uh, it's been real rewarding and it's a way that I can still do my craft and, and make a living and not have to spend so much time on the road, because I'm still working like, you know, 12 to 18 dates a month. That's a lot of windshield time, a lot of, a lot of drivin' time, and, uh, you know. There's a lot of deer out there, frankly, especially where I go –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Ensle: – through the two-lane backroads and, uh, — and I've got some songwriting showcases that I do where I host other songwriters –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Ensle: – uh, so I have residency, a couple of residencies doing that, and that's, I really enjoy doing that, too because, you know, I get to, you know, underwrite, you know, them coming to a gig and, and plus get to hear some great songs and meet and really get to know, you know, songwriters a lot more in depth while, you know, we're spendin' 2 hours on stage together swapping songs –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: – and I, I've had uh, some pretty good success in co-writing with several of my guests that I've really gotten to know, have gotten a feel for through that, that kind of a showcase scenario.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: But there are still some great festivals like Kerrville Folk Festival which I'll be playing this year, uh, Woody Fest, Woody Guthrie Festival I'll be playin' this year.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: Uh, there's one called Michael Hearn's Big Barn Dance in Taos which I hope to be playin' this year. I played it last year. So, there's still, you know, some, some festivals out there where you can, you can be a singer-songwriter and reach a lot of people that understand what it is you're doing –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: – and the Internet's allowed for an online presence that has been good for the singer-songwriter in terms of helpin' us survive.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: And, there are a lot of house concerts and those have, have sprouted up. The whole grass roots movement is, has been very supportive and it's, it's really, uh, in a lot of ways it's a perfect venue because it's, it's a win-win. The audience gets to hear you at your best in an intimate setting and you get an audience that's a listening audience –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: – so you can do your best. And I have cowboy churches. I have a residency at one and then I have others that I play intermittently as well.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: So –

Norie Guthrie: So as you've moved through your career, have you been drawn to different lyrical themes or have you changed the way that you play, or, what kind of changes have you made throughout time?

George Enslé: Well, I think, I've definitely leaned, uh, more toward country in, in some of my, that vernacular, some of my writing. I still have a real strong folk roots, you know, and, and it, you know, it comes out in some of my, some of my songs are just, just straight-up stories –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: –you know, that I tell, uh, through that, that kind of a, uh, style, but I've, I've leaned more toward, I've come to appreciate country music more and more, uh, in its simplicity and its beauty and, uh, you know, its poignancy.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: You know, it's less is more, even though modern-day country is, is kind of all over the map, but, you know, real, true classic country work, you know, I've come to appreciate that more, I think, and lean more in that direction and I'm teaching myself right now how to play piano and so that's uh, it opens up a lot in terms of your, your writing vocabulary, you know, to have that kind of an instrument. You know, it's very cinematic and it's very, uh, uh majestic, you know, with your guitars, you know. It's, it's just a different, a different feel, so, uh, I guess that's, you know, and as far as growth goes with writing, I, I feel like I could trust my instincts a lot more now than when I first started –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: – and, you know, when I do writing workshops and work with, with song, other songwriters, you know, I mean I, I'm able to kind of see where they're walkin' down the wrong direction with, with their, you know, their writing and their approach or whatever, and then I can see it's going to be a dead end for 'em and, but that just, that just comes with doin' it. I mean I've been doin' it for, I'm 60, I'll be 69 this September, Lord willin', so, and I started when I was like 16 writing songs. I mean, so what is that, 50, 53 years, something like that?

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: So, you know, I've gotten to where I, I've made all, almost all the mistakes several times and, you know, so I think I've got a pretty good handle on, on how to write a song and what dead-end road not to start down –

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: – 'cause I, I could see, now there's a dead end down at the end of that one, you know. I'm going to go back over here and try this one, you know. And that's just from time, for me.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslie: I, I'm a slow study, too 'cause it took me awhile to, I think to really be as proficient as I am at writing now what I, and I do feel real comfortable and confident right now that, as a songwriter, you know, that I can write somethin' that connects to people, you know.

Norie Guthrie: That's what's important.

George Enslie: That's the greatest reward. Huh?

Norie Guthrie: I said that's what's important, right?

George Enslé: Yeah, and that's exactly right, you know, and that's what's kept me doing this is when people come up and say, "Oh, man, that really hits home," you know.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: And, you know, it makes, it makes you feel as though what you're doing is important and makes a difference, you know, and I really look at it as, in the end, as being a form of healing.

Norie Guthrie: Um hmm.

George Enslé: I mean, musicians should think of themselves as healers and when you play in the nursing home, I mean, you can, you can know right off the bat that you're making a difference in these people's world and some of the Alzheimer's people that, you know, are pretty much mute, when you play that certain song, they'll start singing, you know. You hit that, that place in their heart and their mind with music that you can't hit with anything else any other way.

Norie Guthrie: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

George Enslé: I just really appreciate you doin' this and, uh, all the energy and time and effort and, uh, love that you're putting into this project and in, uh, helping to, uh, archive and to preserve, uh, where we all came from and the analog world that we grew up in and, and how we didn't turn out all that bad by readin' books and, taking guitar lessons, um, in this modern age.

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

George Enslé: Yeah, it's been my pleasure and honor.

Norie Guthrie: Thanks.