

Kye Flemming: Folk Singer to Country Songwriter

By the time she turned twenty-six, Kye Fleming had already spent several years performing her folk music at clubs and coffeehouses around the country, but her big break still hadn't arrived. Tired and discouraged, she was about to head home to visit her parents in Arkansas when a music friend talked her into tagging along on a trip to Nashville, where he was set to meet producers and publishers.

On just her second day in the city, Fleming's original music caught the ear of a publisher, who heard country sounds in her folk songs, and he signed her to become a full-time songwriter. With that, Fleming happily gave up any dream of a performing career.

"I started thinking somebody's trying to tell me something," she recalled. "It was from giving up the struggle to try to make something happen, and all of a sudden, things started happening."

From that moment, in 1977, Fleming went on to become one of country music's most celebrated songwriters, earning numerous industry awards and a place in the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Born October 9, 1951, in Pensacola, Florida, Fleming grew up moving often to follow her father's Navy career. But music was a constant, and she was deeply influenced not only by the pop songs of the 1960s but by two uncles who played in country bands. In ninth grade, she was given a used guitar by her aunt, and almost immediately, she began writing songs because she found "it's easier to write new ones than to learn somebody else's."

In her seven years as a professional folk artist, she built a collection of more than 200 original songs. But she was never able to get a foothold with publishers or record labels on the East or West coasts. Abandoning solo writing once in Nashville, she struck gold – and platinum – by teaming with other songwriters. Her go-to partner was another young songwriter, Dennis Morgan, and together they helped create a country-pop sound that propelled Barbara Mandrell to a Country Music Hall of Fame career. The duo contributed six of the ten cuts on their first Mandrell album, 1978's *Moods*, and went on to write specifically for her – a luxury afforded to a rare few songwriters.



Fleming found her strength in the lyrics, and Morgan carried his weight with the melodies. "Dennis played guitar real well, better than me," she said. "I still got to have input on the music, but I did most of the lyrics, and so we did it at the same time ... I do love the energy that comes from the mingling of ideas and working off somebody else."

Over a six-year period in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Fleming and Morgan became one of country's all-time great songwriting duos, also turning out classics for Ronnie Milsap and Charley Pride, two other Hall of Fame inductees. Since then, Fleming has gone on to expand into other music genres, collaborate with other songwriters – most notably Grammy-winning singer-songwriter Janis Ian – and devote herself to mentoring young songwriters and artists.

Sources: *American Songwriter*, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum "Poets and Prophets" series, *Songwriting Magazine*

LISTEN:

"Crackers" (Barbara Mandrell)
"I Was Country (When Country Wasn't Cool)" (Barbara Mandrell)
"I Wouldn't Have Missed It for the World" (Ronnie Milsap)
"Nobody" (Sylvia)
"Roll on Mississippi" (Charley Pride)
"Smoky Mountain Rain" (Ronnie Milsap)
"Some People's Lives" (Bette Midler)
"Years" (Barbara Mandrell)

WATCH:

Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum's "Poets and Prophets" series, July 28, 2012: In a lengthy filmed interview, Kye Fleming recounts her journey as an artist and songwriter and discusses career highlights. (countrymusichalloffame.org/programs/poets-and-prophets)