



KYE FLEMING: FOLKSINGER TO COUNTRY SONGWRITER



By age twenty-six, Kye Fleming had spent several years performing her folk music around the country, but her big break still hadn't arrived. Tired and discouraged, she was headed to visit her parents in Arkansas when a music friend talked her into tagging along to meet some music producers and publishers in Nashville.

On just her second day in the city, Fleming's original music caught the attention of a publisher, who signed her to a full-time songwriting job. With that, Fleming happily gave up her dream of a performing career. From that moment in 1977, Fleming rose to become one of country music's most successful songwriters, earning numerous awards and a place in the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Born in 1951 in Pensacola, Florida, Fleming moved often while growing up to follow her father's Navy career. But music always surrounded her. She was influenced by the pop songs of the 1960s and by two uncles who played in country bands. In ninth grade, Fleming 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 wrote more than 200 songs. In Nashville, her career skyrocketed when she began writing with other songwriters. Her favorite partner was another young songwriter, Dennis Morgan, and together they penned a string of catchy country-pop hits that helped turn Barbara Mandrell into a major star.



Fleming and Morgan made the perfect songwriting team: she focused on writing the lyrics while he concentrated on composing the melodies. "Dennis

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LISTEN

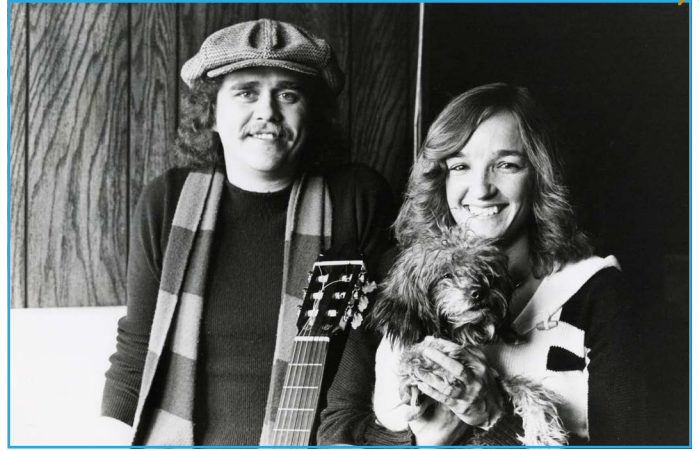
"I Was Country (When Country Wasn't Cool)" (Barbara Mandrell), "I Wouldn't Have Missed It for the World" (Ronnie Milsap), "Roll on Mississippi" (Charley Pride), "Smoky Mountain Rain" (Ronnie Milsap)



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played guitar real well, better than me,” she says. “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 hit songs for Ronnie Milsap and Charley Pride, both of whom, like Mandrell, were future Country Music Hall of Fame members. Since then, Fleming has gone on to expand into other music genres, work with other songwriters, and mentor young songwriters and artists.



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Who gave Fleming her first guitar and why did she find it easier to write her own songs?

2. Find the word “publisher” in the second paragraph. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand the word’s meaning. Then, define it in your own words.

3. In your opinion, what event in Fleming’s life was most important to her success as a songwriter? Explain your answer in a few sentences.

