

Interview with Beth Nielsen Chapman

Dan: We're talking about creativity, how there's so much variety here in Nashville. Many people believe this to only be a country music city...

Beth: It's not. I mean, Michael McDonald lives here, Sheryl Crow lives here, Donna Summer... it's a mecca of songs. To me, Nashville is the vortex of songwriting on the planet. This place is the source of the songwriting profession. Everyone who comes here is affected by that creativity vortex in one way or another. Some people get intimidated by it while other people just can't stop writing. It's a great mix of one-hit wonders and overnight success stories, along with those who persist over time and end up have an amazing amount of success.

Dan: A lot of people think Nashville is designed – if that's the right word – to kick you in the butt and send you packing, if possible. Do you see it that way?

Beth: No, not at all. I'm sure there are many people who come here and do a u-turn, and maybe some have done that prematurely. But I think that each person who is breathing is a creative being in some WAY OR another. Sometimes people might decide "I'm going to be a songwriter," and they go and try that and find out that, *for whatever reason, that's not what they can do best with their creativity*. That doesn't mean they're not creative. It just means that, for that person, maybe it's not the right road.

I just got back from South Africa *had such an amazing time. So many experiences I'll never forget. I had the opportunity to go to Sowetto which is a township in the area of Johannesburg. As we were driving past a squatter section, there amid the tiny shacks was a bench with a guitar leaning against it.* I said "Let's go back and find out whose guitar it is." When we got there, a man and his wife and sister came out of this small house that's no bigger than from here to there (pointing to a spot about 8 feet away). He played *for us* a song he wrote and it was really good. His wife and sister harmonized with him and I was *so impressed*... here is this person in abject poverty having so much joy from being able to create music. It was so profoundly moving to me.

I *asked if I could play* his guitar and started trying to figure out the strange tuning he had it in. Once I was able to pick out some chords and get a pattern going, he sat there and began signing and wrote a song on the spot. It was really *incredible* – he was singing in Zulu, and didn't speak English. I started mimicking his vocal patterns and began singing along with him and we ended up writing this song together. It was the most unique co-writing situation I've ever imagined, and also one of the most special because there was nothing happening in that moment but the sheer joy of creating *music together*.

So, getting back to the question, a lot of people come to Nashville and struggle. *I wouldn't want to diminish how difficult that is, but then there's this beautiful man on the other side of the world who is wonderfully talented with no resource or outlet for having his work heard. That may not be much solace to a struggling songwriter in America, but it does point to the fact that the power of music and creativity holds within it the potential to transcend.*

Dan: Some people say that it's a five year process to find success, others say you should plan for a ten-year process. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Beth: You know what I would say? It's a process. Period. Even if you come here and you have fairly quick success, *the adjustment to that success is something you still have to go through. You can have a big ol' hit song But it can suck the life out of your songwriting to suddenly be defined by that one song. It's really weird... all of a sudden you can feel kind of like the deer in the headlights, and you have to shake off the expectations put upon you to produce another hit just like the first one.*

My first hit was a co-write with Don Schlitz for Tanya Tucker, *Strong Enough To Bend. When a producer asked for another song like that and I thought, "I don't even know how I wrote that one!" I went through a period of time where I'd find myself distracted by the fact that I was "supposed" to be writing that type of song again.*

It took about a year for me to get my balance back. Success can really play with your head, especially if it's quick and overnight and you're not prepared for it.

Dan: When you first had success, did you find yourself having your time limited because so many other people made demands on you, or did success provide you with more time to do what you wanted, and how did it affect you overall?

Beth: My time has always been limited. I overextend myself all the time *and always seem to have too much on my plate. Even as a young mother when I wasn't writing for a couple years I would go to this meeting or work on that project and not have enough time. Success didn't profoundly change me that way, as far as my time goes. What really changed was internal. I had to work through a lack of confidence and feeling like the world was going to find out I wasn't good enough.*

It took some time to step all the way into my own shoes and to own that I deserved to have success. In fact, when I teach songwriting, one of the big points I try to stress and get people to understand before they even write the first note is that they deserve to be as creative as they are, as they can be.

You have to sometimes be in the right place at the right time, but you also have to find your own path *and your own voice as a writer.* Some of the most talented people I know have never really had any big hits. *Some of them are truly poets. For whatever reason they don't have that "big hit" success, the work they do can have tremendous value.*

Dan: With so many great songs floating around the writers' rooms in Nashville, and many of them not being heard, what do you think about artists and bands doing cover songs instead of maybe spending a little more time finding those great, unheard songs?

Beth: I say "May the best song win." It doesn't matter if it's a redo of a cover or a previously unheard original. Whatever is the best song should be the one getting cut. And I think it's also really neat when a great song passes into another generation down the road – giving a whole new group of people the *chance to hear it. That's always been my greatest hope ...to have one of my songs transcend my generation..*

Dan: I guess what I was kind of leaning toward with that last question was whether you think there should be some type of better – process, for lack of a better word – for new songwriters getting their material heard. We talked about the man in Africa not being able to get his song heard, and I know it's not the same but one could say he might be sitting here in Nashville instead of Africa and still not get his song heard. You can go to the Commodore, French Quarter, Douglas Corners and other writers' venues and hear some really great songs that will never get played for the right people. Do you think there should be a better process or remedy for unknown songwriters to get their material heard in this town?

Beth: There are so many different ways for people to get heard here. Obviously, there are brilliant songwriters who don't do the pitching thing so well, or don't know whatever it is they have to do. And I say to those people, do what it takes to find a publisher or plugger who believes in you. You may have to give up some of the money you'd make on the song for that service, but you need to do what it takes to get your songs heard.

For some people, just doing that side of it shuts them down because it really is a hard process to go through. But keep pushing yourself if you believe in your work, and the bottom line is keep writing. Maybe you'll have to write for ten years and then let everybody hear all those great songs you've composed. A great song doesn't go out of style. But keep doing whatever you have to do in order to reach your dreams.

Life is too short not to shoot for the dreams! This was made even more clear to me when I went through breast cancer five years ago...

Dan: I didn't realize that about you, that you'd had breast cancer. Is it public knowledge?

Beth: Oh, yeah, I talk about it. I just celebrated five years *clear of cancer*. ***I was diagnosed just as I was finishing up my album, Deeper Still. On the last day of mixing. Instead of promoting the record I had to take a year off to go through the chemo and radiation, lost the hair, the whole thing. One of the most profoundly comforting things for me through that time was that many of the songs on that record were written as if I'd already gone through that whole process. Like they were sort of written for me, and some of them really helped me stay hopeful.***

I realized there's something going on at a much bigger level than me, than us, and we can't do anything about it but trust it and simply abide by it's timing for us.

It can really be disheartening when someone loses hope, loses their drive because it's taking longer than they believe it should for them to have their songs heard or find success. But they need to realize that things ***will happen when they are supposed to and not before. We can't make success happen until it's the right time for us.***

I know... coming from someone who's had success, others who haven't are saying "yeah, right.... You've already got it." But I've been where they are. I spent years struggling and waiting for something to happen, and went home discouraged many times and I'd kick the chair in my living room and think about giving up, not writing any more. ***But I kept going. I think the difference between people who make it and those who don't can sometimes be simply persistence.***

Dan: One of the ways you said to get heard is to find the right plugger or publisher. For the new writer fresh to town, who doesn't have a clue, what would you tell him or her should be the first thing they do when they get to Nashville?

Beth: I say this all the time, over and over and over again...go join the Nashville Songwriters Association (NSAI). I hate to sound like a company representative, because I am on their board of directors for about 15 years, but they really are the about supporting every level of songwriter. Not only do they support beginning songwriters but they are working the front lines on behalf of the songwriting profession, going to Washington and accomplishing some amazing goals.

As you know, there's such an issue about downloading and people taking music off the Internet. These things have to be addressed now, otherwise there would be no reason to even have something like this interview because there would be no *songwriting profession*.

Another great place for a new songwriter to start is at one of the performing rights organizations, ASCAP, BMI, or SESAC. They are really tied in to Nashville and there will be representatives there who can help you find the right place for your song. They may promise you anything, but if they hear a song they believe would be a good hit, they'll call someone and say "hey, you should listen to this."

If you don't know someone at those places, hang out and network until you meet someone who does and get them to introduce you. Networking really is so important in this town. You need to build up your list of contacts and use them to help further your career as much as possible.

Dan: What about playing out at the writers' rounds? So many people end up believing that's a futile effort, that no one gets "discovered" that way.

Beth: That's totally not true. Get out, play the rounds and get heard. But, more importantly, make those contacts with others who are coming in with you at the same time. I came into Nashville with a group that included Bill Lloyd, Radney Foster, Hugh Prestwood, Trisha Yearwood, Garth Brooks and many others. We all bumped into town about the same time and began networking and ended up signing with the same publisher, hanging out around the water cooler.

Trisha (Yearwood) was the receptionist at Mary Tyler Moore publishing, where we all got signed. ***I never realized she was a great singer....meanwhile down the hall I was writing "Down On My Knees" which some time later ended up being a hit for her.***

We all came to town and made connections, networked, and when one of us had success it helped pave the way for the others. That's how it works best in Nashville. It's that old saying, "It's not what you know, it's who you know." It's totally true here, because it's all about getting to know people and networking. That's why playing the rounds is so important, because you are now meeting the people who, in five years, will be the ones who are stepping up the ladder with you and one or more of them might be in a position to help you at some point.

It's like riding a wave.... every generation has a new wave that comes into town, so get out and play, meet the new, young whipper-snapper crowd (laughing) of talented people and make connections because that will be your support system down the road.

Dan: One of the words you used when you were talking about the NSAI lobbying efforts and support they do for songwriters was “They.” You said “they do this,” and “they do that.” But Beth, YOU are a major force in a lot of those efforts and support.

Beth: My force is that I can go and sing before the congressmen and senators and let them see who a songwriter really is. When I play them *This Kiss* (Faith Hill) ***which I wrote with Annie Roboff and Robin Lerner***, they go “Wow, I know that song,” and it helps them understand there are people behind the songs. Music is the greatest weapon we have in our arsenal to use in our efforts to protect songwriters. We put faces to the songs so they understand the laws they are making affect me, affect you, affect other songwriters and not just some faceless name on a record.

We’re in Washington to protect songwriters from essentially having their livelihood taken away from them. If a songwriter can’t make money on their work, they’ll have to go out and get another job to support their family. So when they’re working in the shoe store and come home tired from a long day, they won’t have the time or energy to write really good songs and music as a whole will suffer. It’s a very critical time right now and we need to do all we can to ensure that songwriters’ rights are protected.

Dan: With all the downloading issues going on, do you think songwriters are losing ground or do you think the lobbying efforts are beginning to pay off?

Beth: The lobbying efforts are definitely paying off. It is a very complex situation, and NSAI is ***unique in that it’s members are 100% songwriters***. Some of the other organizations have other aspects they are working on as well as the songwriting part of it, but NSAI is in the trenches every day ***during these shifts and there are some really brilliant people over there who are sacrificing valuable writing time to dedicate their energy to protecting our profession***.

What really upsets me is that hundreds of thousands of dollars flows into the pockets of those who control the illegal sites that give the music away for free. Everytime someone clicks the mouse and sees an advertisement money has changed hands. Just like it does in the world of radio. But there is a system in place that collects a percentage from the Broadcasters which is paid to the creators of the work. In the case of illegal downloads...the webmasters simply steal the profits. Most kids downloading don’t realize they are assisting thieves.

Dan: How did the first hit change your life?

Beth: In an odd way, it was kind of a paradox between relief and having my focus disrupted.

Dan: Yes, we talked about that. I guess I was meaning more along the lines of your personal life... were you struggling before the hit and did the hit generate enough income to make a significant impact on your life?

Beth: We moved here in 1985 when my son was five years old. My husband had been the director of a treatment facility in Mobile, Alabama, where we’d lived for ***seven*** years, and he was making a pretty good living. But when we transferred here, all his credentials didn’t translate

and he ended up having to take a job that was quite a step down for him. During that whole time, I was making \$300 a week on writer's draw, and we were pretty much living paycheck to paycheck. I was terrified that, oh my God, I just moved my family up here and what if nothing good happens? We'll all starve and have to creep back home.

There was a lot of pressure on me to make something happen. It took until 1989 for the door to open, so I was sweating. When *Strong Enough To Bend* became a hit, I was so relieved. I was like, "okay, we're going to be all right."

Dan: You've actually gone a different route than most, having an artist deal first, right?

Beth: Yes. I was on Capital first and did an album with Barry Beckett producing, *at* Muscle Shoals sound. That album came out in 1980, right in the middle of the Disco Duck era so it didn't get ***heard much since it was a sensitive*** Carole King-type record. It was completely discouraging and it took me a couple years to get over that sense of failure. ***Then in about 1990 the president of Warner Brother's Records, Jim Ed Norman, contacted me and asked if I wanted to make a record.***

We had some adult contemporary hits off the first album with them. Then, after two more albums with them, including *Sand and Water* which was written after my husband's death in 1994, I became frustrated with the big, giant, lumbering impossibility of really getting anything done on a major label unless you're Madonna or Fiona (Apple), or someone like that.

I started doing the math and I thought "I'm better off just making *a* record and selling it out of the back of my pickup truck." I made a new record, *Deeper Still*, ***paying for it myself which gave me the flexibility to license it to different territories.***

My new record called Look, came out last year in the U.K. on Sanctuary Records and is on Compass in the US and Canada.

Dan: What do you attribute to so many Nashville songwriters and artists having better success in Europe than in Nashville?

Beth: It's three letters... B B C. It's because you can get on the radio over there, and when people hear a song they like they can call up the station and get the information on the song, ask for it to be played and the station will play it. It's not a taped, programmed show that's syndicated all over the country. Over there, they still do things the way it used to be done here in America. They play all the songs, including those that aren't being pushed hard by the big corporations, and people hear them and like them. Then, when they call up and ask for them to be played, the stations do it. Here in America, I call it "corporate radio." It's not like that over in the U.K. and other parts of Europe.

Dan: One of the things I always enjoy hearing you talk about is your philosophy on songwriter, the "hole in the top of your head" thing, how a song comes down from above and pour into that hole. Like divine intervention.

Beth: It's very spiritual, without being religious or denominational in any way. It's all about pushing everything out of your mind, all the worries you have, the thoughts about wanting to

write a song, and just letting it flow into you from that perfect place where all songs already exist. Space inhabits energy.

Recently, I've been getting into Feng Shui, with a move I'm doing from one place to another, and I'm learning how space can be perfectly occupied. Let's say you have a table with twenty-five objects on it, all different shapes and colors and such. You almost can't see anything on the table because your eyes are too busy bouncing from object to object. It's too busy. But if you have two or three perfectly placed things on that table, it says so much more. The table, and the objects, jump out at you. The same is true for songwriting. The greatest songs have the least syllables and the most concise simplicity to them.

When you're actually sitting down to write, or do something creative, I've always said there's like this hole in the top of your head where things will flow in. If you can get your brain out of the way, get your ego out of the way, get every bit of information sitting there out of the way and just open a space of nothingness in your mind and hang out there without all the clutter, play a few songs, sing a few things, you'll connect with that perfect place and the right song will flow into you. It may not be a hit or it may be the next number one. But you'll hear it and be able to write it.

I believe there's this creative spirit that's a part of each of us that is so much wiser than we are, and it uses our intellect to put us in touch with the muses, those places where the songs come from. Many people get caught up thinking it's their intellect that wrote the song. It's not. It's something else, that spirit of the song which writes itself. I like to say that all songs have already been perfectly written and we only open up to let them in and translate them for others to hear. They're up there on *really high shelves* and only have to *believe we can* we reach up to find them from time to time.

In order to find the song, you have to start by believing it's there in the first place and that you can be the one to find it. When you begin to believe that, you'll begin to write really great songs. It's the same thing as owning the fact you deserve the number one hit song. You have to believe in yourself and your ability to find it, to write it, to do it.

Dan: Do you remember the very first song you ever wrote?

Beth: Yes. I was eleven. My dad had gotten a guitar for Father's Day and my mother stuck it in my closet. We were living in Germany...

Dan: Army brat?

Beth: (Laughing) Air Force. So I found the guitar, but I couldn't find any song book in English that I could use to teach myself songs. I had the guitar and I had an old tuner, and I would blow the tuner then work on the guitar to find the matching notes and chords. Then I just put my fingers down and wherever it sounded good I'd name a chord. I made up my own symbols to represent the chords, and I taught myself how to play.

My first song was about a cowboy... really bad, all "A" rhymes, didn't go anywhere... very, very "eleven" style. I went downstairs and played it for my mom, who was watching one of her soap operas, and she started snoring before I finished the song. (Beth rolls her eyes and chuckles) I thought wow! *That might not be a good sign!* But I overcame that thought and was really drawn into it, the playing and the idea of creating.

Dan: Were you already into music at that point in your life? Playing other instruments or singing?

Beth: I was always drawn to music. When I was five years old we lived in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on an Air Force base. There was a lady across the street, Mrs. Churchman, and she had an old, dilapidated piano in her basement. I used to get special permission from my mom to go across the street and play on that piano. My mom would stand on one side of the street and Mrs. Churchman on the other, to make sure I got across the street safely.

It was incredibly cool that I could go down there and play that piano. They'd leave me down there for a half hour, sometimes an hour and I'd sit there and just make stuff up on that piano. I didn't know anything, no lessons, but I was just playing and loving it. So, yeah, I was always drawn to music from an early age.

Dan: Were you ever in any bands in high school?

Beth: *Not high school. I was the girl with the wire-rimmed glasses and a guitar in highschool. A few years later though* I was in a really popular band in Montgomery, Alabama, called Harmony. It was also called Harvest. I took the place of Tommy Shaw, who went on to play with Styx. We played the bowling alleys and lounges for two and a half years, six nights a week.

Dan: That must have been really good experience for you.

Beth: It was fantastic, and at the same time it was surreal. It was so strange... all that time, the same customers would come in and pretty much sit at the same tables every night. It was almost like time stood still in that place. But the experience taught me a lot about working with other musicians, and flow of a set, and how to deal with crowds, and so on.

It was while I was with the band that I met Barry Beckett, who produced my first album, and Mac Macinally who played guitar on the album. Another learning experience also came from that time for me, something that really taught me the value of songwriting.

I was stuck in a really bad contract with a publisher I'd signed with in Birmingham, Alabama. The rest of the band had an opportunity to cut a record on a major label and I wasn't available. I thought, "Wait a minute, what's going on?" So I threatened to sue to get out of the contract. Before I could do that, the publisher sold my contract to Screen Gems for \$12,000, and that was for about fifty songs. He never paid me a penny, but just recorded my songs. And when he sold the contract, I saw that my writings were really worth something. It was like a light bulb went off in my head. It said "These things are valuable,"

That was a very big lesson for me. Even now I remember that lesson and I always push for ownership of my songs. I would encourage other writers to do the same. You can't always do it, and often as you're starting out you have to give up a portion of the publishing – sometimes a major portion. But it's a process, and with success comes the ability to keep the rights to your songs.

Dan: What do you think it is, more than anything else, that drives your spirit to be such a strong advocate for songwriters? I mean, there are so many songwriters out here who basically write a song, go home, go back to work, write a song, etc. They don't worry about anyone else.

You, on the other hand, write a song, then go out and stand up for the rights of others who write songs as well. What is it that compels you to do that?

Beth: First of all, I have to say that – compared to some of the people I work with at NSAI – I’m like a weekender. They put in so much more time and effort than I do. They are so dedicated. But what makes me passionate about it is that I’ve been very fortunate and I think I have a responsibility to give back and help others. When a person is in a position of strength, I think they should use that strength to do what they can to make things better for others.

My son is twenty-four, a very talented songwriter, and I’m very concerned that he might not have an industry to be a part of if we don’t make some significant changes to the way things are being done. Songwriting is like any other job... a person should be compensated for all their effort and time it takes to create songs. The world really relies on songwriters to make the music they want to hear. Think about *it – without songwriters, artists would be singing out of the phone book, and that would be pretty boring...even as amazing as a voice can be....there still needs to be a song to launch record sales.*

Another thing that bothers me is that some artists, when they get so big, feel they feel can take some of the publishing away from songwriters. Songwriting and performing is like a marriage. A great song won’t have as much of a chance without a great voice. But, like a marriage, both sides need to respect the other. I think it’s important for each partner to value the other.

Getting back to the crisis of the thieves that operate illegal downloading sites, they don’t even realize that they’re going to end up starving the goose that lays the golden egg. They’ve got it in a cage now and are keeping it alive on minimal rations. Great songwriters are leaving this town, people who’ve had huge hits, and going back to regular jobs because there is so much of a decrease in the income from their work. They can’t afford to spend their time writing the great hits anymore. They have to feed their families. It would be like the shoe salesman making only a fraction of minimum wage salary. He would go broke just driving to work.

Dan: What do you think is the root cause of it all?

Beth: I have this idea, and I was talking about it this morning at NSAI. There is a whole generation of kids who basically think that everything on the Internet is free. They don’t even connect with the idea of paying for music. They turn on their computers like we turn on the radio. But what if every time you listened to the radio you had to pay for the song you were hearing?

If all you ever know was turning on the radio and someone came up to you and said, “by the way, starting next Tuesday, we’re going to be charging you for the song you’re listening to,” you be like “you’ve gotta be kidding!” So, I’m putting myself in the shoes of this younger generation and thinking that they shouldn’t be arrested for downloading things for free. But people who click on those websites don’t realize the songs really aren’t being downloaded for free. It’s not for free. The songs are being paid for by the advertisers. The problem is that none of the revenue is going to the songwriters. I want to let them have it for free, just like it would be on the radio.

But, like the radio, I want the companies who are providing the downloads to have to pay for the use of the songs. People may not realize how the radio station provides music for free to

the listeners because it makes money selling advertising. The websites that are providing downloadable songs are making millions, and even billions, from the advertising on their sites. Yet they don't share a single penny of that money with the songwriters.

Dan: Do you think a lot of this has led to what is being called the devaluation of Music Row?

Beth: I don't think it's just Music Row. I think it's the devaluation of our culture in America overall. I think we're really on a downhill slide and we need to find a way to turn it around before it's too late.

As I told you, I just got back from South Africa. You wouldn't believe it... there are people there who have nothing, but whose spirits are so rich with life. I'm not going to over-glamorize it, because I definitely wouldn't want to live in some of the conditions they live in. But we are so anestitized here. And I'm as bad as anybody else. In our culture we're gadgeted to death, commercialized to death, we're desperately distracted from what life is really about.

While I was there I was in places where my cell phone didn't work, my laptop didn't work, it was fantastic! I had a break from the technological binds that we're all tied with and I could really breathe. It made me realize I'm going to have to make an escape like that a couple times a year just to clear my head and get my soul back to where it wants to be.

Dan: No more connectivity this week...

Beth: Right. *And, it's interesting that we call it connecting, but really we're disconnecting from each other when we all stare into our computers.*

Dan: *It's like if I'm on the phone to you, even though we're talking we're not really having the same depth of interaction because we're not face to face, which is one of the reasons I don't do interviews by phone. I like the personal interaction.*

Beth: Me, too. I much prefer that. There are so many things communicated through non-verbal interaction, body language. When two people see each other, they can see reactions, they can see smiles, and it's a much higher quality conversation.

Dan: About South Africa... were you there touring, or on a special mission of some sort, or just vacationing?

Beth: Some dear friends of mine Gail and Vic Masando and JB Arthur have had a standing invitation for me for some time. I went there to record a Zulu hymn for a project I've been working on. A collection of hymns in all different languages.

I also did a concert and got to work with some amazing African artists. The concert was to raise awareness about an organization called C. O. P. E. S which deals with family abuse.

While I was there we also went to an AIDS village. Just the idea that there could be such a thing as an entire village of mostly orphans who's parents have died of AIDS is

incomprehensible. And yet to go there and hold those babies it is alarmingly real. Africa is a deep place of sorrow and beauty and grace.

Dan: Is this World Hymns record a follow-up to your first Hymns album?

Beth: Actually, I was working on this one before I started the other one. All I was originally going to do was find a Catholic hymn in Latin to put on my World Hymns record.

I went to Tower Records and looked for something that would go back to my childhood, the times when I'd sit in church and listen to the hymns, and I couldn't find anything. I went to St. Mary's bookstore and other places, and couldn't find any CD with all the hit Latin hymns on it! No one had anything like that.

I did end up finding one cassette of some guy, singing through his nose with terrible guitar playing, and I thought "This is an atrocity!" I grew up with my parents singing in the choir, listening to the harmonies of the old Latin hymns, and it concerned me that there was nothing out there on CD like that.

So, I decided to try and remedy the situation by making that CD.

Dan: Fifty years down the road, what do you want people to look back and say about Beth Nielsen Chapman?

Beth: I want to be remembered as being kind. I mean, that sounds so boring, like I should come up with something else. But I want to always try and be kind. Sometimes it's such a struggle, but I'd like them to say I always tried to help out when I could.

It's interesting... I find myself questioning some of the things I do now, after going to Sowetto. I'm much more conscious of wastefulness.

Dan: As you began in music and worked to build a career, did you have any musical role models who you looked up to, who you wanted to aspire to be or influenced you the most?

Beth: There are artists and writers who I've really respected... Joni Mitchell comes to mind. Even on the albums she did that I didn't connect as much with, *I always held her in high esteem that* she was doing what she wanted to do on her own terms as an artist. And, as to others, there's so many... Stevie *Wonder, James Taylor and Paul Simon, who did some important work with musicians from South Africa.*

I look up to the artists who are very focused on their work and not so much on fame and fortune, who really only kind of put up with the fame just so they can make music. I actually find fame to be not one of the plus things about being successful. It's because of the way people shut off who they are when they get around someone famous. They stop being who they are, and start being like, "Oh my God, you're so-and-so."

Dan: Anything new going on for you at the moment?

Beth: Yesterday I found out I have the next single off Trish Yearwood's new album, Jasper County. The song, "Trying To Love You", was co-written with Bill Lloyd.

Dan: Ka-ching (sound of a coin slot)

Beth: (Laughing) Let's hope so! I

Dan: I can tell, and I think your music clearly reflects that as well. Is there anything you'd like to talk about before we go, anything that I may have forgotten to mention?

Beth: *Actually, I'd love to mention that I'll be teaching at Hollyhock next summer-in August- with Paul Reisler. And in addition, I want to make sure I mention the 2nd Annual BNC Creativity Stargaze seminar at Dyer Observatory next year.* I need to lock in the dates, but I'm pretty sure it will be the last weekend in April.

Dan: You know, I had the opportunity to attend that this past April, and I was blown away by the way it was so well organized and how it helped me develop some new ideas in my own writing. I thought it was so neat that it was held at Vanderbilt's Dyer Observatory, and how the stargaze part of it was used to show just how vast the idea of the universe really is and how songwriting is the same way. It was very unique.

Beth: Yeah, ideas come from far out there and we just need to be able to find them, see them, and that's what I was trying to convey at the seminar. *This year, I want to play with it a little, perhaps have drive-by geniuses from several creative genres.*

I want to make this seminar all about the different ways to be inspired to create. And that means creating anything, not just songs. It all connects together. One of the greatest things I ever did for my songwriting was take off a month and sketch. And when I went back to my songwriting, it was like all my vents had been cleaned out and I had fresh air blowing through me again.

It's like anything else... you give it a rest and it will rejuvenate and become even stronger, gathering new energy.

Dan: You know, I'm guessing you don't get a lot of feedback from the participants of the seminar after they all go their separate ways, so I wanted to let you know some of the things I've been hearing from people I met there. Each one said they came away with something positive, something they have been using to help further their own songwriting talents and careers. I haven't met a person yet who didn't get something positive from your Creativity Stargaze seminar.

Beth: That is so kind of you to tell me about that, and it's great to know the seminar had a good effect. That's my mission as a teacher. I really love to critique songs and find ways to help someone discover ways to make their own writing better. You know, along with passing on tips on the craft and the business of songwriting, my fundamental role as a teacher is to simply try to get others to see that they are already wearing the red shoes (from the Wizard of Oz), and they just have to click them together three times to find their way to where they belong.

Each person already has the power within them to be creative, and it's up to them to find that source within themselves. No one can take it away. It can be dampened by outside things, but it's always there. And, in teaching, it's my favorite part of the job- helping others know that.

Dan: When you write songs, do you prefer co-writing or solo writing? If one or the other, why, and which results in your better work?

Beth: I think it's different in co-writing than it is alone. I think some of my best stuff has come from writing alone. If I'm not writing at all by myself, I don't think I'm as good of a co-writer. It's like keeping myself in shape.

With co-writing there is a whole other world of interaction, much more complex.. It depends on who you're writing with, how well you get along, what the writing is about. It's a little less subliminal and subconscious, and more direct, more of a "need to get it done" feel, which makes it feel sometimes rushed.

Dan: Here's a Chicken or the Egg question... Melody or Lyrics?

Beth: For me, ninety-nine point nine percent of the time it's melody first, and the lyrics are on a high shelf within *the melody*. ***I know it can be the other way around for different people, and – as you know – both the melody and the lyric are perfectly written already anyway. It's just a matter of receiving them through that hole in the top of your head.. Usually, I don't have any words flowing out of me unless I have a melody I can hear them in.***

Dan: Beth, I've monopolized a lot of your time and I want to thank you so much for talking with me. We can close it off for now if you'd like.

Beth: Oh, that's fine. I had a great time, actually, and it's been really nice sitting here talking with you, too.