

Interviewee: Sara Hickman

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 Sara Hickman. Today is July 31st, 2017. This is part of the Houston Folk Music Archive Oral History Project. So, could you tell me about your early life and what drew you to music?

Sara Hickman: Wow, uh, so that's two questions, so let me start with the first one. Uh, my early life, I grew up in Houston, Texas, in an area called Sharpstown, and I had two parents that were visual artists. My dad was a painter and an illustrator and a, a renaissance man, and my mom was a fiber artist, also known as weaving, uh, and, um, photographer/writer, also a renaissance person, so I had a really wonderful childhood, and I rode my bike, I played games. We did all things kids do. I used to build, um, volcanos, and I wanted to be a paleontologist in the first place, and I would put my dinosaurs all around the volcano and then I'd turn on the water and blow everything up. Um, and then I thought I wanted to be an underwater architect, um, and then I found music, and that's all I wanted to do. So I had very supportive parents, um, and a really, really fun childhood, and then I was drawn to music because, um, I was inherently lonely, and there was something about the guitar that I really felt a kinship with. Um, it felt like it was my best friend, and, and I could tell it my secrets and I could learn new chords and put my fingers on the neck and, and strum the strings and just be amazed at what the guitar could do. And then melding my voice with the guitar together, we were a team. It was really great. So I just knew I wanted to do music because it made me feel good to be able to express myself and share, uh, my music with other people and, and get a response. Um I would guess that's probably why I became a musician.

Norie Guthrie: What were your first performances like?

Sara Hickman: Um, well, my very first performance, I guess I was in first grade at Ed White Elementary in Sharpstown, and there was a poetry contest underway, a patriotic poetry contest, and the Daughters of the American Revolution were, were putting it on, so, uh, I decided to write a poem a, about the bald eagle, and then I thought, oh, I can just turn it into a song, so I think that was maybe the first song I ever wrote, and then you got on the stage in the cafeteria, you know, and you had the little microphone on the stand, and I had my little guitar, and I sang the song and I won first place, and that was very exciting. And then, um, that, that was first time I heard myself on a microphone as a big voice, and I was like wow. This is so cool. Uh, then my second performance, oh, there was a, there was three other girls. I don't remember who all it was, um, but it was also an elementary school fifth grade maybe and we would all sit together. I would play guitar and the four of us would sing. Um, then, you know, I just, I kept finding places to

play, family reunions or whatever, and then when I was 14, I had my first paid gig. Um, oh, I'd won several, um, really fun, uh, uh, talent contests in junior high, too. That was really fun. One of 'em, I was up against this guy dressed like Dolly Parton and he had water balloons for breasts, and during his performance of "9 to 5" or whatever, uh, one of the balloons broke, and the, and the, you know, all the students went crazy. Everybody was laughing, and I thought, oh, he's gonna win first place, because I sang probably "Nobody Does It Better" by Carly Simon and part of "Stairway to Heaven" and a song I wrote for my boyfriend at the time, Greg, "Greg's Song." Uh, but so I went and I won first place. That was crazy. Uh, anyway, even though Dolly Parton had one boob, I, I don't know how to beat that, but anyway, so, uh, so my, when I was 14, I had my first gig, and I got paid \$450.00 to sing at a private event for the Houston Oilers, and I was the only female there. I was the smallest person there, and I was the only one with a guitar walking around singing, and, uh, that was just really weird. But I survived, and here I am.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so I assume shortly after that, you started, um, you had started to attend the, um, High School for the Performing and Visual Arts.

Sara Hickman: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: What did you learn there? What'd you take away?

Sara Hickman: Wow. Um, well, I had gone to HSPVA at some point – maybe I was still in elementary school – but my mom had been a part of the opening of the school, and she taught fiber arts, and she would take me down to the school in the summer. I guess they had summer classes, and I was taking a theater class in the, that beautiful theater they had that used to be a Jewish temple. Anyway, so then years go by and I, I went there for high school. Um, I, I thi, I, uh, I, I have to go back to my loneliness quotient. Uh, I always just felt really odd, and when I, when I went to that high school, I felt even more odd, even though I was surrounded by people more like me, um, which was a relief, because growing up in the suburb, I was always, felt like the odd person because my parents were the only artists. We would, you know, my dad painted nude women. We had paintings of nude women in our house –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sara Hickman: – and the kids would come over, and wa, wanna look at the like naked ladies. Anyway, so I had been odd, but now I was in a school full of misfits, and it was really great, um, but they were all really great people. They were very talented. They were depressives. They were moody and, and funny and doing drugs and, you know, just – I met my first gay friend there. I had a crush on this boy named Victor Flannigan, who's no longer with us, uh, and he was the first to tell me he was gay, and I was like, well, I'm happy too, and he's like no. Uh, so it was, you know, it was an exciting place to be. Uh, you know, it certainly helped me, um, deepen what I had been doing, especially because of a woman named Pat Bonner, who was the, uh, music director at that school. Not the instrumental section. Uh, the vocals, vocal department. And, uh, my parents were going through a divorce, so it was uh even more awkward time, and I would sit in the stairwell and play my guitar and sing songs, and Ms. Bonner came out one day and said, you know, uh, we get phone calls at the school for people looking for someone to come play at a bank opening or a wedding, and I just got a call from a psych unit, and they would love someone

from here to come perform for the kids, and they're all your age. Whatta you say? And I said, No. That sounds terrifying. And she goes, No, I, I think you're the person for it. So I went to this, um, psych unit, and that was my first time to do music therapy. I didn't know what music therapy was. I didn't know what I was supposed to do, and, uh, and I went in during a lockdown, so I got locked down in with the 'cause a boy had thrown a chair, and, uh, and they were an angry crowd, and, uh, so I just shyly started singing some songs, and they were singin' along, and I, I was just blown away by how the effect of music calmed everyone down, and I mean they turned off the AC. They were really puttin' some pressure on us, like punishing us for this one chair boy. You know, whatever, uh, but it, it really, it really woke my heart up to oh, music isn't just something I write for me because I got my feelings hurt or because I wanna talk about this bird I found in the snow or whatev, you know, or because I loved John Denver. It, it's a way of connecting and making people outside of myself feel good, and that, I am so grateful to Ms. Bonner and HSPVA for that, 'cause then she would send me on other assignments, and, uh, she totally changed the course of my life. I think I would've just – I don't know that I would've had the life I had if Ms. Bonner hadn't come out in that stairwell and said, I, I think you should do this.

Norie Guthrie: She sounds really special.

Sara Hickman: She's still teaching there –

Norie Guthrie: Oh.

Sara Hickman: – so this is, you know, I graduated in '81, '91, 2001, 2011 – yeah. She's been there 36 years.

Norie Guthrie: Oh, wow.

Sara Hickman: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: Um, after you graduated, um, you went on to, uh, uh, North Texas State University in Denton.

Sara Hickman: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: Why did you decide to go there?

Sara Hickman: Well, that's a good question, and there's a little bit missing. So, um, I was at HSPVA and, you know, time to think about college, and I don't remember there being discussions at home about college per se, like nowadays, or even then I guess, but, um, there was a girl at HSPVA named Stephanie Clark, who was really beautiful, and everybody loved her and she was just a bon vivant, and she was gonna go to a school called East Texas State University, which had a really good art department, and I had decided I would go do art because my mom had said, Well, there's no money in music, in the music industry. Go take art and you can be a professor like we were and make money, and I was like oh, okay, so, so I, I went to East Texas State because of Stephanie Clark, and I had a really amazing year there. I, um, just so many

amazing things happened, and I fell in love with my painting professor, so we had a torrid affair and then he sadly died of stomach cancer. Um, and, uh, that was hard, so he, while I was at East Texas State, he said, you should go to Rhode Island School of Design. You're a really good artist. And I said okay, so I applied, and then allegedly I got in but I didn't get a scholarship, so then I, I didn't wanna stay in East Texas anymore because I had a boyfriend, uh, um, quite not after the incident with the professor, but a very nice boyfriend. Sorry, John. Um, so I decided to come back to Houston and figure out what I wanted to do, and my father was teaching at the University of Houston, so that made sense, so I went to University of Houston for a year and studied art there, which as an, a funny aside, I was taking one class with my dad, and I didn't want people to know I was his daughter so, you know, everything's going hunky-dory, and one day I came in and I'd seen my dad that weekend, and then I went up and I said, Hey, that was a really, had a great weekend with you. Thanks. And I went and sat at my desk to start drawing, and these other students came over and said, hey are you havin' an affair with Mr. Hickman, Professor Hickman? And I was like, Uh, no, that's my dad, and they were like, Oh, right. Okay. Okay, 'cause that felt kinda weird after havin' had that other experience at the other college, so, and plus it's my dad, so, um, so I was there for a year, and then, I don't know how or why, but I went to University of North Texas, then called North Texas State University, for art, and I graduated there and got my degree in art. And I was gonna be an advertising directive, director for Hallmark Cards. That was my goal at that point, because I was still thinking there's no life in music, even though I was still playing in clubs and making money and playing in bands by then and havin' a great old time, so I would play music at night and make art during the day, and, uh, so that's, that's that part of that story.

Norie Guthrie: Well, can you talk about that? Uh, that music community that you became a part of up there.

Sara Hickman: Yeah, um, actually, you know, East Texas, I had played in a Pizza Hut and a place called Butch's Barn, which is an Italian restaurant, and I had a lotta fun at Butch's Barn, and oh, can I tell you a story? Oh, my gosh. So at East, East Texas, so there was a place called the Happy Armadillo, and it was down on the square. It was a really cute little historic square, and it was a pretty rough bar. Uh, it had pool tables and, you know, a bar, and somehow I got a gig there, and I would play there, and I used to wear high heels and panty hose and dresses like I would wear to church, 'cause I didn't know how to dress. I was just, you know, I had a little amp and I had my guitar, and I would go and sit in this corner and sing, so I'm in the Happy Armadillo one night and I'm singing, and this whole crew of these, um, Hell's Angels came in. They'd just come up on their big Harleys, vroom, vroom, vroom, vroom, and they walked in the door and, I don't know, there was like 18 of 'em, and they all start playin' pool and they're havin' fun. They're being rowdy, and I'm over in my corner singing my Joni Mitchell songs or whatever I'm doing in my church dress and, uh, they got in this fight. I don't know what happened, but all of a sudden, they had their pool sticks and they were like hitting each other and yelling and beers flying, and I'm like la la la la la la la, singin' my song, um, and then this really big, strong guy goes, Hey, shut the F up. Can't you see the lady's tryin' to sing? And I'm like ha la la la la la, and I'm like, Oh, where can I go? Nowhere. I'm in this corner. So he comes over, and all these motorcyclists come over and they've got their leather. I, I mean they look great. They got their bandanas on, and he, they pull up these chairs like, like preschoolers, and they sat in this half circle around me, and they sat down there like, Ma'am, do you know this Paul Simon song, or, do

you know anything by America or the Eagles or whatever, and I was like yeah, so I'm singin' and they're all singin' and it was awesome. I thought they were gonna come over and kill me, and it turned into like preschool with Sara. Killer preschool with Sara. Um, anyway, so that was East Texas. So I didn't know other musicians at East Texas. At U of H, I didn't, I didn't know anybody. I didn't know the music scene in Houston, and I didn't have any – I mean I knew Gretchen but Gretchen was gone, and, uh – sorry, Gretchen Phillips. Um, so then North Texas was really fun because of, uh, there was, I was doin' the same thing. I was playing in little weirdo places. There was a place called The Library, which was a bar, and, uh, I would go take my turn, sing my – by then, I was singing more of my own ma, material. I was still doing covers, but, uh, I remember one Halloween, I dressed up in a kid's like Wonder Woman costume or something, and it was that weird polyurethane vinyl or whatever that kids wear, and it's got that baby powder inside it, and anyway, I stretched it and I wore this kid-size – I probably looked really good. Um, anyway, I was on stage singin' that, so I started meeting musicians because I did this show called *Doctor Fangus*, and it was a cable access show, and this guy, I guess, had seen me at The Library, and he said, I want you to be on my show, and I was like, Okay. And he, it was this guy. I think his name was Bruce and he had a dog, and they both wore bandanas and sunglasses. I think bandanas or they both wore sunglasses, and they sat next to each other and then you did your thing, the talk show part, and then you sang songs, so he had prerecorded me in his kitchen somewhere in Denton, and, uh, because I wanted to sing harmonies to myself, so I went to his kitchen. He put a, probably a, I don't know, a cassette player on his table. I don't know what he did, but I sang the song and sa, and sa, sang the regular part, and then I played some pots and pans and we put that on there, and then he played that during the show and I played guitar and sang harmony to myself. I don't know. It was crazy, but then I sang the second song, which was a song called "Simply," and I tell you this because a man named Carl Finch happened to see this little program on TV and called the TV station, and they gave him my number and he called me, and he said, Are you Sara Hickman? I was like yes. And he's like, Well, I'm Carl Finch. I'm with Brave Combo and, uh, did you write that song? And I was like yeah. He's like, that's a great song and you need to make a record. And I was like okay, and the next thing I knew, Carl was at my apartment, and he brought over, all this music and, and it was like my second Pat Bonner experience. I mean Carl changed the course of my life. He definitely said, you cannot be another girl with a guitar. You're better, you're bigger than that. Which I found kind of insulting in that moment. Like, well, what does that mean? I didn't really – and he was playing me world music, and this was before wor, world music was a thing, and I was listening to polkas and I was listening to West African music and stuff from Brazil, and I was like, well, what has this got to do with me, you know, with making music and getting a record deal? I mean this this is, no, nobody listens. What is this? You know? But I also got that Carl had this energy and this vibrancy and this enthusiasm and passion, and, and that stuck on me. All of a sudden, I wanted to be like Carl, and, um, you know, and I started doin' gigs with Brave Combo sometimes where they, and I started dating the drummer in the band and, you know, and then I made my first recording. It was a little 45 single, and in the meantime, I was playing in a reggae band, uh, called The Lone Star Dub Band, and I was the lone chick in the band. I ha – I only tell you what I'm wearing because it's really important in the industry what women wear. So you know, I had on fishnet hose and a leather skirt and I would play the keyboards bubble style, and I would sing harmonies and it was really fun. Reggae music's so much fun, and sometimes I'd play like electric guitar. Um, so I was in the Lone Star Dub Band, and then I was in a, a bluegrass band called The Big Corral, which was really fun, and so it was this core group of musicians I started

meeting, and it, and they're all men, and they were all a little older than me but they were all really smart and they were all making me mixed tapes, and they were sayin', oh, you listen to this and listen to this, and they, suddenly my world went from Heart and Led Zeppelin and John Denver and, to Antônio Carlos Jobim and, you know, just, uh, David Byrne, and, and I mean it was amazing. He, it blew my world up and, and I started shifting what I was doing on stage, and Carl's very animated and bubbly and just so, his, he's just amazing. Amazing human being, and I started kinda mimicking the – I, it's okay for me to talk during songs. It's okay for me to explain why this is important to me. Maybe it'll be important to you. So, uh, I was having all these experiences in Denton, and, um, and it just broadened my whole perspective about what I could do on the guitar 'cause I started learning different styles, and I had been taking some classical guitar at North Texas, which was really great 'cause at the time, I wasn't supposed to be in that music class 'cause I was an art major, but the classical guitar teacher said, Well, I just found out midway through the semester you're not supposed to be in here, but you're doin' such a great job and you obviously love this class, so I'm gonna let you stay in because a lotta the other kids have to take it 'cause they have to. That was another boring aside, I'm sure, but anyway, um, so yeah. So Carl Finch changed my world, and, uh, then he said, let's make that record. And we made *Equal Scary People*. And, uh, he was producing it, but he would be doing other stuff or on tour, and I got impatient and I said I can produce, and then so I produced some of the songs. But it was really, uh, Carl and, and Jeffrey Barnes, who plays or played, um, saxophone with Brave Combo. He suggested I do “This is a Man's Man's Man's World,” the James Brown song, and I never heard that song, and I heard it and I knew what Jeffrey meant, and, um, you know, I just, that's, if you've ever listened to *Equal Scary People*, you'll see how much of an influence Carl was, because there's my songs, “Song for My Father” and “Simply,” and Carl did a beautiful job producing “Simply.” Um, but then there's “This is a Man's World,” and there's “I Wish I Were a Princess,” which was Carl's suggestion, which is this 1950s kinda, I wish I were a princess, boom di diddy do de ding. It's like, uh, it's, doesn't have anything to do with folk music but there it is. Um, and because of that album, which has a whole 'nother story, uh, I got signed to Elektra Records.

Norie Guthrie: Do you wanna go ahead and –

Sara Hickman: Sure.

Norie Guthrie: – share that story?

Sara Hickman: So, uh, um, I'm gon – um, so, so I was at North Texas. I was havin' a ball. I had a really interesting boyfriend with a big blue motorcycle. Um, things were happenin'. I started to play in Dallas. Um, I don't know how that – oh, I, there was a really cool place called Club Dada. It's still there, but this was in 1985, '86, and Deep Ellum was just starting to blow up. Actually it was, I wouldn't say it was starting to blow up. It was becoming of heightened interest to people that were aware of what was there, and so these little Club Clearview, um, Club Dada, uh, all these really great little clubs were opening, and traditionally, um, Poor David's Pub over on Greenville Avenue had been the place people would play, but now suddenly we had these other venues you could play in, so I was playing over at Club Dada and Brave Combo was playing there, and Ten Hands and Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians, and all these people, um, and then I started playin' at Poor David's Pub, and, uh, Poor David, uh, David Card. He's a great,

great guy. He said, he saw me at an open mic and he says, you know, I want you to come do an opener. I was like, Oh, yay. How much do you pay? And he said, Twenty-five dollars. And I said, Um, you're gonna have to pay me fifty dollars. And he said, Fifty dollars? Why would I pay you fifty dollars? And I was like, Because I'm worth fifty dollars. I have to get dressed up. I have to put my stuff in the car. I have to get all the way here, and then I'm gonna put on a great show for 30 minutes, and then I have to pack it all up and go home, so I think I deserve fifty dollars. And he's like, Okay. So he gave me, um, and then that was my lifelong beginning of a great relationship with David. He was like a father to me. Um, so I was playing in these places and Uncle Calvin's had opened. I was playing there. It was inside North Park Presbyterian Church. It's still there. A great, great, great venue, and that was kind of at the beginning of, of the folk coffeehouse scene in Dallas. I believe they were one of the first, if not the first, so I had a nice little circuit I could play, and so I was starting to get press and things were starting to happen, and I had graduated from North Texas and I moved to Dallas, and I ended up winning some of the *Dallas Observer* awards, and I ended up being on the cover of the *Dallas Observer* with three other up-and-coming musicians. Um, I mean that for all four of us. Not just the three of them. All four of us were up and coming. Um, so somehow, this rag ended up in New York City on the vice president of Elektra's desk, and from what he told me a long time ago, he looked down. It ended up on his desk. He looked down and he saw my, there was an illustration of me on the cover, and he liked my name. He liked how it sounded. Sara Hickman, and I guess he probably read the article 'bout me, and he called down to Texas and asked somebody to send a copy of my record up because Carl and I had put the, I, it was out. The record was out, and so unbeknownst to me, uh, he was looking into me, and I, because I had this record out, I could get press, um, but outside of Texas, nobody really knew about me, but this band called Killbilly, which was a punk bluegrass band, they called me and they said, Hey, we wanna go on tour. Do you wanna go on tour? And I was like, well, sure, and they said, Well, great. Because you have a record, we can get press, and because we're a band, we can get gigs and so we can tour together, and I said, Oh, that's wonderful. So here I was in a van with six or seven guys driving through the Midwest, and, um, we got to Lawrence, Kansas, and my manager that I'd just gotten called me and said, Hey, the vice president of Elektra Records is gonna fly down to Kansas and come see you at your show tonight, and I was like, What? And when I was a little girl, Elektra was the label I wanted to be on because it was the most artistic. It had, everybody you love was on Elektra. I guarantee it. Um, so I had just gotten a credit card, and I went and bought a new dress and some boots and whatever, and I got to the club and I did my sound check, and people started coming in. You know, 20 people. And, um, I started to play, and then I stopped and I said, I know you all have no idea who I am, and thanks for comin' out tonight to hear Killbilly and, but I wonder if you could do me a favor because I got a call earlier that the vice president of Elektra Records is coming from New York. He's gonna be in here tonight to hear me sing, and I worked all my life to get to this one point, so if you could act like you really like my music after every song, it would really mean so much to me. So they're all like yay, you know, yeah. And my Great Uncle Joe was there. That was exciting too. He's a great guy. He was. Sorry. Um, anyway, so I start playing, and I look over and I see this tall, handsome guy all in black kinda, and he sits down and, um, oh, I had also told the audience, He'll probably be wearing black, so when you see a guy all in black come in, that's, that's the guy, so I'm singing my songs. I finished a song. He sat down, and the audience goes, Yay! Yeah! And they're just goin' crazy, and there's beer spillin' and even the bartender was like plinkin' glasses, you know, and I'm like, you know, I'm actin' cool, like yeah, of course, you know, so I sing my next song. It's the same thing. They go nuts.

And a third song. They go nuts. And I think I finished after that, and so I was tryin' to be cool, you know. I get offstage. I go over to the bar to get a drink and I get, notice that this man wants me to come over to his table, so I go over to the table, and he stands up and he says, Hello. My name's Howard Thompson and I'm from Elektra Records, and I just have to say that's really amazing. Uh, the audience, that, that was quite a response to your performance. And I was like ah, you know. Um, so he had me sit down. We sat and we talked. He was lovely, lovely. He's still a lovely human being, and, uh, so we had a shot of tequila together and he told me he was interested, and then he started comin' to my shows and that's how I got signed to Elektra Records.

Norie Guthrie: So how was your time with Elektra?

Sara Hickman: How was my time with Elektra? Um, well, fabulous you know, amazing. I, uh, right away it was, well, what happened was right before Elektra, um, I had met a woman named Christine Lavin, whose an amazing musician and I had done a show with her and Brave Combo at the Arcadia in Dallas, a big old theater and I played, then Brave Combo played and then Christine Lavin played and I'm only telling you this 'cause it has purpose. Uh, so, after the show Christine came up to me and said you know you need to talk to my friends at Windham Hill Records and you're amazing and, and I was like your amazing and she said no seriously. So she told me what to do and I sent a, a cassette demo tape of me playing in front of my little Radio Shack cassette recorder to, uh, Windham Hill Records and, uh, she told me on the outside of the package to put from Christine Lavin up in the return address area. So I did and then I got a call from Will Ackerman who owned and founded Windham Hill and he said I got, I got your demo and, uh, I think you're pretty good. I really like this song "Salvador" and I said oh, that's great and it was a song I'd written about Salvador Dali, um, and he said but I don't think that songs done and I never had anybody say that to me before and I was a little snippy. I was like what do you mean, I think it's done and he said no, you need to go in and, and, and finish it and so I was annoyed and I said okay, all right and I hung up and then, and then I started thinking about it and I knew he was right. I knew that that song was not done and I went and I sat with it and it was really hard because I would guess perhaps other songwriters feel this way too. You, you know the truth, you know when a song is gold and you know when a song is brass and you know when a song is just dirt. This song was in between brass and gold and I couldn't figure out what to do, what to do and then I started realizing what was missing. Um, and so I, this song doesn't have a chorus, it has two bridges which I guess could be considered a chorus, but they're not. So these two bridges suddenly became apparent and I wrote them in and I rerecorded it and I sent it to him and he was like ah that's a song, that's a song. So he put me on this compilations TV with all these songwriters I'd never heard of, John Gorka, Pierce Patis, Cliff Eberhardt, amazing songwriters and at the same time Elektra had heard "Salvador" and all the sudden they liked "Salvador" so there was this little thing going on between Windham Hill and Elektra and I got permission to be on this Windham Hill compilation because what we were doing with Elektra was taking some time so I went on my first tour with that and we can talk about that later because your question was about Elektra so, um, so then, uh, I licensed *Equal Scary People* my first album to Elektra which is great. That means I retain the master for the rest of my life once a certain number of years passes by and they've exploited that material. Um, so Elektra was magnificent because I went from being a girl who was playing bars and getting some local press to all of a sudden appearing on *The Tonight Show* and, and havin' videos shot of me and being

interviewed for CMJ or, you know, um, going to, um, Friday morning, Friday, *Friday Morning Quarterback FMQB* yes, so I, I learned this whole new world of radio and going in and to magazines and there was *Pulse* which was Tower Records magazine and you would go to these headquarters and you would perform and you would schmooze with people and it was titillating and it exhausting because if you say yes to anything a label asks you to do you they will go hog wild which is great, you know, at this point in my life it was great. I had all this energy, I was 26 years old, I was probably pretty cute and I, I had a song to sing and joy in my heart and so it was fun. It was fun for people to interview me and it was fun to give interviews and, um, and then *Shortstop* came out, my second album, and then it just went through the roof and all the sudden all these other things are happening and it just, it was, it was like getting to be in the 1 percent is the best way I could put it I guess. All the sudden I knew what a yacht was and I knew what a, you know, convention was and I knew what how people lived on the other side and they lived really well and, um, I wasn't living like that. I'm just sayin' that's what it felt like. Um, so, although my, my financial status did change. so I won't lie about that. Um, then, uh, I, it started with this thing for Hollywood Records, I'm still on Elektra, but, um, there was a, a movie coming out called *Arachnophobia* and I was singing a song that they were gonna use as the lead song for the movie and the album and there was a video to be shot to the song and I went to shoot the video and there was a lot of rigamaroo about, about how I was to be painted blue and to be naked on this big spider web and I said no and all the clothing that was there was very sexy and Victoria Secret like and I said no to that and so the only other clothes there were the clothes the stylist herself was wearing and I asked if I could borrow it so we switched clothes and I wore her silk skirt and a little white top and, anyway that got back to the head of Elektra, of course and I think he wasn't too pleased with that. That was kind of the start of the downfall because I think he wanted to promote me more sexually 'cause back then I had a bigger mouth and I was younger. Um, I think he wanted me more like a Taylor Dayne and so then I started working on my third record which was *Necessary Angels* and it was me and Paul Fox, Angelo Badalamenti, the three of us were the producers for this album and Paul Fox is a great producer. He's worked with XTC and Wallflowers and so he has a very definitive pop sound. Angelo Badalamenti does all the music for *Twin Peaks* and the David Lynch films and he has also a very definitive sound and then there's me and, uh, this would have been my third album to produce on and I, I, by then I was getting pretty savvy and I felt like I could play with the big boys. But what happened and nobody was foreseeing was that you have three very different styles, three not six, three different styles and when the master was turned into Bob Krasnow who's the head of Elektra he said no. This doesn't make any sense and so my world came tumbling down because I got dropped and suddenly all the fun was gone, all the joy was gone and I felt like I was a huge failure and I was really embarrassed and not just embarrassed like for myself but embarrassed for my, for, for all of us involved in it. All the people, my family, my friends, the fans who had come to my shows and really believed in me. I just felt like I let everybody down that I wasn't good enough, obviously I wasn't good enough because my album wasn't gonna come out so that, that was a really hard time. That was a dark period. I, I didn't really know how to deal with that because I didn't know what that meant. So, that's up to that point and then if you want more I can keep going or if you have questions.

Norie Guthrie: You can keep going.

Sara Hickman: Okay.

Norie Guthrie: 'Cause you, you are, you're doing so well.

Sara Hickman: Oh thank you.

Norie Guthrie: So you just like –

Sara Hickman;Okay.

Norie Guthrie: – go with it.

Sara Hickman: Um so, episode two of this saga. Um, I do have to, I have to comment in here that my manager, Kevin Womack, uh, really, I think he really got me. I think, I think the best, to the best of his ability with what he'd done as a manager and with who I was and I was a wild child. I was all over the map, um, musically, I liked everything in the world and I liked every boy I met and I'm sure he just had his hands full and, uh, so he instead of calling me the day he found out I got dropped he actually drove from Austin up to Dallas where I was living to tell me in person and he was very gracious in how he told me and so from that day forward I, I didn't know what to do with myself. I didn't want to go out and perform 'cause I felt like I was stupid. I felt like I didn't have anything interesting to say and I didn't think, feel particularly deserving to be on stage. Um, because part of what happens when you cross over to the other side is suddenly all your dreams are coming true and it feels like your immortal, much like when you're a teenager and you feel immortal that's, that's how it feels to have your dream come true. You feel immortal to some degree. So all the sudden I was immortal again and I wasn't very special in that sense of failing at my dream. And then I was talking to my mom on the phone and I was boo hooing and having a pity party or whatever and she said you know you should do something about this and I said I can't do anything about this what do you mean. She said well it's like your songs are hostages and I said yeah, I guess, kind of, like kinda because when I got dropped from what I recall was I wasn't going to be able to rerecord my songs for 5 years and that felt weird because now I also didn't have control over my own music and she said well you know that bracelet you wear because at the time I was wearing a bracelet for man named Thomas Sutherland who was a hostage in Lebanon and I'd been doing a letter writing campaign, I'd written a song for him, I had t-shirts made that I threw out at my shows with the lyrics from the song and a picture of his face and I was tryin' to gain awareness to help him gain his freedom. So I had Thomas Sutherland on a bracelet and I said yeah. She goes well look at that bracelet and think about your songs as hostages, hostages and get bracelets made that say "Necessary Angels" and I said well what am I gonna do with bracelets and she said well you'd sell them to fans and then I got it. I was like of course. Oh my gosh mom, you're a genius. So I knew I had to start with the label so I called up to New York to talk to the lawyer there and he got on the line and we started chatting and, and then I said I'm calling you for a, a greater purpose which is I would like to buy my masters back and there's this pause and then I think he probably chuckled and he said well you know we spent over \$500,000.00 on this record so I don't think you can buy it back. I don't think we want to sell it back and I was like okay well are you sitting at your desk and he said yes and I said are, you do have pictures of your family at the desk, your kids and your wife and he said yes and I said well I don't have a husband and I don't have kids because I chose to make music and my songs are my children and you have my children and I want my children back. So I hung up the phone and I

was really upset and, um, you know, I didn't know what I was doing. I just, I just thought again part of my life has always been just ask. Why, it can't hurt to ask and then about, I don't know, an hour later maybe, or 2 hours later my manager called and he said what have you done and I said what do you mean what have I done. He said I just got a call from Elektra and they want to sell you your masters and I said really and he said yeah. So I told him what I'd said and he said oh they don't want \$500,000.00 they want \$100,000.00 and I was like really so then I called my mom and my mom's like oh you can raise \$100,000.00. Now this is 1993, almost 94 and there's no internet. There's no cell phones. I mean cell phones were just comin' on the market, but there was, the only way you could reach fans back then was you did a newsletter and you, in my case I would draw and write and do this thing and put dates on it and then I'd go to get them all Xeroxed and then I'd put 'em in envelopes and put, you had to lick stamps back in, lick stamps and handwrite all the addresses and I sent out, I don't know thousands of these requests to these Necessary Angels and I asked if they would donate a \$100.00 each and if we got 10,000 people to donate a \$100.00 each we could buy the masters back at \$100,000.00 and you would get a blue aluminum Necessary Angel bracelet that said Necessary Angel embedded on it and it had a number. They were numbered 1 through, whatever, I think I got, I actually got 500 made or 1,000 made or whatever. Um, you'd get a bracelet, you'd get a bumper sticker that said Necessary Angel and then I was gonna have a big show after we got the masters back and it was a private party for all the Necessary Angels and you would, the way you would get into the party is you would have your bracelet on. So this was a pretty high fluting dreaming on my part. Um, and nobody had ever done this. Um, so I went to the post office, I mailed all these letters out and suddenly my P.O. Box started getting responses and people wrote these beautiful letters and they sent hundred dollars, \$100.00 bills, \$100.00 checks, they would come to my shows. I had kids bringing me their piggy banks or families putting money in together. I had bands Trout Fishing in America, um, Trish and, Trish and, um, Darin Murphy and Michelle Shocked and people at Elektra. People working at the label that had just dropped me were sending me a \$100.00 bill and my NR man, Howard Thompson, sent \$100.00. You know it was just coming from everywhere and, you know, I thought it would be a really big story. I thought it would be in all the press like here's this little, little David going up against Goliath and I even had a, a woman named Joan Myers who was my media specialist, my PR person. Um, but I remember her saying there's not really a story here and I kept saying how can you not think there's a story here. Oh my gosh, please help me and I'm paying you money, please help me. Um, but it, it never broke. So I had to do it all by myself and my, and the people that helped me. But I was running this little thing out of my house and then I realized I wasn't gonna have \$100,000.00. I was short and so I sold my house. I sold several of my guitars and I had a miniature salt and pep, salt, I had an antique salt and pepper shaker collection and I sold all those and made some money and I was living with friends. I was homeless for like 6 or 7 months. I was living on people's couches. I had all my stuff in storage and I got to \$50,000.000 and I got stuck and so I sent out another letter and I said you know this is where it's at and da da da da and I guess, no, I didn't send out, hold on, I didn't send out another letter. That's coming. So my manager met the head of Discovery Records, Jac Holzman, Jac Holzman founded Elektra Records. He was the original founder of Elektra Records. So manager Kevin and Jac are talking and Jac says oh you know that Sara should come over to Discovery and then she'll still be in Warner Elektra Atlantic which was the distribution company I was in with Elektra and so I think Jac called Elektra and said hey come on man this kids working really hard, give her her masters back. I'll put her out on Discovery, she'll still be in WEA and, you know, she'll be off your hands and you'll make a little money 'cause you're not

gonna have anything sitting there in the vault. That's what I assumed happened because the next phone call I got was they'll buy it for \$50,000.00 and so, and the stuff I turned into you there's a copy of that check somewhere. I made a Xerox copy of it before I sent it to Elektra. So yay we won, we got the masters back and then I had the party and people came from all over the world. People came and my band, my friends, my musician friends, Jon Blondell and Chris Searles and I think maybe Jim Cocke but we all played, um, songs from *Necessary Angels* and there was food and cake and it was at a beautiful theater in Dallas and, um, so that happened.

Norie Guthrie: It's a heck of a story, really. Um, so at that time you were still in –

Sara Hickman: Dallas.

Norie Guthrie: – Dallas.

Sara Hickman: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: And then you relocated to Austin. Um, why did you move there?

Sara Hickman: That's a good question too. So, I had no place to really live in Dallas, I mean except with friends and somehow maybe Kevin suggested I start songwriting with other people just to be moving forward. Oh actually Discovery I think did. They said come out to Santa Monica and, and just write and keep writing and you know and *Necessary Angels* had come out and I was touring and doing all that stuff so I ended up getting a little apartment with a wonderful guy named Tom Ford in, uh, Santa Monica and I was going around and writing with David Batteau and Phil Parlapiano and all kinds of, Marvin Etzioni, um, great songwriters that live in LA and, um, so what was the question?

Norie Guthrie: Um –

Sara Hickman: I got tired of listening.

Norie Guthrie: Why did you –

Sara Hickman: All right, okay. So, I was living in Santa Monica in this, in this apartment and having a great time and at the same time, I was thinking I need to find a place to live and I felt like, again, I felt like I let Dallas down. I felt like, you know, I think part of it was that, um, this sounds so silly but I'm just gonna say it 'cause it's true but, you know, Edie Brickell who I didn't really know, I mean I met her and she's amazing, amazing person, loving person, you know, she had had this meteorite, meteoric ex, you know, experience where she did *Saturday Night Live* and then she was marrying Paul Simon and, you know, the New Bohemians were out with Bob Dylan and all the, I mean it was really amazing and so I felt like she was queen of Dallas and I was the princess and I as the princess had tarnished that role somehow. Like I, I hadn't gone as far as Edie had so I wasn't quite as good. This is my own thing but it's pretty true because she's pretty amazing. So, um, I, I started looking about where I wanted to live and I didn't want to move back to Houston 'cause I didn't really have any friends here left, they'd all left, and everybody whenever I was out on tour, people would say oh you're from Texas, do you live in

Austin? and I would say no, I live in Dallas and they'd say oh, well you seem like Austin so I thought well maybe I should get to know Austin better and I came to Austin and I realized oh, this is such a spiritual place, it's a healing place and it's, it's about children and families and nature. I loved it and I found a place in Austin and I moved to Austin so I was living half the time in Austin and half the time in Santa Monica, going back forth and that's how I moved to Austin.

Norie Guthrie: Um, was, ah, moving to Austin, was it helpful for your career?

Sara Hickman: Huh. Well, there had been a little talk for a tiny bit about when I was doing stuff with VH1 in New York about moving to New York to be a regular on VH1, um, and I seemed to recall that my manager said well, but everybody associate, associates you with Texas, you should stay in Texas and I was like, okay. Um, so moving to Austin was really interesting in that, um, I had friends and I had lots of musician friends in Dallas but when I moved to Austin, it became I wanna say more organic or more earthy or more, I don't know, it seemed like everywhere I went in Austin everybody knew everybody and, and it was a different feeling. I'm not sure what the difference is maybe because there's a major river running through the city and it, it brings a different life source or energy, I don't know but, like I would go out, I would go, I remember when I first moved to Austin I was going to Las Manitas which is a really sweet, um, two sisters that own this Mexican restaurant, and I walked in and Ann Richards, Governor Ann Richards was in there and I walked by her table and she said hi Sara and I was like hi Governor Richards and then I walked towards the back and there was Charlie Sexton and he said hey, welcome to Austin and I was like thank you and that's how Austin felt to me. It felt just really homey, like everybody, there was no I'm here and you're here and you're here. It was like everybody was right here. It was so equal and lovely and you could share instruments with people. I mean I'm not saying you couldn't do that in Dallas, but I don't know, so Austin suddenly I started writing a lot and, ah, I was traveling a lot. I was gone all the time but I would come back and, and there would be this foundation for me and then I started working a lot with Mark Hallman and Bradley Cobb and that's where I met Tommy Taylor from Chris, Christopher Cross and I, I went out on an Eric Johnson tour and, I don't know, it's just lots of things were happening and, um, the tour probably happened earlier now that I think about it but, you know, yes, it was good for me to move to Austin. It, it, I think anytime you have a shift in any part of your life, you're opening more doors so, oh yes.

Norie Guthrie: So, while you were there, you, um formed the band Domestic Science Club. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Sara Hickman: Um, yes. So, Domestic Science Club actually happened right before I moved to Austin –

Norie Guthrie: Oh, okay.

Sara Hickman: – I think, yes, because my friend Robin Macy was the founder of the Dixie Chicks and the Dixie Chicks had a falling out and Robin was on the outside of it and it was really hard, it was cruel and it was hard and I invited Robin to come sing with me at a Christmas show at Poor David's Pub in Dallas and she said oh, I'd love to, can I bring my friend Patty Lege and I

was like sure so I think we got together and rehearsed and it was a three-part harmony and we sang at the club and it was, went over pretty good and it was fun to be with two other women and signing these three-part harmony things and so we decided to have a band and we came, well Robin came up with Domestic Science Club because there actually used to be domestic science clubs in the 30s, 40s and 50s where women would share information about how to cook and clean and take care of your family, um, and you could actually get a domestic science degree in college. Those were the first degrees women could get so she thought that'd be a cool name and it was a cool name. So, ah, when *Necessary Angels* came out, Domestic Science Club went on tour with me so I would get into Domestic Science Club and we would open the show and then I would go backstage and I would change clothes and I would come out as me even though I'd just been me anyway but that was pretty fun and, and I used the same band so the guys playing with me and Robin and Patty, Chris and Jon, were also playing with me so it worked out great. So we were all in the same band for 8,000 years together. And we put out two albums. Most people know the first album but the second album we put out and they were both, excuse me, the first one was distributed, for anybody that wants to know, through Crystal Clear Sound, um, Sam Paulos' company and then the second one was distributed through Discovery. They paid for the second one so they own the second one.

Norie Guthrie: So you kind of touched on this before about, um, meeting, uh, I, now I've forgotten his name, but, um, kinda the second person that you met that was really –

Sara Hickman: Oh, Carl Finch, mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: – yes, and, um, that he would kind of, helped you a little bit with performance. Now I have seen you live, and you do really like to meld like storytelling, humor and music together.

Sara Hickman: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: Was that something that you developed right after him or was that something that's kind of, when do you feel like you kinda came into your own?

Sara Hickman: Mm, that's a good question.

Norie Guthrie: You know.

Sara Hickman: Uh, you know, when I was a child and we would go up to the Ozarks, my cousins and I, we would write plays and put on musicals and, for all the other, the older family members, and I remember that was always really fun because there was a lot of, we'd do jokes and stories and then a song, and it, so it was like, it was like a variety show. And when I started performing, I was very, very shy on the stage. I would close my eyes and play my guitar and sing my songs and just go to the next song, and I would look at my song list, and I would make sure I was going down the list. I didn't, I didn't know. Um, and then I would go in the summers and play with my grandparents, my dad's parents, uh, because both of them were musicians, and my grandma played piano, and my grandpa played saxophone, and I would play a guitar, and so I picked up a lot of jazz stylings from them. So that started shifting something for me. And then, you know, I

met Ms. Bonner, and I started doing music therapy, in essence, very simple music therapy, and then I met Carl Finch, and he was very animated on the stage. Up, uh, I think what happened was when I got to high school and I met Gretchen Phillips, Julie Campbell and Julie Prejean, and we were the folk group, uh, I remember Gretchen having this ease on stage. Julie Campbell was pretty shy, I believe, and I think Julie Prejean was pretty shy, and then I was in between Gretchen and them. But Gretchen had this way of commanding an audience right away, and she still does. Um, and so I was, I was watching her, but I wasn't really using that yet. Uh, I would, when I would go play a gig by myself, I would just do my music. And then when I, and then when I met Carl and I saw what Carl was like on stage, I think it certainly, if I was performing with Carl, we would have a little banter. And, but it was really I think me playing night after night at Club Dada, and I would look out and there'd be 13 guys or whatever, you know, and the guys were just sitting there all moony faced, you know, drinkin' their drink. And I mean, I don't mean like 13 guys together. Like a guy at a table, a guy at a table, it was pretty cute. And I would be singing to them, and I, I started talking to them. I wasn't being funny yet, I was just, I was, I, I don't know, they seemed lonely, and I would start talking to them, and then they would respond. They would laugh, or they would, they would go oh, you know, or whatever they do, and that kinda that, and some of the experience I had in college like with the motorcycle guys where I had to say something to them. These, just these little things started coming together, and being in Arts for People, hold on, I know this sounds like a lot of information, but, uh, in Dallas, I joined this group called Arts for People, and they continued that musical therapy journey for me because I was working in burn units and with, um, the first cases of AIDS in the '80s, um, pediatrics, um, um, oh my gosh, um, people with aphasia, stroke patients, um, people in comas, and, and nobody taught me how to do music therapy. I was told do what you do, and go in and figure out a program, and we'll pitch you. And, so I was driving all over DFW doing this, and there's an intimacy to music therapy that is not like anything else. It's, you know, sometimes I'm seeing someone and they're dying, and there's other people in the room, and you're comforting those people while you're focused on this person who's passing, or you're with a preemie in a prenatal unit, and you're, you can't touch them, but you can hold your hand over them, and they can feel that energy, and you're just humming tones, and they shift their head and they look at you, and it's just like a miracle. So all these things were kinda coming together, and then I just, something happened where I made somebody laugh, and once I felt that, like that was the hook for me. Like oh, that feels really good. I started drawing little tidbits out, and then I would throw more out, and then people liked laughing. And then I would start telling stories about the songs, and so I was doing all this, and then I got on Elektra, and I even had people tell me, you know, could you talk less and sing more. Because by then, I was talking, singing, talking, singing, talking, singing. And, um, I went on tour with Billy Bragg, that was my first big tour with Elektra, and suddenly, he, he, between Carl and music therapy and Ms. Bonner and, and Gretchen Phillips, and just all these little segues in between. Billy Bragg was like get outta the way. You know, let me tell you a story. You wanna know a story? He would be on stage, he would, he would talk for 10 or 15 minutes, and then they'd do three or four or five songs or whatever. But he, nobody ever told him to shut up. People were going crazy, or people were cheering, or, you know, and he would talk about politics. He would talk about hard stuff. Like he was fearless, and he was funny, and he was gregarious, and he's very handsome, and he's a, you know, he has a voice that you either like or you don't, but he's a great songwriter. And I was backstage every night. I was just like how is he doing, that is amazing. Like he made me fearless. Watching Billy Bragg made me fearless. It made me realize I need to just be me, and who gives

a rat's ass what anybody thinks. And so because of him, I started talking more, and which, of course, didn't make some people happy. But the audiences, it was, you know, a joy. It was total joy because all of a sudden, not only was I realizing that my music affects people in a positive way because it makes them feel something or makes them think about something, he brought in the thinking aspect. I had this feeling thing sort of, sort of going on, and a little bit of this humor, but he made me realize, there is power, there's power in you. Don't hide your power. You know, if you're gonna make people feel and think, make it fell, make it big. If you screw up, who cares, screw up big. And I, I was like wow, and, you know, that changed my whole life. And then I was like I wanna be like Billy Bragg. I want, you know, I wanna be Sara Hickman. How do I be more of Sara Hickman?

Norie Guthrie: Um, what –

Sara Hickman: And I just wanna say really quickly, thank you, because I've never really had a reason or a thought, a moment to sit and kind of process this and put it all together.

Norie Guthrie: Uh huh.

Sara Hickman: And for me, it's just –

Norie Guthrie: Great.

Sara Hickman: – it's, it's a, it's an honor to sit here and put these pieces together and go oh yeah, okay, that makes sense. It's a little map. So thanks for giving me a map.

Norie Guthrie: Um, kind of a, a different kinda question, but you just talked about touring, so what are some of your favorite places to perform across the state? We'll just keep it to Texas.

Sara Hickman: No, that's awesome. Yeah, no, that's –

Norie Guthrie: You could go further.

Sara Hickman: – no, no, no, no, no. No, that's great. Um, because that's a perfect segue, 'cause in my mind, when I was talking about being fearless, I was thinking of Caravan of Dreams. You know, Club Dada to me was my playground. It was where I could make mistakes and, you know, Poor David's was more of like you had to be a little more polished, and you had to be a really good songwriter because that's where, you know, the Guy Clarks and the Townes Van Zandt and people would play, and you, it was a listening room. Well, it's a bar, but for the most part, people would go to listen. Um, but Caravan of Dreams was the holy grail. I mean that club in Fort Worth, that, that was, for me, getting to be Carol Burnett and getting to be John Denver, getting to be all my childhood heroes in one place because A, they respected their artist. Back, the stage was huge, and it was kind of like, I think it was like a, sort of a half circle maybe. I'm not sure. But backstage, it was a two-story green room. Downstairs, you had full lights and mirrors and a shower and da, da, da. Then you have stairs, and they had a food spread like, like you were the queen of Egypt had shown up. It was just lovely, and all the drinks you could want. You could call down, uh, we need some whiskey sours or whatever, and they'd bring 'em up. No

questions asked. And so you felt really happy and relaxed and ready, and then you walked out on stage. And, and I don't, I wanna say it was a 600-seat place maybe, but oh my gosh, suddenly I had lines around the block. Like there was, it was crazy. It would be sold out, and people would be, you know, trying to buy each other's tickets to get in and, and I would come out on stage, and this was, people could still smoke back then too, so I'd, there'd be smoke. 'Cause like, you know, it was, you'd come out, and it was like, I, to me, I'd made it. To me, Caravan of Dreams was like heaven. I never had a shitty show. Ooh, can I say shitty?

Norie Guthrie: Yeah, I'm not on TV so.

Sara Hickman: See they trained me really well. Whoops. Um, yeah, I, I, I, I never had a bad show at the Caravan of Dreams. In fact, all, all my favorite, not all my favorite memories, but some of my favorite memories are definitely at Caravan of Dreams. It was a, a, a beautiful space. The sound was incredible. Um, and so many of the people I know now that were fans that became friends over the years, they would come to every Caravan of Dreams show. In fact, one show I had there lasted over 4 hours because there was a huge, huge, huge hail storm, and we couldn't leave, and it was right over downtown Fort Worth, and it was demolishing buildings. It was terrible. It was a big hurricane and hail. So I just kept going. And, um, when I got outside, my van was just, the whole windshield had just collapsed in from hail. It was all dense and, and I had to drive to Austin the next day, but I just did it anyway. So Caravan of Dreams. Um, the Mucky Duck in Houston. You know, for my playground at Club Dada, which was, uh, uh, I also have to say, very art savvy and, and about our performances, they had the great Reverend Bob there, and they had, you know, people were trying weird, you could do anything there. You could wrap yourself in toilet paper and sing a whole set, and nobody would think that was weird at Club Dada. Um, but in Houston, I first, I didn't, I didn't play Anderson Fair for a long, long, long, long time. I played at a place called Munchies, and then I played at Mucky Duck, and the Mucky Duck was my Caravan of Dreams for Houston. I mean, Rusty and Teresa, the owners, are like my brother and sister. I love 'em so much. And they went, they've gone through the last 20 years with me, holding my hand. They're just, they cheer me on, and they lift me up, and they were beautiful people. Um, but I could do whatever I wanted on their stage. You know, like if I was playing the Bluebird in Nashville, I knew what I was supposed to do at the Bluebird in Nashville, which was just sing. I could tell stories, but you're usually in the round with someone else, so, you know, you're, you're, you're aware of what kind of club you're in. At Mucky Duck, it was like Caravan where I could just be me. I could tell stories, I could tell jokes, I could do whatever I wanted to do, and, and it was fine. And, um, uh, uh, I'm tryin' to think if there's some place else special that, uh, in Texas that I wanna talk about. Houston, Dallas, Austin. Oh, Austin. So Cactus Caf, Cactus Café for me was also a jewel. It's the jewel. It, it's a small, small listening room on the University of Texas campus, and, uh, that's where I made my boyfriend cry, uh, when I was getting signed to Elektra, and I think that helped seal the deal, actually, because I sang a song to him and looked over at him, and he got all weepy, and it was pretty awesome. But Caravan, I mean, uh, Cactus Café also has impeccable sound. It has very loving audiences. I mean, they are there to enjoy the ride with you. So those would be my favorite places in Texas, but, yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Um, kinda change tracks here. You, I don't, I couldn't tell exactly how many albums there were.

Sara Hickman: I don't know either. I really don't. I hope you find out because I have no idea.

Norie Guthrie: Were devoted to children's music.

Sara Hickman: Oh, I know that.

Norie Guthrie: Um, but what was the impetus behind writing and releasing children's music?

Sara Hickman: Okay. Um, well, I'd been making albums, and then I veered off with Domestic Science Club. I did that. I was still making my music, um, and I got pregnant in 1995, the fall of 1995, um, unexpectedly, and I loved it. You know, I mean, I was shocked at first 'cause it wasn't on my game plan. Uh, I never had a vision of having children or being married or anything like that. Uh, and the very first time I felt Lili move inside me, I was at Club Dada, and I, I felt this butterfly thing, and I was like oh, I'm on stage and I have a baby. Oh my gosh, this is amazing. I had the drummer, and nobody could feel anything. I was like can you feel anything, and they're like no. I was like oh my gosh, I can feel her, it's so weird. Um, so I had Lili in 1996, August 15, 1996, and I started, of course I had been singing, I had been performing the whole time while she was in me, and it was great. And when she came out, I was still singing to her, and you could tell which songs she recognized. I mean, even just born, it was amazing. And, uh, I was always singing to her, and somebody, uh, a mom I knew, a couple moms I knew said oh, I wish I could sing for my children. And I said oh, you can, and they're like no, we, we're terrible singers, and they'll just push us away or whatever they said. And I said well, oh, okay. So by then, I had been making little recordings of myself to play in the car, and I would sing harmony to myself to Lili, and I started thinking oh, I should just make a record for my friends. So I went in the studio, and I made this album called *Newborn*, um, and that was kind of it. All of a sudden, I had a children's career going. The cool thing about *Newborn* was there was a fan that approached me at a show one night and said I wanna give you some money for a project. So I, I said well, I wanna do this children's CD, and so they put money into that children's CD. And then as a way to pay her back, she didn't want the money back, uh, half of the proceeds went to the Mautner Project in Washington D.C. which supports lesbians with breast cancer, and then the other bulk of the monies went to the Hill Country Youth Ranch, which I'd gone out and, and done some volunteering for, which helps, um, abused and neglected foster kids have a safe haven. So I think *Newborn* raised \$50,000.00, or a little more, for the Hill Country Youth Ranch, and probably about the same, or a little less, for Mautner. And, and then that, that really hooked me on wow, I can use my music to make money for other people. I mean, I'd been doing projects where, you know, you, people say will you pay at a benefit concert and stuff like that, but to, to make my records help other people was really profound to me. I'd done it with *Necessary Angels* too 'cause, well, no I didn't. Uh, I did it on *Spiritual Appliances* 'cause that was after my children. Yeah. So *Newborn* was really a, an awakening to me that oh, whatever I'm making, whatever format it's on, let's put some of that money into a nonprofit. I don't know, I don't know why, but I always felt a call to do things for other people, and it might be 'cause both my grandmothers worked in, uh, you know, as volunteers. I don't know. But I think part of my loneliness as a child, you know, uh, doing nonprofit or supporting people in their causes, it, it made me less lonely 'cause it made me feel connected, like I'm helping in some way. So when I attained a modicum of power, in a sense, or money, it, it was like oh, here, I can use this to help you. Let

me help you. So, um, yes, uh, you know, I, I, when I first got involved with that first, uh, psychiatric ward with the teenagers, that was, of course, the first taste of it, but then when I started getting engaged with Arts for People in Dallas and working with all those different groups, doing music and, and art therapy, and I could see, I could see how people's lives were changing right in front of me in, in at least that moment. And you know, many, many years later, I, I, like 10 years after Arts for People, I had a woman come to me after a show. She sent a note back and asked if I could meet her, and I said sure. And she said you won't remember me, but you came to a psyche unit in Dallas, an adult psyche unit, and you came in and you sang songs, and you sang a, you worked with me for a little while, and you saved my life 'cause I went into that unit and I wanted to kill myself. I didn't have a purpose. I didn't know. But you said something to me that I've never forgotten, and she said whatever it was. And, you know, those, those were my Grammys to me. Those, those moments, you can't, I can't, you can't give me anything that's better than those moments because then you realize that little dream you had as a girl, that it, you know, to, to share something, and it's musical, and it makes somebody have hope. Wow, you, you know, you just can't buy that. You can't, you can't, it's so amazing. Anyway, so, um, after Arts for People, and I moved to, I was living in Dallas, and then I got signed. Oh yeah, so I would, I would be out on tour, and I would go find the homeless people, and I started hanging out with homeless people, and I would bring food. I remember, I was doing this VH1 special called *In Your Face*, and I was the host, and it was my birthday, and we spent the whole day going around New York City and, and I had come up with this idea that we would talk to people, and I would run down the street with a microphone and go, uh, where can I find biscuits and gravy, and they would go biscuits and gravy, this is New York. What do you think? We **** that's a southern thing. You know, whatever. I didn't know what people were gonna say. I didn't know, and, you know, people weren't doing this. This wasn't, uh, I think David Letterman was just coming out, so I probably got the idea from him. But, and so I was running around. At the end of the day, and it was a very, very cold, long day, March 1st, uh, we went down into the subways to finish the shoot, and there was all these homeless people in there trying to stay warm, and they, VH1 had made me a birthday cake, and they brought the cake, and they were singing me happy birthday, the, the film crew and the PR people or whatever. And I took the cake, and I walked over and I sat down with the homeless people, and I, I started slicing it up and giving it to them. And somebody came over and said, you know, we, we can't film, we, I was like oh no, I don't want, I, I don't want you to film this. This is time. This is our time. Thank you for the cake, but, you know, and I think they were shocked that, that I would go sit with these people. Because, you know, anyway, that, that really, uh, you know, finding people after showing, and taking money from CD sales and just going and distributing it or, or really bringing people food and clothing was the biggest thing for me 'cause that's what I could do right there, and the people really needed socks or whatever they needed. And then I got involved with, um, the Texas Evolution Network, and I started speaking out about the death penalty, and I, I was very engaged with Amnesty International. I joined in, in college, and that's how I got in, involved with speaking out about Thomas Sutherland, and that came into my music on *Shortstop*. And, you know, and, and so I was doing stuff with the homeless. I was involved with speaking out about the death penalty, which was not anything anybody ever wanted to hear about, so that's why I put it into a song, because I could talk about it in the song. And then I was at a radio station in Nashville, this was when I was on tour for *Shortstop*, so this would've been 1990 or 1991, I went into this radio station, and they asked, and every station at that point I, I was singing "I Couldn't Help Myself." That was the big single. And for some reason, in Nashville, you go on,

and you talk gobbledygook. You'd sing this song, you'd maybe talk a little more and you were done. They asked me to sing another song from the album, and I was like oh, wow, and they're like sing the one that you like the most, although they said it like this, sing the one you like the most, 'cause they all had that radio voice, and they all talked like that. And I was like okay, and I wanted to sing "If We Send Our Hearts Over Now," which talks about Thomas Sutherland, but it starts out talking about me being raped. Um, it's, you, you don't hear that in the song. Like you here in song is I'm being attacked, and it's in first person. And the second verse is about the person that attacked me is now in jail. And the third verse is about Thomas Sutherland because he's a universal victim. So you got personal victim, the second victim and third victim. So I finished this song. It's a, it's a song I usually have the audience sing along on. I never really talked about it on stage except about Thomas Sutherland, and I finished the song, and the DJ said oh, well what, what, what was that song about. And I had never said this, and live on the air, I said well, it's a song about victimization, and I, I was a victim of rape. And he said something like we have to go to a commercial break, and they asked me to get up and leave, and they walked me out, and I had to go sit in the limo, and they took me away. They did not want me to talk about that. They did not want me to ruin their day. And I, uh, felt so ashamed, like, like I'd done something wrong. And I knew it. I knew, you know, I knew when I was picking that song in the back of my head, what if they ask me, and I thought I have to say it. I have to, and not just, you know, not just for me, but why can't I talk about rape? Why can't we talk about it? It's a terrible thing, and it should be talked about. And, you know, I just ended up, so I didn't talk about it for a long time after that. So there's that element. And I started working with women in domestic violence situations. I started going to women's shelters. I started trying to help there because I thought wow, if people shut you down for that, you know, they're getting shut down all the time, of course. And then I started speaking out about abortion rights. Uh, with NARAL and with the pro-choice group, um, Janie [Bush] in, um, Dallas. We started doing pro-choice concerts in the park, and, and then, you know, I just, it just seemed like there was, you know, I, I got to work with, um, this is how I met Molly Ivins, 'cause Molly Ivins and I were working, uh, speaking at an event about the death penalty, and they brought in, you'll have to look her up, I can't think of her name, but it's this little German woman [Anna Hauptmann]. Her husband, her husband was put to death for the Lindbergh baby or somebody.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sara Hickman: And he, he was innocent. He didn't do it. But so here was this little 90-year-old woman who came up, and she was the lead speaker. So I performed, and Molly Ivins spoke, and this woman spoke, and it was her birthday, and we were all like crying, listening, excuse me, listening to her story. Uh, it just seemed like everywhere I turned I could do music, but I was getting to either hear a new message that was important or talk about a message to people that didn't know about it. So then I got involved in Romania, and I went to work with the orphans there, and then, and, you know, my fans, oh my gosh, they did amazing, the, again, I had, uh, Xeroxed letters. I'm going to Romania, please, I need socks, I need shoes, I need coffee, I need, you know, and I, and I went to Lufthansa, and I said can you please help me ship this stuff over? I don't have the money. Lufthansa's like sure. I mean, I, I sang a song for Michaels MJ Designs in exchange for art supplies. You know, and I, and I would just take it over, and I would go around to these, uh, these orphanages that were horrible, and I would make art with kids, and I would bring them stuffed toys, and I would bring them socks, and I'd use cigarettes to, you

know, bribe my way down a street or whatever I had to do to get past a guard with a machine gun. And, you know, it just seemed like the, the more engaged I got with social justice, the more I loved it, and the more I, I wanted audiences and my music and social justice to be one thing. And I, I, you know, I, I, I would assume a big part of that was having Ms. Bonner plant that seed, and then having, seeing Billy Bragg talk about, you know, what was happening around the world. But I don't know. And then, and then when I went to Austin, there was just so much to do. You know, and I got involved, involved with House the Homeless, and I, you know, gave a guitar for an auction for them. We'd get people to sign guitars that I knew that were famous, and I would, I would sing at their memorial service every November to, to, we would read the names of those that were homeless that died on the streets that year. And I, I have this song called "Joy" that I wrote based on a homeless woman I knew who passed away on the streets. And, you know, I, I made a video, uh, for "Joy," and, uh, on my own dime because Elektra didn't wanna make one about it. And, uh, so I learned how to direct a film and, and write out a storyboard and make edits. And, you know, and that won first place in the USA Film Festival because, uh, because it was a social justice thing. And, and then, uh, it got played on, I don't know if it was the Playboy channel, or it got played on VH1, or, it got played anyway. It was amazing. It still got played. And, and, and what somebody listening to this may or may not understand is again, there was no social network like there is now. This was all stuff that you're doing it because you believe in it, and you're gonna worry about how to make it work after you do it, and, and you're kinda doing it as you're going and figuring out the stuff, and then trying to find people to help you do what you need to do because it hasn't been invented yet almost. It's like, uh, it, there was no Google. I couldn't ask Siri anything. Anyway, so then I just kept, you know, I got involved with the SPCA, and I wrote them a song called Skin Leather, uh, something Skin Leather and, Feath, "Skin Feathers, Skin Feathers" and Fur to sing at their SPCA, SPCA Fur Ball. Anyway, you name it, I've probably done it. And I loved it, and I loved every minute of it, and I hope that I, you know, sometimes I would, once I had children, I would take my daughters out to House the Homeless or different protests. We, my youngest daughter and I just marched in the Women's March after Trump became that person that he is, always been. Uh, anyway, we marched in the Women's March together, and it was just dynamite to see my kids engaging in social justice in their own way, too.

Norie Guthrie: Another kind of interesting thing that I read about you was that you've worked on a variety of commercial campaigns.

Sara Hickman: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: What is that work like?

Sara Hickman: You know, um, that work is really fun, and it's terrifying, because you never know what the client, if the client's gonna be there, if, uh, uh, so we're talking about commercial jingles, right? So, uh, the first one I did, I didn't get the ad spot, but I got an audition to go for a Borden Light Milk commercial. It was, and they took that famous song, I don't know the name of it, but I had to go introducing Borden Light, ever light, every bite tastes just right, da, da, da, da, da, da, for your health and fitness needs, and I had to sing it faster and faster, and I had to sing it in the certain key that was a little high for me, and, you know, and I didn't, I didn't know, I, I was at this big agency in, in, uh, Dallas Richard's Group, and it was really scary 'cause it was

different, you know, there's, you're under a time constraint, and people are staring at you, and it's not like making an album where it's kind of you're doing your thing. Um, so I didn't get that, but I, I was like hmm, that was kind of interesting. Then I got a little Coke spot, and I got a little Fannie May spot, and then I got a spot for Clark, Clark Wilson Homes in Austin, and this was also a, a time where I realized hmm, 'cause they were negotiating with me about how much they were gonna pay me to sing this spot, and I was also gonna be in the spot. And there's this pretty girl sitting on top of a gazebo singing about buying a Clark Wilson Home. And I said you know, I'll do this spot if you'll match what you're paying me and give it to Housing the Homeless. And, well we were in a big board meeting with a whole bunch of people, and Clark Wilson himself, or whoever his representative was was there, and he was like I, I, I care about the homeless, of course I will, you know, da, da, da, da, da. And then I was like oh, this is kinda fun. I put him on the spot. Of course he's gonna say yes. You know, then it's like, it's a little game, and it's fun. Anyway, so he matched what he paid me and gave it to Housing the Homeless, which is great. But then I, I did a, a, I did a, a Wal-Mart ad, and, and that started a whole different ball of wax because generally, when you do a jingle, you go in and you do a demo, and you might get a hundred, \$150.00 just to sing, and then they pitch it to the client, and then the client picks what they like, or they listen to different singers and pick the singer they like, whatever they're doing. And, uh, and I got the spot, and then I did Wal-Mart for a long time. And then, uh, the ad agency that did Wal-Mart came and asked if we'd like to have our whole family in the commercial. And being on camera is different from singing a spot, uh, and it would've been a lot of money. It would've probably helped our kids' college funds. Um, and my husband is very adamantly against Wal-Mart. So, uh, so my husband is anti-Wal-Mart, and I came home, I said oh my gosh, we're gonna make so much money. This will help the kids, blah, blah, blah, and he's like no. And I was like you're right. So I went back to the ad agency. I said no, we can't be in the spot. And they're like what? Nobody ever says no, and, uh, I was like yeah, my husband doesn't approve of Wal-Mart. He thinks what they do is wrong, and they're like wow, really? You know, pretty cool. Anyway, so, uh, then after Wal-Mart, I did, uh, I'm doing other ones too, but I'm just telling you big ones 'cause it's gotta be 8 hours, you're into this. Um, then I did Daisy Sour Cream for 8 years, and that was a blast. So you go in, and they have a, a tune, they have the words, you sing it. The one thing about the Daisy thing was they had, um, put on a dollop of Daisy, and I was like why don't you just make it do a dollop of, and they're like ah, which I'm pretty sure at that point I had said, and I should have rightfully said, hey, I'm a writer now, 'cause you get paid to write too, but I didn't think to do it 'til what, whatever. And so I sang it for 8 years. It was okay. Um, and it's really fun. You go in, and it could be anywhere from a half an hour to an hour, and you sing something, and then it can play forever, and then you get paid every quarter. So sometimes you get a check for a penny, sometimes you get a check for thousands of dollars, and sometimes you get 15, 20 checks for thousands of dollars or hundreds of dollars. You know, so it's exciting. You never, I'm not quite sure how it works, but I don't care. It's magic money, and, uh, then after Daisy Sour Cream, I have been singing Popeye's for the last 8 years, and I just finished singing some new segments that will come out in the fall of 2017. That's the year I'm in right now. Although, by the time she finishes it, uh, interviewing me, it may be 2019. I am very long winded. I know. Go get a coffee, come back. I'll be here. Anyways, while she's figuring out her question, I'll just tell you, yes, so when you're watching the Popeye's ad and it's got Annie, and she's going, okay, and, and, you know, Annie's going mm hmm, I bet you love my fried chicken or whatever she's saying, and you hear that mm hmm, mm hmm, mm hmm. That's me, and at the

end, love that chicken from Popeye's, mm hmm. That's me too. So now you know. Good, go ahead.

Norie Guthrie: Looking back on your musical output, which albums mean the most to you and why?

Sara Hickman: Mm. Wow. I've never had anybody ask me that question I don't think. Hmm. Um, well, I just had a whole bunch of stuff pop into my head. Uh, I guess I'll start with the first response, which was *Faithful Heart*. *Faithful Heart*, I just, I think sonically, which is probably not the answer people would expect, but I think that album sounds delicious. Um, Marty Lester was the engineer. We did it at Arlyn Studios in Austin, and I worked with Will Taylor and Strings Attached. He did beautiful arrangements. All the musicians were exquisite, including John Fremgen, who I think I left out of the liner notes. So, I'm sorry, now you, this is your payback, yay. Um, that album, just, I felt like my voice was in really good form. I thought Marty really captured it well, and I got to do some things on there that mean something just to me and other people that nobody needs to know about. Um, I'm really proud of that album, and I, I drew the cover, and I had photos taken with Lance. Um, and Todd Wilson did the photography, and just everything about that record to me was full of love. And there was some hard times. Things were, hard things were happening to musicians on that project, that, and we had to take, we had to figure out things to do, and, and I don't know. That was, that was, I love that record. Um, of course, *Equal Scary People*, because that was my first album, and it's, you know, I, I'll never understand how anything happened, but I'm grateful that *Equal Scary People* was made. I'm, I'm grateful Ray-Mel Cornelius did the artwork. I'm grateful that Howard Thompson liked it. I'm grateful Kevin Womack liked it. I'm grateful for all the musicians who played on it, which there are way too many to mention, but thank you all. And, um, and I thought that collection of songs was really, I don't know, it, they don't seem like they match, but as a collection, it was, it worked like, just like a handshake. It just felt, felt good. And the last song, "Equal Scary People," I played all the instruments on it, did all the vocals, and that was the only time I've ever played bass on a recording, or, I mean, it was just, it was fun to do all of it. And then I guess I talk about my children's albums, because to me, really my children's albums define me the, the best. I, I, I guess people would think my adult albums do, but I don't think people listen, people with children listen to my children's albums, but if you'd ever listen to my children's albums, you can hear just the core of me, 'cause I'm just having the best time. I'm very inventive, I'm playful, I'm working one on one with Marty Lester. We are having a great time, and, um, and I get to be all the different parts of me as a whole, and I, and doing children's music, music is fun 'cause you don't have to have a reason. You know, you can just make music. I, I sometimes felt like as an adult making music, there needs to be, the content needs to kind of mesh together, which none of mine ever have. Um, but on children's music, it's just a blast, and I really, I'm grateful that I made the children's albums I did. And lastly, I, I would say thanks to makin' Domestic Science Club records, because I never had two sisters. I, I mean, I was grateful to be in the band with Gretchen Phillips and Julie Campbell and Julie Prejean, but with Robin Lynn Macy and Patty Mitchell Lege, we were practicing, and we were doing really intricate hard three-part harmonies, and we would have a big swing band in the, in the, on the album, and we would have the finest bluegrass players. I mean, Robin knows everybody, and just, she would bring in these songs, and I don't even know where she'd find 'em, but she introduced us to a whole new world of music. And those albums mean so much to me because I don't know that I could sing those songs today. I

don't know how I did it, and I can only credit, credit that Robin and Patty are geniuses, and they allowed me into that scope. So I'd say those are the albums, *Faithful Heart*, *Equal Scary People*, *Newborn*, *Toddler Big Kid*, and my collection of children's music, and *Domestic Science Club*, one and two. *Domestic Science Club*, and the second one's called *Three Women*, in case you wanna get those. Good luck finding them.

Norie Guthrie: Um, in 2010, you became the Texas state musician.

Sara Hickman: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: What did that mean to you?

Sara Hickman: Um, well, I believe they called me, and I thought it was a joke, and so I said ha, ha, very funny, and I hung up 'cause I thought it was my mom or something. I didn't know who. Um, what did it mean to me? Well to me, it was another opportunity to help, you know, here's another, uh, stage, another format where I can, I will get some recognition, but I can use that recognition to give back, right? It was very exciting. And, um, and I'm sure I drove the people that took, Texas Commission of the Arts crazy because I'm, I don't know, I hope I didn't. But I went into the meeting, uh, I, I, and I asked them, I said can I, huh, can I use that, this platform to raise awareness and raise money. And they're like well, sure. I mean, we don't have any money to give you. And I was like no, I don't want any money. Uh, but I just need to make sure that's not gonna mess, get y'all in trouble. And they're like no, no, no. So, um, and I would just like to say it's, it's cool because when you become official state musician of Texas, or Texas musician, uh, it's through the Texas Commission of the Arts, and it's through, uh, certain members of the, the legislative body, the Texas legislators. And so it's Republicans and Democrats, they're all voting on it as well. And that's cool because they're coming together over musicians they think deserve this honor, which is a great honor. So, um, Willie Nelson was the mu, state musician before me, and so he was 2009 to 2010, and I was gonna be 2010 to 20, 2011. So the good thing was, I had a whole year before I was gonna be state musician to get my act together and figure out what I was gonna do, right? So I thought it would be cool to take my songs, because then I didn't have to license or do a whole much of rigamaroo with other people, take my songs and have other Texas musicians sing them, make a double disc, so it's 39 songs, have that money go to Creative Action, which at the time was called Theater Action Project, so if you look and that's what it says on the album, blah, blah, blah. Anyway, now it's Creative Action, and Creative Action is an amazing organization that, uh, goes into schools and does afterschool programs in the arts and, and theater, and they do peer to peer, uh, so kids are teaching other kids about drugs and, and, um, domestic violence or, uh you name it, they're working on it. And it's a, a, just, I can't say enough about this program. So I thought I wanna put my money where my mouth is and raise awareness and money for this group. So at this time, and in 2009, I was also thinking it would be cool to put together a family program to go into schools and teach about creativity. So I had met Jason Molin and Greg Parsons, and we became Family Time Rocks, and we made an album. I, I went to HEB and asked for a grant, which I got. Thank you HEB. And we made, uh, uh, Family Time Rocks made a CD, uh, and it was a collection of poems and stories and songs in all kinds of different languages, and it came with a workbook so you could listen to a song and then, as a teacher, talk about creativity with your class and do these projects based on what you just heard. Or if you're a family at home, you know, the family that creates together does great

together, and then we were doing live performances at the Houston International Festival where we went up, we went up to, did we go to Missouri? Uh, we went, we were going all over and playing. It was really fun, and two great guys, I couldn't ask for two better brothers. Anyway, so I was doing Family Time Rocks, and I was producing this enormous CD, so I was asking, of course, Brave Combo and, and, uh, Trout Fishing in America and Patrice Pike and Ruthie Foster and, you know, uh, everybody. You, I don't know, just a lot of people. And, uh, they're all saying yes, and, and their part of the program was they had to record it themselves. And then, so I would send, pitch them two songs that I thought would fit their personality, and they would pick one, they would record it, they would send it back to me, and then, so I was, I was sending out songs. I had this big board in my office where I had everybody's names and where they were in the process. Sent the song, approved song, recording song, finished song. You know, and, uh, so I was doing that, I was doing Family Time Rocks, and I was working on an album called *Absence of Blame* which came out in 2010, and that was an adult album, uh, with Mark Addison, which was great. Thank you, Mark. Um, so, uh, I had everybody that I had wanted except for Willie Nelson, and I went to an event where Willie was, um, and I went up and asked Willie if he would sing this song, and he said yes, and, uh, I was so excited. I turned around and I thought, my husband Lance was standing behind me, I turned around and I grabbed him, and I kissed him on the mouth. I was just like yes. You know, and it wasn't my husband, it was Senator Kirk Watson, and, and his wife. And, and I said oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. And he's like oh, Sara, have you met my wife? And I was like oh, I'm so sorry, I'm excited, I just got Willie, which, you know, didn't sound good either. But anyway, so, um, so Willie sang, and there's a whole cool Willie story, but that's another story. Anyway, so, so to me, that year was really important. So I got all my ducks in a row, and then 2011 came, and, and, uh, Creative Action worked really hard, and we got the Paramount Theater donated, and we had a big event at the Paramount to raise money, and Robert Earl Keen, all these people that were on the album came out and played. It was very cool. Um, and, of course, Gretchen Phillips was on it too, which was really neat because it came full circle that she got to be, um, a part of the project, and her version of my song is spectacular 'cause she's spectacular. Anyway, so, um, I was hoping that this would be a snowball effect. Okay, like so this person in between Willie and Lyle Lovett that nobody really knows, Willie who? Lyle Lovett. But this person, Sara Hickman started this idea that each Texas musician would come in and have a certain nonprofit that they believed in, and they would use their profile as state musician and, and raise awareness, right? I was so excited. I, Billy Gibbons was after me, and I, and I talked to his wife, and he's like ah, whoa, Billy will wanna do that, and I, I was like oh, well please tell him to do something like this. And then, and, but it hasn't happened. I don't know why. I was, I, I was so, I was so certain that that would become the thing. You know, oh, you're Texas musician, and is there a nonprofit you're interested in? Here's some things you can do. You know, do it your way, but here's what Sara did.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sara Hickman: You know, and then eventually they wouldn't even talk about me. They'd just, they'd wanna do what the person before them did. It would be so cool. So I don't know why that didn't take off either.

Norie Guthrie: It seems like a really good platform.

Sara Hickman: Right?

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Sara Hickman: And it would also bring a higher awareness of, awareness of state musician, because nobody really knows we have a state musician. I mean, it's becoming a little more known –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sara Hickman: – you know, but like, I just found out yesterday Marcia Ball's gonna be the next state musician. Um, and I was like oh, that's so cool, but I didn't hear about it. You know, and others, we could make it so cool that other states would do it, and then they would have state musicians, right? And then it would be this ongoing win-win situation.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sara Hickman: So anyway, I tried.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah, I guess, maybe they were trying to make it kinda like the, the state poet and make it like a ****.

Sara Hickman: Yes, in fact the state poet laureate, who I met, Karla Morton, the day I was at, at the legislative, lative, uh, at the state capital--I'm getting tired--at the state capital, the, you go up on the dais and they ring a bell, and you get a, a certificate, and blah, blah, blah. She was there, of course, the poet laureate, the 2D and the 3D artists, and then the state musician. She ended up appearing on the Family Time Rocks CD reading one of her poems. So it was again, you know, it's crisscrossing and networking and how much fun is that? So.

Norie Guthrie: Um, I guess you want to take a moment and talk about how the music industry has changed since you began?

Sara Hickman: Ooh. Yeah. I'm gonna take a sip of water on that one. Hold on 1 second. Let me calm my throat. Mm. Well, how has it changed? How has the music industry changed? Um, well, let's see. When I started, when I was a little kid, whippersnappers, when I was a kid, uh, you just worked hard. You just practiced, and you worked hard, and you wrote your songs, and you showed up. So if I was gonna sing at church, I would sing at church. If I was gonna sing at school, I was gonna sing at school. That, you know, and then you just kept your eye on the prize. I, you, I, there, I didn't know of any way to get to a major label. That just seemed like a pipe dream, but it was in my head all the time. And, um, then I started, you know, when I first started recording, uh, the first recording I did was I think on quarter inch tape, like the whole master for my, for *Equal Scary People* was on quarter inch maybe, and then it was 2 inch. Um, I'd have to ask Terry Simmons that, but there was somebody before Terry Simmons, and we recorded some stuff on quarter inch, and I know because I gave it to you. Um, then I became, uh, and 2 inches already has been around, uh, so maybe I was an anomaly, and it was a weird thing. Uh, so 2 inch for a long time, and then it went to ADAT, and, and DATs, and then it went, you know, to Pro

Tools and, and Garage Band and, whatever, you know. I mean, I can't, uh, whatever. So, uh, so in terms of, uh, what medium people used to record on, that's change significantly. I started on a cassette player, and then buying another cassette player and, and multitasking myself because I didn't know about 4 tracks, and then going to 4 tracks, and then being in real studios with flying faders, and then Pro Tools, and it's all digital. Um, and in terms of the music business, well, I don't, I don't know how much it's changed. Uh, it's a contractual business, and if you aren't careful with what you sign, you can lose a lot, or you can gain a lot, or you can be right in the middle. Um, there's slimy people, and there's, there's good people, and the bad people are very bad, and those people never go away. And in terms of the music industry, uh, you know, I don't think it's ever had more glitz and glamour than it does now, and it's, there's more talent. I mean, there's always talent. There's always, always been great music, and there's great music we'll never hear because sadly wasn't recorded. The difference now is you've got, you know, I mean, when I was growing up, I guess, you know, if you got on *The Tonight Show*, that was a big deal. That was as high as you could get, right? Um, and then along came MTV and VH1 and, and radio, you know, first radio, or video killed the radio star as they say. Then after that, now it's just, you know, you, you had a, you had a single focus. You get a label, get on *The Tonight Show*, play Carnegie Hall, whatever those kinda things are. Now it's like, there's just so much all the time, information coming and going, and people are making music on *American Idol*, and people are online and uploading YouTube videos of themselves. They're doing Snapchats. They're doing, you know, uh, it's just everywhere, and it's, it's almost, uh, for me, it's almost too much. I'm not really sure where to look or what to listen to. So, uh, I'm sure, you know, and it's an exciting time because that's what people know right now. The music industry is always what it is right when it's happening. So for me, it was what it was. You know, for my friend Adam Stewart, who's doing really well right now and I guess has a label looking at him, it's an exciting time because he has a label looking at him. So it doesn't really matter if the label, the industry has changed or not. It is what it is. You know, and, and you have to be with what it is while it's happening to be a part of it. And so there's more media sensations. You could be everywhere at once, whereas you only had a few opportunities when I was growing up. Now you could be everywhere. And if you're huge, like Adele, I mean, the fact that she sold more records than anyone and her song hadn't even come out yet, that would never have happened when I was growing up. That would never have happened for Lightin' Hopkins, that would never have happened, you know, going all the way back to, I don't know, just, that's amazing to me. So it's just a different, it's, it's all good. There's nothing, it's just different.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Sara Hickman: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: So you recently retired.

Sara Hickman: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: Um, why did you decide to retire at this time?

Sara Hickman: Um, well, I, I decided to ret, I, I had one, I had been thinking about it for a long time. I, I started thinking about it, uh, probably 2011, 2012, which is crazy 'cause 2009, '10 and

'11 were highlight years. I, I had very, very big projects going on, and I was delegating and, and manipulating to make these things happen. Not manipulating in a negative way. Uh, like manipulating clay, working, yeah, working towards making things happen. Um, but I had some very severe health issues in 2011, and, um, I just, I found myself not functioning quite as well, and I, and I was, I would get tired more often, and, you know, in this industry, everybody has an opinion, and, and I think I finally hit my, my teacup was overflowing with opinions. I had had opinions, you know, I just, I think I just, I had people telling me you shouldn't, you shouldn't do this and you shouldn't do that, and you shouldn't do this and you shouldn't do that, and you should try to do this, and you should, just, and it just seemed like that was all around me all the time, and I, and still I was, I was making these things happen, and I was doing it my way, and I highly encourage everybody to do it your way. But, um, I don't know. And then I, you know, you know, Io, our youngest daughter Lili, our oldest daughter, they're such talented people. They're such beautiful people. I mean, I just, I would hear them sing, and I would go wow, they can sing. I mean, I'd had this career, and I have all these records, and blah, blah, blah, but all of a sudden, I could really hear them. And it just seemed like I needed, and this, I'm not being a martyr. I don't want you to get mad at me. I don't want people to say whatever, I just wanted to kinda move outta the way. I felt like I'd done everything I could. I don't, I can't keep up anymore with social media. It's too much for me. But Lili and Io, they just, man, nothing makes me happier than when they sing. And Io doesn't sing anymore, and she doesn't like me to talk about it, so don't watch this Io, but she has a beautiful voice, just as beautiful as Lili's. They're very different, and, and I miss her voice. And I guess I thought if I moved outta the way, they would have more room. So, anyway, Lili's making music, and it's just, uh, it's exquisite. It's, I, I can't even, I don't even know how she does it. It's, she's like a magic fairy. She's, her voice is so beautiful, and her songs are just unbelievable and, you know, and Io is just, just as talented. And I don't know, it just seemed like a good time. I think I'm tired. I think, you know, I don't know why they say retired. They should say I'm tired, I'm gonna go get re-fired because, so, I'm just tired. You know, I just, I feel like I really, to the best of my ability, and I made a shitload of mistakes, and I am really sorry to all my boyfriends. I know I'm a nut job. I'm hard, I'm mean, I'm, I'm here one minute, but I'm not and, uh, I, I, you know, I don't have regrets. Like Bonnie Raitt says, I don't have regrets 'cause it got me right here. But, you know, I'm sorry, and I just, I just had the best time. I, you know, I did, I really worked hard. I don't think anybody would question that. And I made things happen that didn't exist before, and I'm really proud of that, and I tried to be as creative as my parents were and find creative solutions to everything and make things exist that brought beauty to the world, and now it's just, uh, I just wanna live by the sea and make good things happen in smaller communities, and that's what I wanna do. So I hope that answered your question. Sorry again. I don't give short answers.

Norie Guthrie: That's, that's excellent. Um, well, I think with that, you have come to an end.

Sara Hickman: Yay.

Norie Guthrie: But I wanna thank you so much.

Sara Hickman: Thank you.

Norie Guthrie: This has been lots of fun.

Sara Hickman: Thank you.