

The Best of Becky Hobbs—interview by Danny Peary

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My earliest recollection of country singer-songwriter Becky Hobbs is of her performing sometime in the mid-eighties on "Nashville Now," the nightly Ralph Emery-hosted cornerstone show for the then thriving Nashville Network. She was belting out an up-tempo song while pounding the keyboards Jerry Lee Lewis style, exhibiting unbridled energy. Her pretty face was beaming, her wild blond hair was going every which way as her head bounced from side to side, and the audience was going crazy—appreciative of someone who gave it her all.

By the time she picked up her guitar to do her second toe-tapper I had my VCR ready. I had no idea who she was, but I thought that this supercharged and very talented performer personified "fun"—and there aren't many better words to describe a country singer. At the time I didn't know that, while always fun, she sang, wrote, and played a wide variety of music, including tender ballads like the classic "Angels Among Us"—which Alabama turned into a country classic." But over the years I'd purchase all her CDs and be impressed by her wide range, as both a singer and songwriter. She always sang from the heart, her lyrics always spoke the truth, she never failed to get to me. For twenty years, I have tried to spread the word about Becky Hobbs. Now my job will be easier with the release of her brand new CD, "The Best of the Beckaroo—Part One."

Danny Peary: When I first saw you in the mid-eighties, I thought you were a Honky Tonk-rockabilly singer. But as I learned, and as your new album shows, you write and sing a lot of different kinds of country music. I've always had a hard time describing to friends what kind of singer and writer you are, so how would you describe yourself to the uninitiated?

Becky Hobbs: That's a good question. I usually say I sing country, honky tonk, and rockabilly because that's what most people know me for, but as a writer, I write all kinds of songs, just whatever comes to me. Looking back, I see the "r&b-Aretha Franklin-influenced" stage" and the "singer-songwriter-Carole King-influenced" stage, as well as the out-and-out country stuff, so I really don't have a good answer. I reckon I just am what I am. It's always been interesting, though, to write real country, 4/4 guitar-oriented songs, not on the guitar but on the piano. The very nature of that beast urges me to write a big ballad, a shuffle with a walking bass, or a Jerry Lee Lewis rocker.

DP: Your voice has that bit of gravel in it that makes it distinct—has anyone ever said anything that best describes your singing?

BH: Early reviews described me as sounding like I "gargled with razor blades"—that was a little harsh! Someone said I sang like a "poor man's Brenda Lee"—I love her, but I didn't understand the "poor" part...ha! In Africa, they said I sounded like a "young Skeeter Davis," whom I loved dearly. Sometimes I've been described as having that "Tammy Wynette teardrop" in my voice.

DP: Tell me something about your upbringing in Bartlesville, Oklahoma in the fifties and sixties, and your family, and how that influenced your music growing up and over your career.

BH: My dad always loved music and had played violin in the Coffeyville, Kansas Junior College's orchestra. Whenever he played a rotten note, the conductor would throw a walnut at him. So Daddy stopped playing his violin except at Christmas time for the family, and you can imagine how that sounded! When I was eight we moved across town to our new house and my dad bought my sister Barbara and me a piano. We both started taking lessons, but I quit after just three of them. I was just too shy that first time around. After I heard my sister playing cool pieces like "Purple People

Eater” and “Witch Doctor,” I started taking lessons again, this time with a vengeance! Both our parents worked and didn’t get home until after 5 PM, so every day after school, we’d fight over who got to practice on the piano. We’d always wind up hitting each other with the Baptist Hymnal, trying to knock the other one off the bench. Although Barbara was four years older and bigger, I was meaner and usually won.

I was lucky. I got to hear a variety of music in our little Oklahoma home. Barbara had a 45 RPM record player and turned me on to Elvis Presley, Ricky Nelson, Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis, and all the pop artists of the mid to late ‘50’s. She and I and my cousins would dance “be-bop” whenever we got together.

My dad loved all kinds of music, but jazz and the old pop standards of the ‘30’s and ‘40’s were his favorites. He loved Ella Fitzgerald. I remember he used to say, “Just close your eyes and listen to her voice. She sounds like the most beautiful woman in the world.” He also loved Bob Wills and western swing, and Willie Nelson, and he was always interested in the songwriters. I remember him reciting to me all the songs Hank Williams had written.

My mom listened to Patsy Cline, Jim Reeves, and Jimmie Rodgers. I remember she had a very early album of George Jones and I would make fun of it for being pretty dang corny. Years later, I was singing/writing about him in “Jones on the Jukebox,” so what did I know back then?

DP: Two people you’ve mentioned, Bob Wills and Jerry Lee Lewis, obviously influence your music.

BH: I used to hear Bob Wills on KVOO as my dad and I would drive from Bartlesville to Tulsa. I definitely have that “Western Swing thang” runnin’ through my veins and in some of my songs. It never fails to make me happy! When I was eight, my dad took me to hear Jerry Lee Lewis at the Bartlesville Civic Center. I’ll never forget how exciting he was to watch sing and play the piano. He’s still my favorite entertainer of all time.

DP: What instruments besides piano did you learn how to play, and when?

BH: Piano is my main instrument, but I learned to play acoustic guitar when I was 14 and in a couple of folk duos. Then I graduated to electric guitar. Around 1990, I taught myself to play the accordion. I always had loved hearing accordion music when I was in Europe and I started noticing how many of the country bands over there were using accordions. I did most of my practicing in the back of my bus, and I know it drove my musicians crazy. Even the roar of a Silver Eagle can’t drown out a bad accordion player! It was a great way to get people off the bus, and even today is a great way to get people to go home after a dinner party.

DP: Were you inspired by any of the Oklahoman singers like Patti Page, Roy Clark, Roger Miller, Leon Russell, Merle Kilgore (who wrote “Wolvertown Mountain” and co-wrote “Ring of Fire,” or Woody Guthrie and his cousin Jack Guthrie, who had a hit with Woody’s “Oklahoma Hills?” Or later country superstars like Reba McEntire, Vince Gill, and Garth Brooks?

BH: They have inspired me in different ways, and I have been honored to have met some of them. When I was a little girl I loved Patti Page’s “Tennessee Waltz,” which was my grandmother Nanny’s favorite song. Patti was the “Page Milk girl,” and only a couple of days ago I found an old “Page Milk” key ring in my dad’s things. I am using it right now for my keys.

One of the earliest songs I can remember is Jack & Woody Guthrie’s “Oklahoma Hills.” At one time I thought it was the national anthem! Coincidentally, I recently found the original sheet music for it and it’s on my grand piano right now!

I had the pleasure of knowing Roger Miller when I lived in L.A. He lived in the guesthouse where Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn used to “rendezvous.” He was one of those people that was hilarious all the time. We went out a couple of times and had a blast! I remember driving around Beverly Hills in his Rolls Royce the middle of the night, and he couldn’t get anyone to answer him on his CB radio. His handle was—big surprise--“King of the Road.”

Merle Kilgore also was very funny. I got to play a Randy Owen/St. Jude’s songwriter show with Merle a few years back. He had us all in stitches backstage with his great stories. He was bigger than life!

I admire Roy Clark as an entertainer. Nobody goes away from his shows feeling slighted.

I always loved Leon Russell, and yes, he did influence me. I saw him in Tulsa the year I went to TU, when he was playing with Mad Dogs and Englishmen. I got to meet him several times and opened a show for him outside of Pawhuska, OK, around 1980. Now I run into him in Nashville sometimes and he is always really nice. He's still the Master of Space and Time.....those blue eyes go on forever. About a year ago he played the Belcourt Theatre here in Nashville and Al and Tipper were there and we were all backstage.

Reba and I were on Mercury at the same time in the late seventies. She has inspired me with her business savvy. Nobody handed it to her. She worked her tail off for her success.

I met Vince years ago, before he became a superstar. He has always been the nicest, most humble guy, with a truckload of talent.

Garth Brooks is a true gentleman and humanitarian and has brought tons of listeners to country music. I first met him was when he opened for me at Bink's in Stillwater years ago. Just as his career was taking off, I got to open for him in Queens. Through the years we have done several shows together and he always has been that same, kind, respectful person. People sense his goodness and that's why they love him. It goes far beyond the singing and the songs.

DP: Do you have early memories? When did you start performing and writing songs?

BH: My dad was a huge Cardinals fan, and my earliest memory is lying in a crib and hearing a baseball game on the TV in the other room in our little house on Quapaw. When I was little, I was painfully shy and would sit quietly and draw for hours. Throughout my school years, I took art lessons and painted a lot. I even sold several paintings when I was in Jr. High and High School.

In going through my mom's things when we moved her to Nashville, I found an old diary of mine. On one page, I had written, "My name is Rebecca Ann Hobbs. I am in the fifth grade. I am a songwriter." So I knew what I was, even then.

My first folk duo was with Nancy Sloan and we played a couple of times at our school, Madison Jr. High. My second folk duo was with Beth Ann Morrison. Our parents were old friends and we played a few gigs around town. In particular, I remember playing at a Christmas party at Phillips.

In 1965-66, we included a lot of songs by "protest" singers. I was CRAZY about Bob Dylan, and was playing a lot of his songs. My favorites were "Blowin' in the Wind" and "Mr. Tambourine Man." Peter, Paul, and Mary and the Byrds had hits with those songs, and I was a fan of theirs, too. I also loved Joan Baez. I can't remember all the songs I sang of hers other than "Farewell Angelina," which Bob Dylan wrote, and the old standbys, "We Shall Overcome" and "Where Have All the Flowers Gone." I also sang "Eve of Destruction," which Barry McGuire sang to protest the war and Donovan's "Universal Solider," as well as his classic love song, "Catch the Wind."

DP: Tell me all about your all-girl rock band. Considering you preceded Kim Fowley's Runaways, did you consider yourselves pioneers?

BH: In looking back, yes, we were pioneers, though I didn't "know no better" at the time! It was 1965 and I was a sophomore at Col-Hi in Bartlesville. I was digging the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, pretty much the whole British invasion. That year for Christmas, my folks, after much begging, bought me an electric guitar (which a friend of my dad's, Ed Moss, actually made!), a \$7 microphone, and an Airline amp (hey, it even had an output for "accordion!").

Four of us formed a band that we called Four Faces of Eve, and for a time we were one of the few all-girl bands in the country. My dear friend Karen Esch (who has passed away) was our drummer (after having played with a guy band called King Leaf & the Trees), Cheri Martini played organ, and Audley Collins played lead guitar because I could only "scrub" (a slang word I made up) a rhythm out at that time. A little later, Beth Ann Morrison became our bass player and then her little sister, Mary Lou, became our drummer. Judy Pershal replaced Audley on lead guitar.

We played some local gigs, like the Y-Hut, Youth Canteen, etc., and even ventured to other little towns in Oklahoma such as Nowata and Miami. We played Whiting Hall in Pawhuska--we made \$3 for gas money to play during the Rogues V's break. They were from Tulsa and Jamie Oldaker, who went on to play with Eric Clapton, Leon Russell, and others., was their drummer. We also played several times on "Lee Bailey's Dance Party," a local TV show that was on every Saturday in Tulsa.

In my senior year in high school, Charlie Brown's Guitars, KAKC, & Pepsi Cola were so inspired by our band that they sponsored an "all-girl band contest," where all the girls would try out separately on their own instruments, and the winners on each instrument would become the band. I won the "rhythm guitar" slot and that band became the Sir Prize Package. We opened shows for the Buckingham's, the Grassroots, and others, all around the Tulsa area.

Later, we branched out on our own and became The Wax Madonna. We wore mini-skirts and go-go boots--only the boots have changed, folks--they're now "cowboy!" I was playing lead guitar by then (I really sucked) and bought an old Les Paul I found in a pawn shop. I am sorry to say, I painted it psychedelic. Shortly after that, our lead singer, Nancy Beeman, got offered a recording contract with Abnak Records in Dallas and they changed her name to Nancy Sugar. I was sure she would be a big star, but nothing really happened for her.

Now we were down to four members. We were booked out of Springfield, Missouri, for a while and then ventured to upstate New York and Pennsylvania, playing "show bars." It was then that our organist and main singer, Thea Sanseverino, quit the band and decided to move to Pennsylvania. She wasn't even out of high school yet! So then I started playing not only guitar, but keyboard as well, since we were down to three pieces. Barbie Cortner was on drums and Pat Big Pond--we called her "Puddles" for short--played bass. We all sang.

When we played a gig in Birmingham, Alabama, we met a group of guys from Baton Rouge called the Warbabies. We wound up following them back to Baton Rouge. We were in a van and they were in an old beat-up bus. Their agents, Jim Brown, Danny Kertacy, and Lynn Ourso booked us for a while. Then we came back to Oklahoma for Christmas that year, had a gig somewhere in the area, and disbanded.

I wound back up in Baton Rouge and was the girl singer with Swampfox, a southern rock band. By then, I had ditched the guitar—I never could get the darn thing in tune!--and was playing keys and singing lots of Janis Joplin. It was either that gig or accepting an offer from the Quatro sisters band. Suzi Quatro had just moved to London and I was offered a gig to replace her in Detroit. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I had headed north instead of south!

Swampfox played a lot of hot, humid, sweaty bars, outdoor concerts and LSU fraternity parties. We did a lot of driving in the middle of the night in dense fog. When I think of my time in Louisiana, the one-liner that comes to mind is, "I washed my hair one night and it stayed wet for two years!"

One of the highlights of my Swampfox days in Louisiana, was opening for the Allman Brothers in front of 20,000 people in New Orleans. I have a real nice picture of myself biting my lip on stage!

I lived in Baton Rouge only for a couple of years, turning twenty-one there, but it seemed longer. Then Lewis Anderson, who played guitar in the band, and I headed to Los Angeles. L.A. rather than Nashville, because at that time I considered myself rock. I'll never forget that excitement, coming over the hill on I-10 and seeing all those lights!

DP: When did you talk to Kim Fowley about the Runaways and did he ever consider you for one of the girls? Or were you too old by that time?

BH: Kim Fowley was one of the first people we met in L.A. He had heard of me from Lynn Ourso. He had just gotten back from England and showed up at our door in 90 degree heat in a rabbit fur coat, all 6'6 of him, about as big around as a pencil. He demanded "something to eat before I throw up," so I fixed him some scrambled eggs, which was the only thing other than tuna casserole that I could make. He was shocking! I had never met anyone who used such foul language!

Kim used to pay Lewis and me to drive him around. Five, ten, twenty bucks here and there. It added up. He was the first publisher to ever give me money for a song. He purchased the publishing rights on a song Lewis and I wrote called

"I'll Be Your Audience" that Helen Reddy and Shirley Bassey later cut. (In the years to follow, Helen would record three more of my songs.) Kim is totally bizarre and eccentric, but he is one of the smartest people I have ever met. And he is honest. He's a street survivor and we are still friends.

Before Kim put the Runaways together, he picked my brain about assembling an all-girl band. I told him not to waste his time--one of my more brilliant moments--because someone always would be getting pregnant and quitting the band. He knew I wasn't interested in being in his band. And besides, I was the ripe old age of 23! Kim was into 14-year-olds and teddy bears.

DP: When did you become a solo artist?

BH: All I ever really wanted was to be the "chick singer" in a band. To me, that was the perfect scenario; to get all the attention but not have to bear all the burden. But no one was interested in that. They were only interested in me. Kim Fowley used to take me around to all kinds of biz folks, like Lou Adler when he had Ode records, and he'd introduce me as "Queen of the South," or say I was "a miniature Playboy Bunny," that kind of thing. I'm sure we weirded some people out. I don't think anyone knew what to do with me. I really didn't know what to do with me.

When I arrived in L.A., I got out and met a lot of people. I met a guy on Sunset Blvd. named "Tornado Warren" who introduced me to Jeff Wald, who was Helen Reddy's husband and manager then. Jeff got me a record deal with MCA through Artie Mogul, and we recorded an album in Muscle Shoals and Miami. Just as the record was coming out, we went to a meeting with Artie. We noticed his name was no longer on his office door and all the furniture was gone! Artie had left MCA! That's the way it was, dealin' with Artie!

I got to open for Roger McGuinn at the Troubador not long after that. It was a fun evening, but I was scared to death. I played the baby grand and sang by myself, which I wasn't used to doing. It was intimidating! I was playing the singer/songwriter stuff that night, performing songs like "Paradise Is In Your Mind" and "I'll Be Your Audience." I have a hilarious photo of that audience, and Kim Fowley was there towering over everyone.

I had always loved the Byrds, and all that West Coast earthy, folky, country stuff. I was a huge Eagles fan. Who wasn't? I even met Glenn Frey back then, in the bar of the Troubador. I didn't think he would remember, but when I met up with Glenn years later--my husband Duane Sciacqua was playing with Glenn when we met—he said he did remember me.

DP: I'm sure you also played in lots of bars and honky tonks in L.A.. Was this mostly country or rock?

BH: During the first couple of years, I played the singer-songwriter clubs. Then I teamed up with Mike Martin (who later became Martin Delray) and we became the regular band at the OK Corral in Lakeview Terrace, just north of L.A. People would ride their horses to the joint and they'd hitch 'em up in the parking lot. It was wild, and the cops were always getting called out there to break up fights between men, women, whatever. I remember one night, a guy was gonna "whip some ass," 'cause another guy's horse had kicked his Mercedes and dented it. One night a guy put a rattlesnake he'd killed on my piano bench! I've played all kinds of places and have never been in a rougher joint. But, I totally loved it! As ornery as some of the customers were, most of them were solid gold. The gals, especially.

Once the "Urban Cowboy" craze hit, I had more work than I could handle. I played the Palomino in North Hollywood, Cowboy's in Anaheim, the Crazy Horse in Santa Ana, and the Round-Up in Chatsworth. Another one of my favorite gigs was The Rawhide, a gay bar in North Hollywood. And I got a regular gig at The Ranch in Garden Grove. The owner hired me to play on Wet T-Shirt Night (before the contest), then added me on Female Mud-Wrestling Night, and then put me on weekends. I was making a lotta dough for back then!

I was fortunate enough to be playing 90 percent original tunes during all this time. The trick was to write a good enough song that people thought they had heard before and could sing along with by the second chorus.

DP: Did you eventually give up on L.A., or did you see your time there as a stepping stone to bigger and better things?

BH: I loved my years in L.A. and when I moved out there, I thought it would be the ultimate place for me to be. I had no inkling that I'd end up in Nashville. L.A. was so invigorating! However, the more I opened my mouth, the more people told me I was a "country singer," when I had always thought I was rock and roll!

DP: Talk about moving to Nashville and again trying to break through. What direction did you want to take your music?

BH: In 1978, I started writing for Al Gallico Music. Although Al lived in L.A., he was the biggest independent song publisher in country music. Al signed me as a writer, on the strength of a song I had written called "I Can't Say Goodbye To You," which had just won First Place in the Easy Listening Category of the American Song Festival (and is on my new CD). I had some other songs Al liked, so he knew I was a good writer. Al picked up the phone and got me a record deal with Jerry Kennedy, who was running Mercury records in Nashville. That's when I started going to Nashville to record.

Once I started hanging out in Nashville, I knew I would wind up there. Being a songwriter is a respected occupation in Music City, U.S.A. You can actually buy a house! All I really wanted to do once I moved to Nashville was write songs-- great songs, BIG songs.

By the time I moved there, Al had gotten me a few cuts. Lacy J. Dalton recorded "Feedin' the Fire," as did Zella Lehr, who took it to #16 on the Billboard Charts. In 1983, I recorded a duet with Moe Bandy, "Let's Get Over Them Together." It went to #10 on Billboard, but Moe's label, Columbia, was not interested in signing me. The next year, however, Lynn Shults signed me to Liberty/EMI and I had moderate success with a few singles.

DP: Looking back, what do you think were your peak years in Nashville?

BH: My "peak" years in Nashville thus far would have to be when MTM signed me and my "All Keyed Up" album came out in 1988. It got rave reviews and I was really starting to kick ass, but then the label folded! RCA bought my contract and re-released the album, with two additional cuts--one being the last single, "Do You Feel the Same Way, Too"--but dropped me from the label soon after. I was on the Curb label for about five minutes and had a little success with John D. Loudermilk's "Talk Back Trembling Lips." My biggest chart successes as a solo artist were "Jones on the Jukebox" for MTM in 1988, which went to #31 on Billboard, and "Honky Tonk Saturday Night" for Mercury in 1981, which didn't do that well nationally but went to #1 in many major markets.

Other than the recordings, I was known for my appearances on the various Nashville Network TV shows. I was actually turning down some because I didn't want to be overexposed. I was also on the road pretty much full-time for a decade so a lot of country fans got to see me. I supported a four-piece band, sound engineer, manager, booking agent, bus driver, and a big-assed hillbilly bus that cost a fortune to maintain. I also had a good-sized active fan club. (I'm still friends with many of my fans from those days.)

DP: Did you appear at the Grand Ole Opry back then?

BH: Yes, for a while I was on it whenever I was in town on a Friday or Saturday night. I always loved being on and how all the Opry members were so nice backstage. I'd love to be on it again, but there's a new guy booking it now, and he seems to be trying to weed out the older artists. I'm working on getting back on there, though!

DP: You were known before Alabama had a smash recording of your song "Angels Among Us" in 1994?" But what impact has that had on your career?

BH: "Angels Among Us" made a huge impact. It definitely has been the biggest blessing in my career and every night I thank God for that song. Randy Owen, Alabama's lead singer, and Teddy Gentry have both told me that the group has received more fan mail for it than any other song they've ever recorded. It's also my most requested song, once people know that I co-wrote it. It has helped so many people.

DP: Talk about writing it and the meaning of the words to you.

BH: The idea of "Angels Among Us" came from a profound experience I had. Shortly before Christmas 1985, I had started getting premonitions that I was going to be in a bad vehicle accident. Night after night, I lay in bed, drifting off to sleep when suddenly I'd sit up with my heart pounding, thinking to myself, "I'm not ready to go yet!" Each time, I was overwhelmed by a sense of despair--a sick feeling deep in the pit of my stomach. This went on for weeks, right on through the holidays.

Then, in the wee hours of the morning of January 24, 1986, something very weird happened. I was in my kitchen, baking a birthday cake--chocolate, of course--for a gathering I was having the next afternoon to celebrate my birthday. As I stirred the batter, "something" took hold of my arm and literally pulled me outside. I wasn't really scared, but I felt very uneasy--like when you're getting ready to hear something you don't want to hear. I stood in the front yard, looked up at the starry sky and asked out loud, "What? What is it you're trying to tell me?"

I didn't have to wait long for an answer. This loud, very strong, masculine voice said, "Be careful--this may be your last birthday!" I felt slammed by that same sick feeling in my stomach that I got when I was having those bedtime premonitions. I just stood there in the yard, dumbfounded, asking out loud for more information, but no more was given. I knew I was being warned about something, and I had a pretty good idea that it was connected to the premonitions.

I went back in the house. My knees were shaking and my heart was pounding. My mind kept going over every word. . . . "Be -- careful -- this -- may -- be -- your --last--birthday!" "May" is the key word, I thought to myself. Whatever I was being warned about must be something I can prevent -- otherwise, why was I being warned at all? And who was it that was warning me? At the time, I thought it was God or my sweet, loving daddy who had passed away in 1982 and was speaking to me in a voice not quite his own, that was much deeper than his had been..

The next night was January 25, 1986. My band and I were driving back to Nashville after performing at a police benefit in Albertville, Alabama. It was raining hard, and our van and trailer stopped at a red light and we waited to cross a four-lane highway. I was sitting in the back of the van on the left, and our road manager, Randy, was driving. As I looked out the window through the rain, I saw an eighteen-wheeler barreling down the highway toward the intersection. I thought to myself, "My God, if his light turns red, that truck driver's not going to be able to stop in time!" As I looked up, I saw our light turn green. This was all taking place in a split second, but it seemed like forever, as if everything had suddenly switched to slow motion.

I felt Randy lift his foot off the brake. We started moving forward. And I got an awful feeling deep in the pit of my stomach. "Stop!" I yelled at Randy, sensing that he didn't see the truck.

Randy jammed on the brakes just as the eighteen-wheeler--its air horn blasting--slammed into us. Miraculously, the truck struck the front-left side of my Dodge maxivan--its strongest part. Our equipment-loaded trailer was ripped off its hitch as our van spun around the wet pavement. Although the Dodge was totaled, we all survived with minimal injuries. Had the collision occurred just a split second later, when we'd moved further into the intersection, we would have been broadsided and--from what the police told us--most likely killed.

After the accident, I realized that the voice from above belonged to my guardian angel. As soon as I understood that, I wrote down the song title, "Angels Among Us," in my notebook and I would think about lyrics off and on for several years. It wasn't until Christmas 1992, when I was sitting in my dad's old easy chair late one night at my mom's house in Oklahoma, that I got the strongest feeling I had to finish the song. When I got back to Nashville, I worked with Don Goodman and he helped me finish it. Not long afterward, we demo-ed the song and I took it over to Randy Owen. Alabama recorded it soon after that.

DP: The lyrics and sentiment of that song really reach people, which explains its lasting success. A few years earlier, you did have one other really big hit as a songwriter, "I Want to Know You Before We Make Love" by Conway Twitty.

BH: Yes, to date, it has been my only #1! Alabama recorded it before Conway did, and when I found out it wasn't going to be a single for them, I "cried all the way to...Conway Twitty!" I got to open several shows for Conway and he was so supportive and kind. He even pitched one of my songs that he didn't feel was right for him, to Tammy Wynette.

DP: What other artists have recorded your songs?

BH: I already mentioned Helen Reddy Shirley Bassey, Lacy J. Dalton and Moe Bandy. Also: George Jones, Loretta Lynn, Emmylou Harris, Glen Campbell, John Anderson, Janie Fricke, Shelly West, Jane Oliver, Ken Mellons, Frank Sinatra, Jr., the list goes on and on!

DP: Who would you like to sing your songs?

BH: I'd love to have a George Strait cut. He did record "I Can't Say Goodbye To You," but he didn't like the way he sang it, so it didn't make his album. I'd love to have a Merle Haggard cut, a Willie Nelson cut, an Aretha Franklin cut, a Garth Brooks cut. I would have loved to have had a Tammy Wynette cut--I will always love her voice. I'd kill for a Killer cut! I wrote a duet for Jerry Lee Lewis and me, but so far, no cigar. That would be awesome! I guess what I would love more than anything, would be a big ol' POP cut. I need the dough.

DP: The first song on your previous CD, "Songs from the Road of Life" is tellingly called "Woman Gettin' Older." Like many other great female singers, you've experienced ageism on country radio. How do you deal with it? Can you get your music heard by new stars?

BH: It is harder now to get my songs heard. I used to write songs in a little cubicle with one of the hottest producers in town, and now it's impossible even to get to him. You've gotta go through his wife's mother, his wife, or his kid, etc...it's ridiculous!

I deal with ageism by exercising to keep in shape, which is good for my inner as well as my outer strength, and just by keepin' on. I keep my eye on the big picture: spiritual things, LIFE, what really matters, etc. I sometimes get discouraged by the Nashville environment, but that won't stop me from writing and singing my songs. It's a big part of who I am.

DP: I stopped listening to country radio when the country establishment, including recording artists, crucified and ostracized the Dixie Chicks. That happened because of Natalie Maines' remark in England, prior to the invasion of Iraq, about her being ashamed Bush was from Texas, too. Considering you sang "No More War" and "Let There Be Peace" on your last CD, what has been your take on that?

BH: It was unbelievable to me what happened to the Dixie Chicks. I don't understand why country radio reacted so violently to the Chicks. "Big money" is the only reason I can think of. It's all "bought and paid for." I play all over the world and many people I meet in other countries ask me how I feel about our president and the war in Iraq. I answer them honestly, saying that I don't agree with our president. There's a whole bunch of country music artists that don't agree with President Bush regarding the war in Iraq, but they're too scared to speak up.

DP: If country music weren't so conservative, do you think you'd have written more protest or political songs?

BH: Probably so. At least I would have had more outlets for them.

DP: Now you've just assembled "Best of the Beckaroo—Part One," a terrific collection. Do you think your recent music, on your latest CD with original music, "Songs From the Road of Life," is similar to the earliest music on this recording?

BH: Yes, I think so. Some of the subjects may be different --obviously I wasn't writing about "being older" 20 years ago--but the approach is still the same. I am honest and direct, with a sense of humor and a good beat on the up-tempos, and on the ballads, I try to reach way down into the gut.

DP: I am happy that you included the gently sung but heartfelt "Cowgirl's Heart," because that's the first song of yours I really responded to. It's a memory piece about a cowgirl following a rodeo cowboy, and I sure like the lyric: "You sure knew how to break a cowgirl's heart." Is that bittersweet song about an early love of yours or pure fiction?

BH: I had someone in mind when I wrote it. He wasn't a cowboy, but he sure broke my heart.

DP: One of your more poignant songs is "She Broke Her Promise," which would make some current singer a fortune if she or he recorded it. Talk about that song.

BH: "She Broke Her Promise" is about my mom and dad. My dad always said to my mom, even when they were young, "I want you to promise me that if anything happens to me, you'll re-marry. I don't want you to be alone." It always sort of bothered mom, but she'd say, "Well, all right, I promise. But I want you to promise me the same thing." My dad passed away in 1982 (he had lingered in a semi-coma for almost two years) and mom never re-married.

When the song started coming to me, it was at night and I had an Irish coffee and was riding home with a dear friend. I was so overcome with emotion that I was shaking. Goose bumps were all over my body. I knew I had "greatness" on the line--not because of me, but because it was TRUTH.

I played the song for "Momaroo" (what I call my mom) in private before I recorded it and performed it on stage, to make sure she was ok with it. She said, "Becca, I love it. It's a tribute."

Alabama came close to recording it, and both Billy Sherrill and Bob Montgomery wanted to cut it with George Jones. But George said it was "too sad." This was from the guy whose biggest hit ever was "He Stopped Loving Her Today"--go figure.

DP: "Mama Was a Working Man" is maybe the only country song ever to mention a labor union. It's an inspiring song. Was your mom a working man? And what about "Mama's Green Eyes (& Daddy's Wild Hair)—is that based on fact?

BH: My mom worked at Phillips Petroleum Co. in Bartlesville, OK for years. She was a top-notch secretary and saw many a man being hired for more money and less work. I "embellished" some of the story in the song. For instance, my dad didn't "go away" in '58. He had started working for Phillips in 1948 and both of my parents thought they had job security there. He got laid off in 1969, my only year at college.. It broke his heart to tell me they couldn't pay for another year of college for me. I told my parents I didn't want to go back to college anyway, that what I needed to learn, I wasn't gonna find there. I needed to hit the road and beat the streets!

Growing up, my folks would have rather run out of gas than fuel up at a competitor's gas station. That's how loyal they were! Yet they laid off my dad. Mom continued to work at Phillips until she took early retirement.

As far as "Mama's Green Eyes (& Daddy's Wild Hair)" goes...I stretched the facts a bit. My dad was definitely more outgoing than my mom, but he didn't hang out in bars. He liked to think and talk about the wild side of life more than live it! That was a hook by one of my co-writers on the song, either Jerry Hawkins or Don Goodman.

DP: Your CD begins with one of my favorite of your heartache songs, "Jones on the Jukebox," which you co-wrote with Don Goodman and Mack Vickery. How did you come up with the clever chorus: "I've got Jones on the Jukebox, you on my mind/ I'm slowly going crazy, a quarter at a time."

BH: Those were Don Goodman's lines. Shortly after I moved to Nashville, Goodman and I were writing together on a Sunday afternoon. It was one of our first writing sessions. I was sitting at an old upright piano at Lobo's publishing building (remember "Me and You and a Dog Named Boo?") and Goodman said, "Hey, Beck, last night me and ol' Mack (Mack Vickery) were at the Hall of Fame"-- the bar at the old Hall of Fame Motel by Music Row—"and we were foolin' around with this..." He started stompin' his feet and "scrubbing" air guitar and "sang" those two lines. He asked me if I wanted to "jump in on it," and I said, "You betcha. I know a hit hook when I hear one!" Mack was cool with it and years later, I got to meet him and write with him. He was a wonderful, wild man!

DP: I would say these are typical Becky Hobbs lyrics: "I don't dance with strangers, so, honey, what's your name?" You wrote "I Don't Dance with Strangers" with Jerry Hawkins.

BH: Jerry came up with that hook and we wrote the song together. Obviously I've had some great male lyricists with strong "female" sides! I love it, since I can be very "masculine" when I write!

DP: You have a super song where you pay tribute to your first pair of boots, an unusual topic. You even titled one of your CDs "The Boots I Came to Town In." So do you still have those boots?

BH: Yes, I still have 'em. They've been re-soled at least a million times! And they've waded through a ton of manure, that's for sure! That was Candy Parton's song title and the song pretty much came to me when I was sitting in the Pacific Ocean!

DP: To me "Don't Cry for Me" is your most old-style, traditional country; if you had three-part harmony, it would make a super bluegrass tune. Where do you see this song fitting into your career?

BH: That's one of my favorites, which I wrote in 1980. When the doctors at Hillcrest Hospital in Tulsa said there was nothing more they could do for my dad, I went down to the chapel in the hospital and this song just flowed in through the stained glass window. It was my dad's philosophy on life. He was a happy-go-lucky man who never met a stranger. The European fans really respond to this song for some reason. Jett Williams recently recorded it. She had heard me sing it last summer in Sweden. I think that really brought it home for me. I had written it for my dad, and she was singing it for hers. And her dad was Hank Williams! And my dad was Bill Hobbs, a big Hank Williams fan. Wild!

DP: Perhaps the most beautiful song you ever wrote is "Pale Moon." Talk about your Native-American heritage and your ongoing "Nancy Ward Project" to honor your ancestor.

BH: Thanks. "Pale Moon" is one of my favorites, too. Nancy Ward (this is her English name) was my fifth great-grandmother. She was born of the Wolf Clan in approximately 1738 in Chota (one of the "mother towns" of the Cherokee Nation), which is now in the southeastern Tennessee area. It is said, on the day she was born, a white wolf roamed the horizon. White was the color for peace.

When she was around sixteen years of age, she went to battle with her husband, Kingfisher, against the Creeks. Her job was to chew the bullets, to make them more deadly. When Kingfisher was killed and fell to the ground, Nancy arose to take his place and led the Cherokee to victory. She was then given the title Ghigau, or "Beloved Woman" of the Nation. After earning this honor, she dared to stand where no woman had stood before--in the center of the white man's council meeting, protesting war and promoting peace between the Cherokee and other tribes, the colonists and the settlers. She is credited with introducing dairy products and beef to the Cherokee.

She wore a shawl of white swan feathers and was given the power to save a life. With the wave of a swan's wing, she spared the life of Lydia Bean, a white woman at the stake. She saved countless Cherokee and white lives when she warned settlers of impending attacks.

On the day she died in 1822, witnesses saw a white light rise up from her body. It took the form of a wolf and then of a swan. It fluttered about and flew off in the direction of her beloved town of Chota.

I wrote "Let There Be Peace" in honor of Nancy and it is the theme song of the Association of Descendants of Nancy Ward. I have started writing and recording a tribute album to Nancy Ward. That's the "Nancy Ward Project" and both "Pale Moon" and "Let there Be Peace" are part of it.

DP: "Country Girl" has a different sound--maybe it's the beat--than most of your songs. Your co-writer is your husband Duane Sciacqua. Talk about his work with you and other artists.

BH: "Country Girls" was the first song Duane and I wrote together. It's from my 1998 album "From Oklahoma With Love," which was produced by Duane. Duane is an awesome guitarist who has played with Paul McCartney, Don Henley, Joe Walsh, Glenn Frey and many others. He works hard to get unique guitar sounds, not just the same ol', same ol', and I like the edge he adds to my recordings. He and I both wanted a real dance vibe on that song, so, yes, there's a lot of Duane on it! By the way, he's currently on tour with Rodney Atkins, who has a hit out called "If You're Goin' Through Hell."

DP: Some witty lyrics are in a song of yours that isn't upbeat, "The Devil May Care," including: "I don't know where you've been, but I know where you can go" and "The devil may care, but I don't.; the Lord may take you back, but I won't." Was that song written to anyone in particular?

BH: So much of that lyric is Don Goodman. He, Craig Karp, and I wrote it in one sitting and nobody is better lyrically than "the Goodman" when he's ON, and he was WAY On that day! I wasn't thinkin' about anyone in particular for that song--I just rolled a bunch of old losers up into one big one!

DP: Of course, you include "Angels Among Us" in your collection. I'm sure when people hear your version, many will agree with me that it's even better than Alabama's hit version. Is that your favorite song to sing, or is there another one that has really special meaning?

BH: Some folks have told me that, but the world would not have heard it if Alabama hadn't recorded it. I love singing it because it gives people hope. Every time I sing it live, I still get goose bumps. I also enjoy playing the rockers a lot, because people go wild and I can cut loose. I like to kick the piano and jump up on it!

DP: There are a couple of songs on the CD not written by you, including John Loudermilk's "Talk Back Tremblin' Lips," which you had a modest hit with. Why did you record it?

BH: Doug Johnson, who was producing me at the time, suggested I record it. My sister had the 45 of Johnny Tillotson's version and I had always liked it. Ernie Ashworth, who had the country hit with it, appeared in my video and even let me wear one of his "lip" jackets! He was a doll!

DP: You generously include 21 songs on "Best of the Beckaroo—Part One," saying they are the most requested ones from your early albums. But I want you to talk about two of my favorites that you left off this album because I don't think you know how well they're written and sung. "That's the Way I Feel About You" should be a country standard, a love song recorded by every female star. Lyrically, "Joanna" reminds me of Dolly Parton's "Jolene," and your vocal is powerful.

BH: Wow. That is so cool that you like those songs! I have always liked them a lot, too, and several people have picked one or the other as their favorite. I reckon I could have put them on there. But then, the hardest part of putting together that album, was deciding what NOT to put on it.

DP: Also talk about three songs from your recent "Songs from the Road of Life"—"Another Man in Black," about Johnny Cash, "What Are You Doin' in My Dreams," which has the potential to make some current star a platinum record; and the tell-off-Music-Row song, "Kiss My Ashes," which must have special meaning to you.

BH: I had the pleasure of opening shows for Johnny & June Carter Cash in England and Ireland in the mid-80's. They were very kind to me and lots of fun. I'll never forget the time I spent with them, including when we all got to kiss the Blarney Stone together! Dene Anton and I wrote "Another Man in Black" over the phone the Sunday after Johnny passed away.

I had the chorus to "What Are You Doin' In My Dreams" for quite a while and I would just groove on it when I sat down at the piano. Finally when I hunkered down to do the album, the verses pretty much just rolled out. I love a good shuffle and my "Songs From the Road of Life" album needed one.

"Kiss My Ashes" was a riot to write! I am sick of the Music Row bullshit. Female artists (and male, too, for that matter) are thrown out to pasture because they're no longer 18 years old with perfect bodies and perfect faces. I just told it like it is in that one and audiences go wild when they hear the lyrics. Funny thing is, some of the very guys I wrote it about love it--they have no idea it's about them! Or maybe they do.

DP: I mentioned Dolly Parton. . I know you're a big fan of her writing. Is Candy Parton, who co-wrote a few of your songs, related?

BH: Candy Parton's ex-husband is a second cousin to Dolly. You know, "All them Partons...they've all got them big.....EARS!" At least according to Candy's ex, that is!

DP: What do you think of the songs written by Loretta Lynn? And what do you think of Shania Twain's writing?

BH: To me, Loretta is the grandmammy of all us gal writers. She told it exactly like it was, no bones about it. She's so real, raw and honest. It thrilled me that Loretta and George Jones recorded a song Mark Sherrill and I wrote called "We Sure Make Good Love" on George's "Ladies Choice" album. I like Shania's songs, her voice, her recordings, and her stage act. She's got it all! She brought a great energy to the country music industry. She and her husband Mutt Lange are a terrific team. They taught the Music Row "good old boys" a thing or two.

DP: Who are your friends in the Nashville scene and outside of country music?

BH: My songwriting gal pals are my best friends. We can relate to each other. And then there's Don Goodman. He was the first "big" writer to write with me, and he gave me my "Beckaroo" nickname. That was 25 years ago.

Duane and I have several couples that we hang out with, but when we're both in town, we usually prefer a quiet evening at home. Duane's got that Italian blood and he is a GREAT cook. I'm spoiled rotten. All I do is drink wine, wait for supper and do a few dishes afterwards. We have a recording studio in our basement and if Duane's not on the road, he's either working in the studio or is out on the golf course. I'm upstairs writing, out pitching, or at my computer taking care of my publishing catalogs.

DP: You write songs about traveling. Talk about your travels around the world, including Bosnia and Africa, and how that has affected you personally.

BH: I have always loved to go to other countries to perform. It was just meant to be--it's in my birth chart big time. Bosnia was wild. The hotel we stayed at had bullet holes in the headboards of the beds and burlap over the windows. We played for U.S. troops (as well as other country's troops) on the 4th of July on a British base in Sarajevo.

My most memorable tour was in the spring of '92 when I performed in nine countries in Africa. It was the most inspiring, revealing time of my life. I met the most wonderful people I've ever met. In Kigali, we stayed in the hotel that was in "Hotel Rwanda." The civil war already had started there but we hadn't even heard about it in the U.S. yet.

One night we performed in Zambia, and one third to one half of the audience had AIDS. That was a tough night, especially when I sang "Don't Cry For Me When I'm Gone." Many of the musicians that we exchanged musical ideas with in the workshops, had AIDS, too. It was heartbreaking. They were beautiful people.

The main thing my travels have taught me is that there is not just ONE way, as far as religion and politics go. There are many doors to heaven, and heaven can mean different things to different people. People need to be kind to each other and stop killing each other. We're all on one planet.

DP: Talk about recently playing at the renowned Bluebird Café with sixties icon P.F. Sloane. And what is "A Cowgirl, a Diva, and a Shameless Hussy?"

BH: My neighbor, Jon Tiven, was producing Phil's new album and he called me and asked if I'd come down the street to play and sing back-up on a couple of songs. I did, and that's how I wound up singing with him at the Bluebird. He's like rock 'n' roll royalty to me. What great songs he wrote--"Eve of Destruction," "Where Were You When I Needed You," "Secret Agent Man," "A Must to Avoid," on and on.

Benita Hill, Kacey Jones and I do an "in-the-round" thing and we call ourselves "A Cowgirl, a Diva & a Shameless Hussy." I'm the cowgirl, Benita is the diva, and Kacey, who is formerly of "Ethel & the Shameless Hussies," is the hussy. We play around Nashville and have a blast.

DP: Talk about your plans for the next year. And do we New Yorkers have to go down to Nashville to see you play?

BH: I have no idea what my plans are, other than I'll be performing in Australia in January of 2008! I am writing the best songs I can, pitching them. and hoping for the best! I'm also taking care of Momaroo right now, so I'm living more in a "one-day-at-a-time" mode.

DP: Tell people how to order the "Best of the Beckaroo—Part One" CD and your previous CDs as well. And can we expect "Part Two?"

BH: People can hear my music, buy my music, and read all about me on my Web site at: www.beckyhobbs.com or www.cdbaby.com (just type my name in the search box). I plan on a "Part Two." This show ain't over yet!