

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 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.

From that moment, in 1977, Fleming went on to become one of country music's most successful 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 she was always near music, and she was influenced by both the pop songs of the 1960s and by two uncles who played in country bands. In ninth grade, she was given a used guitar by her aunt, and 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, written solo. In Nashville, she struck gold – and platinum – by teaming with other songwriters. Her favorite partner was another young songwriter, Dennis Morgan, and together they helped create a country-pop sound that turned Barbara Mandrell into a major star.

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."



By the mid-1980s, Fleming and Morgan had become one of country's all-time great songwriting duos, also penning classics for Ronnie Milsap and Charley Pride – members of the Country Music Hall of Fame, like Mandrell. Since then, Fleming has gone on to expand into other music genres, collaborate with other songwriters, 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)