

## KYE FLEMING: FOLKSINGER TO COUNTRY SONGWRITER

By age twenty-six, Kye Fleming had 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 headed to visit her parents in Arkansas when a music friend talked her into tagging along on a trip to Nashville, where he was meeting producers and publishers.

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

"I started thinking somebody's trying to tell me something," she recalls. "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 rose to become one of country music's most celebrated songwriters, earning numerous industry awards and a coveted spot in the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Born October 9, 1951, in Pensacola, Florida, Fleming moved often while growing up to follow her father's Navy career. But music always surrounded her. She was deeply influenced not only by the pop songs of the 1960s but also by two uncles who played in country bands. In ninth grade, she was given a used guitar by her aunt and, almost immediately, 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, Fleming compiled a collection of more than 200 original songs.



But she didn't enjoy much success getting contracts with publishers or record labels on the East or West coasts. In Nashville, her career skyrocketed when she began co-writing with other songwriters. Her go-to collaborator was another young songwriter, Dennis Morgan, and together they penned a string of catchy country-pop hits that helped propel Barbara Mandrell to a Country Music Hall of Fame career. The duo contributed six of the ten cuts on Mandrell's 1978 album, *Moods*, and went on to write specifically for her (writing for a single artist is a luxury few songwriters enjoyed).

Fleming found her strength in the lyrics, and Morgan carried his weight with the melodies. "Dennis played guitar real well, better than me," she says. "I still got to have input on

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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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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 hits for Ronnie Milsap and Charley Pride, who, like Mandrell, were future 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.



### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Explain the significance of music in Fleming’s childhood. Underline evidence in the text that supports your conclusion.

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2. Define this sentence in your own words: “Fleming found her strength in the lyrics, and Morgan carried his weight with the melodies.”

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3. Highlight three events in Fleming’s life that had a significant impact on her success. Which of them had the greatest impact? Explain your answer in at least three sentences.

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