



## CINDY WALKER: TRAILBLAZER FOR WOMEN

Cindy Walker built her outstanding songwriting career in the 1940s and 1950s, when the field was ruled by men. Today, Walker is considered the greatest female songwriter of country music. But when she and fellow songwriter Harlan Howard were both inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1997, he praised her even more, calling her country music’s “greatest living songwriter.”

Born in 1917 on a farm near Mart, Texas, Walker was taught how to sing and dance by her mother, a skilled piano player. At age twelve, Walker began writing songs on a guitar, and by her teens, she was performing on stage.

In 1940, Walker joined her parents on a business trip to Los Angeles and auditioned one of her songs for Bing Crosby, one of the most popular singers of the twentieth century. Crosby bought her song. She soon moved to Hollywood to pursue a career as a songwriter, and more sales quickly followed.

In 1954, Walker and her mother, who was her music arranger, moved to tiny Mexia, Texas, where Walker continued songwriting. Each year the two made long visits to Nashville so Walker could pitch her work to recording executives and performers.



“I wrote until the song was pleased with itself and I was, too,” Walker explained. “If a song didn’t like its words, I’d work until I got it perfect. You have to give every song a face, like a melody or a hookline, so you remember it—just like I’ll remember you by your face.”

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### LISTEN

The artists noted below sang famous versions of these Cindy Walker songs: “You Don’t Know Me” (Ray Charles), “Distant Drums” (Jim Reeves), “Dream Baby How Long Must I Dream” (Roy Orbison), “I Don’t Care” (Webb Pierce, Ricky Skaggs), “In the Misty Moonlight” (Jim Reeves, Dean Martin)



## CINDY WALKER: TRAILBLAZER FOR WOMEN (CONTINUED)

Dozens of Walker’s songs found a place on the Top Forty country and pop charts, and she had a Top Ten hit in every decade from the 1940s through the 1980s.

Walker died in 2006, at age eighty-seven, in Mexia after a long illness. Though considered a hero by the many women who have followed in her career path, Walker did not give much thought to her pioneering role.

“I have no idea why there weren’t other women songwriters,” she said of her era. “I never did have trouble with the artists because they wanted the same thing I did: They wanted a hit. That’s how they made their living, and they didn’t care who wrote the songs, whether it was a man, woman, or monkey.”



### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. How old was Walker when she started writing songs?

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2. Circle the word “pioneering” in the seventh paragraph. Underline the clues words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of the word. Then, define it in your own words.

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3. Why did Walker say that every song needs a “face”? Explain why this is important for a songwriter.

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