

California State College, Bakersfield
Bakersfield Sound Oral History Project
Recorded History

INTERVIEWEE: Susan Raye Wiggins
PLACE OF BIRTH: Eugene, Oregon
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INTERVIEWER: Curt Asher
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CA: This is Curt Asher. I am interviewing Susan Raye Wiggins at her home in Northwest Bakersfield at 3:00 p.m. Tuesday/Thursday January 15, 2014 for the Bakersfield Sound Oral History Project. Could you please state and spell your name for me?

SW: Yes. My name is Susan Raye Wiggins.

CA: Thank you. And when and where were you born, Susan?

SW: I was born on October 8, 1944 in Eugene, Oregon.

CA: Can you tell me about your early life growing up? Tell me about your family, where you lived, and did you move from Portland...things like that?

SW: Well, I have two brothers--one older and one younger. I was the only daughter. And my mom and dad. When I was born it was at the tail end of World War II and my father didn't see me until I was about eighteen months old because he was overseas. We had a very happy life. We lived in Eugene, then we moved to the coast in Southern Oregon—Port Orford, Oregon, lived there up through 5th grade which was a wonderful place as a child, you know, living right there on the sand and the ocean. And then when I was in 5th grade, we moved, and moved up outside of Portland to Forest Grove, Oregon. And that's a small town about 25 miles west of Portland in the Willamette Valley and it was about 6,000 people then. And the last time I checked it was about 12,000 so it is still relatively small. I had a very happy childhood; went to school, graduated, didn't start music until after I was out of school and then lived there until I was 24 and then moved to Bakersfield and that was when I got involved in music.

CA: OK. So what did your dad do?

SW: My dad was a truck driver. Actually, when I was I was little, he owned a jewelry store in Port Orford in the little town and repaired watches. The story I got was that basically, he was too nice. He repaired everybody's watches and jewelry and nobody paid him. He was too nice to ask for money and so after he had fixed everything, there wasn't that much use for him anymore, and so he went back to driving truck. And he drove truck up until...in fact he was killed on his truck when he was 72 coming back from a cross country trip and he must have had a stroke and because he couldn't...his foot was locked on the gas pedal and he went off into the Snake River and was killed instantly. So for years, I just thought of my dad as out on the road somewhere, you know, because he had spent so much time out on the road. I knew he was gone, but in my mind it was like he was just out on the road somewhere. But, yeah.

CA: So you said you started singing when you were 24. Can you tell me about that? How did the singing career begin?

SW: Well, actually, I mean I started singing for real when I was 24, but when I was 17, my senior year in high school, a couple of guys came to town from Idaho, two brothers, and they wanted to start a little rock band. And they asked me to sing with them. And at the time, I thought, "Well why would you even ask me? Because you don't know if I can sing. I don't know if I can sing, you know." And later, I asked them why and the younger brother said, "Well, I really liked you and I hoped if you were in the band, we could go out and be boyfriend and girlfriend." Which we never were, we were just friends, but then they moved back to Idaho a year later and wanted me to go back there with them and I said, "You are crazy. I'm not going back there. I am staying here." And by then, I kind of enjoyed singing. So I heard of a country station. Now mind you, I really didn't know what country music was. I had never heard of it. But there was a little country station that had a live radio show on Saturdays and so I went down to the one little music store in town and said, "I need a couple of country records," and got two 45s and went home and learned them and then went down to the radio station and I ended up working there all the time. I ended up getting my DJ's license (which was easy to do back then.) I think you paid a few dollars and got---well it wasn't like it is now, I am sure. I worked as a DJ and then I did my own show singing on the weekends at the radio station and then somebody heard me and asked me to come in to Portland and sing with their group. So I graduated to doing that. And then somebody asked me to be on a local TV show. So I was on local TV every week. I did that for probably three or four years or five and then after that, I just decided where I wanted to sing because I was like a local TV star, so I could just say I did not want to work all the time because by then I had gotten married and had a baby. I thought, "I just want to work a few days a week." So I would call someplace and say, "Well, would you like to have me come and work Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays?" And they would already have a crowd on the weekends so I will help pull a crowd. And that is what I did. And then, one time Buck Owens came to town and...

CA: So what town was this?

SW: Portland.

CA: This was all in Portland.

SW: I lived outside of Portland, but yeah...

CA: The original town where you bought the two records and everything?

SW: That was Forest Grove, Oregon.

CA: Forest Grove

SW: Yes, Forest Grove. That was a little town outside of Portland. So I went in to hear Buck and the band. And I wasn't 21 yet at that time, so they had me stand in the kitchen area looking out and as I walked into the restaurant area, somebody (I have no idea who it even was) somebody said, "Oh, there's Susan Raye. Have you ever heard of her?"

Well, of course he hadn't. Nobody had. I mean, they were from California and so they asked me to get up and sing with Buck's band. And I got up and sang. I don't know what I sang. I don't remember, I sang something, and then after that they called me and said, "Well, would you come down? Buck would like to talk to you."

And at the time, I was married and had a small son. But I wasn't about to fly down there by myself, so I took my mother with me and my mother and I flew down to Bakersfield and talked with them and nothing really came of it. Whenever they would travel up to the Pacific Northwest, they would call me and say, "We are going to do Portland, Seattle and Vancouver, BC. Would you like to be on the show?"

I said, "Sure, that would be fun." So this went on for a couple of years and then they asked me if I would work in Las Vegas. So I went to Las Vegas. And then the last night I was in Vegas, they called and said, "Could you come by Bakersfield on your way back to Oregon? We want to talk to you." So I did.

And when I came through, Buck said he was just getting ready to start his "Buck Owens' All American Show." And he would like for me to be the featured girl singer. I said, "No, thank you." And he said, "**Why?**" And I said, "Well, because I don't want to be just some name, you know,—so and so and so and many others, you know, on the bill. That is not what I have in mind."

And he said, "Well, that is not what I have in mind, either." He said, "I will manage you and you will be an individual act on your own and you will work on my show."

So I guess at that time, I thought, you know, "I need to work and make a living, so I will try it and if it doesn't work I'll go back home."

CA: When you were 21 then?

SW: I was 24 then. That's when I said...

CA: I see.

SW: So when I came down here I actually started working not just locally. That is when I consider my career started, I guess. So I went back home to Oregon, packed up my son and I and we moved down to Bakersfield. I had gotten divorced during that time, so that was why I thought, "Well I have to work anyway. So I will try it and if it doesn't work" And it was great because I worked a few days. I got a lady to live with me and watch my son when I traveled a little bit and the rest of the time I was home all the time so I never had to get a 9 to 5 job or whatever. You know, I was with my family the majority of the time. So it worked really well. And then one thing led to another. I went down to Capital Records and recorded and then before my first record came out, with "Charlie Hee-Haw" and so then I was on national television every week so when my first record came out I had an "in". You know, I mean everybody's, "Oh, that's that little gal that sings on "Hee-Haw." Let's listen to her record." So I had that kind of a jump start, you know, rather than having to just be a total unknown. And, you know, 25 records came out, well who is this? I don't know, you know. So, it was actually quite easy for me, I have to say. And I didn't travel. People say, "Oh, we worked in all these horrible places and lived out of a van...." And I didn't do any of that. You know, by the time I started working for Buck. I think we had.... We didn't ever travel. We flew, to the beginning of a tour. And then he had a big bus and he would hire the driver to go to the beginning of the tour and then we would just drive on the tour and then fly back home. And we didn't do that very long. After I had been with him a very short while, they just, we just started flying everywhere. So it was really even better for me because I could just fly in, sing a couple of days, you know, you make good money in a few days, and you go back home.

CA: Nice.

SW: So, and I didn't have all the, if I had been left to my own devices, I probably never would have become an entertainer because I didn't have that "Oh, I am going to be a star someday. I'll do anything to become a star" thing. It just kind of happened. And I thought, "Well, we will see how it goes and if it works, I will do it and if not I will do something else. So I was probably the most surprised one of all that it worked out so well.

CA: So your musical education was not really anything formal?

SW: Not much. I sang in our church choir. In high school, I sang in our school choir. I did, you know, a couple of things like that. I believe I took lessons, not for very long. I didn't like them. It was like, all you do is go "do re mi" you know, sing scales. It was not my idea of fun. I never even got to sing a song, I don't think. And so, I wasn't real impressed with that. But I don't know if I learned anything from it or not, probably not.

CA: And so then you came to Bakersfield with the express purpose of working for Buck?

SW: Working for Buck. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

CA: And that's before he had a venue here. Right? Or did he have it?

SW: Well he lived here at the time I first came here. We recorded at Capital Records in Hollywood. It was before he had his own recording studio here. It was before, way long before

he had the Crystal Palace. That was years and years later. So this was just home base. He lived here and we flew out of LA.

CA: So most of his crew...people...

SW: We all lived here. Um, hmm. Yeah, everybody lived here.

CA: Can you describe Bakersfield in the 70's, especially from a musician's perspective?

SW: Well, you know, to me Bakersfield was the largest city I had ever lived in because Eugene wasn't that big when I was young. I lived in a town of 1,000 in Port Orford. I lived in a town of 6,000 in Forest Grove and although I worked in Portland, I really didn't live in Portland. So Bakersfield was about, I think it was like, 82,000 people when I came and that was the biggest place I had ever lived. But I **loved** it in that it was very friendly. I believe it still is, for the most part. And people were nice. I enjoyed it right from the get-go and I, even though I grew up in Oregon, Oregon is absolutely beautiful, I loved the sunshine. And you know, and then when I would go back to Oregon, I would just be freezing all the time. You know, I would have my mom's down robe on in the middle of the summer because I was cold, you know, and I felt cheated if I went up to Oregon and there was no sun, you know, so.... A lot of people don't like it, but I would rather be too warm, than too cold. So I liked it right from the beginning.

CA: Was there a... I know there was a big music scene here. Do you remember any of those places?

SW: Well, I was somewhat removed. Like I said, I had my son when I came. And then I married Jerry, Buck's drummer, in 1971, and he had two children and they came to live with us. And then we had our first child 15 months after we were married, so I went from one to four children...

CA: right away.

SW: ...in 15 months. Yeah. So I was pretty much at home, and especially because I did fly out for a few days here and there, but when I was home I just wanted to be with my kids. So I was more apt to be in church or at the school as part of the PTA, you know, helping out and so my life was revolved around family and wasn't into the night club scene. I hardly went anywhere at all. In fact, I think the only time I went was the first time I flew down to Bakersfield with my Mom. Jack McFadden, Buck's manager, took us out to show us what was in Bakersfield and I think I went into some of the places that they had back then, but I just never went there. I was a mother. You know, I was an entertainer when I was on the road. I was a wife and mother when I was home.

CA: I see. So you kind of described how you got interested in performing country music. You said...

SW: I just kind of fell into it.

CA: You didn't grow up listening...

SW: No, I never heard of it. I didn't know it existed. I listened to Rock and Roll, but you have to remember back then Rock and Roll was the Everly Brothers, Fats Domino. You know, even with Pat Boone versus Elvis Presley, I never liked Elvis Presley, I liked Pat Boone. I was the conservative, you know. Really, it wasn't that much different, you know, from the Rock and Roll that I knew because by the time I actually got into it, country music was moving a little more progressive as well. I know a lot of people would come up to me after shows and say, "I don't usually like country music, but I like your voice. I think what they meant was, "You don't have a country twang. You don't sound like what I expected you to sound like." And I would enjoy taking songs and singing them myself and they didn't sound the same because I didn't grow up with... you know, I wasn't in that atmosphere, I didn't have that accent or whatever. So, yeah, it was, it was different, something I never really ever expected to do, but as I played the songs on the radio, it is funny, because after a year at the radio station, I am thinking, "Gee, George Jones doesn't sound as "twangy" as he used to. Well, he was every bit as "twangy." I had just gotten accustomed to it and it had grown on me over the, you know, over time. So I think it was just new to me in the beginning because I just didn't know anything about country music.

CA: So it was kind of just an opportunity for you, the country music. You sort of fell into it.

SW: Yes. And people would say, "Well, would you rather sing something else?" And my answer was always, "Not really." Because, to me, the people that liked country music were more conservative. I would not have wanted to be a Rock and Roll singer 'cause that was scary. You know, I led a very sheltered life and I would have felt like a horrible misfit probably in the Rock and Roll scene, although "LA International Airport" did cross over into the Pop Charts and the Rock and Roll Charts. But that was another accident.

CA: In fact, it was Number One in some countries, right, as a Rock?

SW: Yeah, I have two gold records from New Zealand and Australia because, I guess at the time in New Zealand, I had sold more records than any other female artist had ever sold. I mean, not just Country, but, you know, any genre. And again, I had no clue of that. I had always heard from record executives that if you are not out pushing your record, it will never go. Well, I had never been to New Zealand. I didn't even know my record was released in New Zealand until they gave me a gold record. So that kind of shoots that theory down. And then I got one from Australia. I had never been there, either. So after I became a star there, then I went over to New Zealand quite often, at least probably once a year. And loved it.

CA: Did you play there?

SW: Oh, yeah. After I knew that they had my record and they liked me. Then they booked me in New Zealand and a couple of fun stories is—The first time, well I went over by myself a lot. Then they set me on a day show with Tom T. Hall and Bobby Bare. Now, over here, they would be considered a bigger star than I. But in New Zealand, I was considered the bigger star.

CA: Is that right?

SW: And it was kind of comical, because they bought me First Class airplane tickets and they bought them coach tickets. I traded my first class ticket in and got two Coach tickets and took my mother, just because I figured she would love it. They traded their traded their two tickets up and got First Class tickets and then they tried...and their managers were upset because they were giving me top billing and so they finally had to kind of deal with it. So they took me off top billing and put them on and they couldn't sell the shows. So they put me back on top billing, sold the shows out and then before we got there, they moved them back down. And I just thought it was funny.

CA: That is hilarious.

SW: I didn't care one way or the other. Then they went over with Buck Owens and they would say, "Susan Raye and Buck Owens sings with her." And it was just kind of funny, you know, to me, because they thought I was a big star and I am going, "I am not a big star. I am not that big at home."

CA: You were pretty big at home. I mean, it wasn't like you weren't known. I can tell you that.

SW: No, but I just didn't, I guess I just didn't push it. I mean, to me it wasn't about, I don't know, like I said if, if Buck hadn't been my manager and Jack my booking agent, I probably never would have done as much. So, I always figured I owed a lot to them because they knew what to do and they produced my records and you know, so I owe a lot to them.

CA: In the early years, in the 70s, there was most of the musicians that were in country music that were involved in the California, sort of, West Coast music.

SW: Right.

CA: A lot of them lived in Bakersfield.

SW: A lot of them. There were some in LA as well, you know. But there were quite a few that lived in Bakersfield and some of them were here before I really even got here. Like Billy Mize, and I kept hearing of a Cousin Herb Henson or something. Somebody said that I was on his show once, but if I was, I didn't know who he was. I had just come here and I didn't, I had no idea of where I was going and what I was doing. So, like I said, again, because I was home with my children, I was kind of out of the loop as far as, you know, what goes on. More people know me at church and at school.

CA: Yes. Not in the music circles.

SW: No.

CA: Do you think that having a lot of migrants from Oklahoma and the Southwest and the Plains helped to build the music scene here?

SW: Well, it did exclusively probably, because Buck Owens' parents came here. And he was born in Texas and lived in Arizona, and then they came out here. And Buck used to joke and

say that it was like “The Grapes of Wrath” type of thing. And so they came out here. And then when he became well known, then he drew a lot of other people here. Buck had a habit of putting people under him that he thought had potential but that had never gone so far as to reach stardom yet because then he could get them for much cheaper because they were thrilled at the opportunity. He was a business man, more than even an entertainer, although he was a good entertainer. So that is what he did. And I was some little naïve conservative girl from a little town up in Oregon and he heard me and I know Jack said one time, “To be honest, I don’t remember what you sounded like the night we had you get up and sing.” But he said, “There was something in you that I didn’t see in any other country singer.” And I am thinking it was my naivety I wasn’t hardened and “I am going to be a star no matter what” and that was just refreshing or something to him. So basically I think Buck thought, “Well, you might have something there. Let’s sign her up, you know, and then he took care of it.”

CA: Do you know, I think you were the first, one of the few women who succeeded in Country Music without being in Nashville.

SW: I guess that could be true. I never really thought about it like that, but it was probably a hindrance in some ways, because a lot of people in Nashville didn’t like Buck because he was in your face like this is the Bakersfield Sound and I don’t need to go to Nashville. He felt like they slighted him probably a little bit so he...who needs you type of thing. Well, I didn’t have that attitude but because I worked for Buck, then, you know, I am sure that some people just lumped me in to that same category and after I left Buck and Capitol Records, I went back and did one album in Nashville. And I think it hindered me then, because I think Buck kind of tried to make sure that I didn’t do well in Nashville.

CA: Really. Okay.

SW: That is sort of what I heard later. That because they had a..

CA: He didn’t want you to go to Nashville?

SW: No, he just.... I had left him. And he thought, I am sure he thought, “Well she left me. I don’t want her to do well on her own. That’s what she gets for leaving.” That type of thing.

CA: So he might have sabotaged your career?

SW: Well, I know that I went to United Artists Records, and George Richie, who married Tammy Wynette produced a record for me and it was a really good album. Really liked it. And he had an opportunity to then have me under a contract and there was some letter that was sent to him and then he turned me down. Said, “No.” And I don’t waste my time on stuff like that, so I really didn’t keep it, but I do remember reading something where he kind of made it difficult. He had me under a contract for all of my Blue Book music and this and that and he kind of just made some strong case for why they shouldn’t take me.”

CA: I see.

SW: And it wasn't too long after that that I decided that I really would rather sing Christian music than stay in the Country Music field. And so I thought to myself, you know, I am just going to change direction anyway.

CA: So when you say Christian music, is that Gospel or is that like Christian Rock or what do you mean "Christian music?"

SW: I call, well, I call it Contemporary Christian music. I listen to KAXL, the Christian radio station all the time. It wasn't Country. I don't even know what they call it. Country Gospel? Southern Gospel? It wasn't that. And it was just more regular Christian music.

CA: Okay. Have you recorded any of that?

SW: I did record one album in Amarillo, TX. I did, there was a man there who wanted to record me and I went back and did two albums for him. One was called "There and Back" and it was a remix of all my greatest hits on one side, (that was the "There") and then the "Back" was new recordings. And then we did another one called "Then and Now." It had Christian music on the "Now" side and new records on the other side and interviews interspersed between them.

CA: Oh, I see.

SW: And it was all set to come out and something went wrong. He divorced his wife and there was a big huge fight over the money from the recording studio and it fell through.

CA: Oh, Okay.

SW: And about that time, I just decided you know what? I really would just rather stay home.

CA: Now were you a Christian as a kid or did you...

SW: Yes

CA: ...convert to Christianity later?

SW: No. My grandmother took me to church when I was probably 4 or 5. And I went to church all throughout my teenage years. All my life I have gone to church.

CA: So, even when you were playing with the Buckaroos and all that ...

SW: Oh, yes, I was a Christian. And there were times like, there were songs I wouldn't sing. I mean even like when I was singing in places where I sang other music besides my own, if somebody came up and said to sing, you know, a song that I felt was disrespectful, I wouldn't do it. I just said I didn't know that song. But I didn't know it because I didn't want to know it. So I was always careful about what I chose to sing. Most of my songs were on the happy side.

CA: What is the Bakersfield Sound to you? What distinguishes it from other kinds of music?

SW: Well, to me, my husband could probably answer that better than I can, but....

CA: I would like to interview your husband at some point.

SW: To me it was the guitars. Buck Owens' guitar playing and Don Rich, who was his sound. He played the violin, a fiddle, and lead guitar and sang harmonies with him, so it was mostly Buck and Don was the sound. And everybody tried to copy it because, it was just, everybody liked it. He just had a sound about him and the just way he entertained even. As far as I am concerned personally, Buck Owens doesn't have a very good voice, but he is a great entertainer. He was a great entertainer. And he would make, it was like, the biggest point to him was, "I'm not quittin' until you feel like you have been entertained." For some people, I remember if there was ever a bad crowd, which there hardly ever was, but some people if there is nobody there, they just kind of do a halfway show. They don't, they are just not in it because it is just not fun if there is just nobody there. But Buck was the type of entertainer that if you did not like him or if there was hardly anybody there, he would work four hours straight without even taking a break because he wanted to make sure before that show was over, you liked what you heard. And that was part of it I think.

CA: Would you consider yourself to be a member of the Bakersfield Sound?

SW: Well, that is a good question. I would say "yes and no." Yes, because I was with them for a long time and I recorded with them, I traveled with them. And I knew inner and out of what it was all about. But I was never a part of the Bakersfield Sound here because like you said, I didn't go-- a lot of musicians go and hang out and see what other bands are playing and hear what everybody is doing, and I just didn't do that. So I was a little bit separated probably from it in that way, but I certainly would be proud to be a part of it. And I did all of my, you know, I recorded at the studio with Buck here in town and with Buck in LA and so I would say, "Yes, I was, but maybe not 100% because all of the time I worked for Buck, I also worked on my own and did things differently, maybe, on my own. You know. And I was kind of forced into being Bakersfield Sound in a way because when I recorded for Buck, he picked all of my songs. And he would tell me what I was going to sing, and they were usually his songs...and his musicians. So basically, I was Bakersfield Sound probably by virtue of that. And I very seldom got to pick my own songs.

CA: Until you went off on your own?

SW: Well, yeah. There were a couple of times I picked my own songs, but not very often.

CA: Did you know Merle Haggard at all? Have you ever met him?

SW: I've met him. I know him. I knew Bonnie, probably, Bonnie Owens more. I had more in common with her. I didn't spend a lot of time around him. Like I said, I didn't go out with other people and see who was where. But I definitely knew who he was. I met him at Capital Records, I think, the first time.

CA: You must have met a lot of musicians over the years. You said you performed with Tom T. Hall, Bobby Bear.

SW: Um-hmm.

CA: Were there other musicians of that level that you were friends with?

SW: Oh, yes. Because I traveled on my own, so I worked on shows with a lot of people. Until I quit. People in the 90s and the 2000s, I haven't worked with them, because I haven't been singing.

CA: But like who? Can you tell me about any of those people?

SW: I loved working with Charlie Pride. He was a really nice man. I am crazy about Vince Gill. He is one of my favorites. Gosh, I don't even remember all of the people that I traveled with. It's like when you go somewhere different every night and there are different people every night, they kind of all run together.

CA: Sure.

SW: But I did the Glen Campbell Show---a television show with Glen Campbell. And I did a TV show with Johnny Cash. That was kind of fun. I didn't, I mean I remember Johnny Cash from when I was a teenager, and then to be on a show with him, it was – he came up all dressed in black and said he was going to buy me a Coke at the concession stand and he came up with that voice and said it was like he was from another era. You know, and he walked off of the pages of history or something. Because he didn't seem to fit in the here and now. It was like he came from a while back. A lot of different people that I enjoyed working around and seeing.

CA: It must have been an exciting time. Was radio and television played a big role in the development of West Coast country music? You already described that you got your start as a live performer on a radio station. And then in some TV show, and what was the name of the show?

SW: It was called "Hoe Down."

CA: "Hoe Down."

SW: Yes.

CA: In..?

SW: In Portland.

CA: In Portland. And then after "Hoe Down" you played a lot clubs around but could you talk about other experiences with TV and radio that you had?

SW: Well, when I first came down here, Buck was flying to Oklahoma City regularly and doing the "Buck Owens Ranch Shows" and everybody assumed they were from here. But we all flew to Oklahoma City and recorded those. So for a while I was doing the Oklahoma City shows and then I was also going back to Nashville doing "Hee Haw." And then like I said, I did the "Glen Campbell Show." I did the "Tonight Show" in New York City with Johnny Carson before he

came out to LA and that was kind of a fun excitement. We sang at Madison Square Garden. We sang at the White House. We sang at the Sydney...

CA: Who was the president at that time? Was that Nixon, Johnson?

SW: I think it was.... I think my husband was there when Johnson was the President. But that was...When I was there, I think it was Nixon. Yes. So we went into the Oval Office but, he wasn't there. So, I think it was Nixon. I, like I said, I just kind of like geography. You would think I would do really good because I have flown everywhere, but that's the problem. You go from Point A to B and you don't even know where you are half the time. So I don't remember who was there.

But we sang at the Sydney Opera House in Sydney, Australia. That was one of the highlights. We sang in Prince Albert Hall in England and in Hong Kong, China and the Philippines and Scotland and Ireland and just a lot of, you know, there were a lot of interesting things that we got to do.

CA: That sounds great. When you were on "Hee Haw" how was that?

SW: That was fun because it wasn't done like, when I did the TV shows in LA, you would rehearse all week...Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and then film on Friday or something like that. "Hee Haw" was done differently and I think at the time it was the first show that was ever handled like that. They would just do a bunch of stuff and then a computer would put the show together. So they would set up the cornfield for the jokes, and then they would do a half year's worth of jokes or something in the cornfield, and then they would set up another section and then they would set up another section and so you would go in and you would do your part and then you would go home and when you saw the show you had no idea what it was going to be. So it was kind of fun, you know. At first, we were there longer because they got better at it as time went by. They brought in everyone practically from LA. It was filmed in Nashville, but the producer, the director, the cameramen, everybody was from LA. And they did it that way because it was cheaper to get the country stars in Nashville to be on the show. So they would put everybody up and the first time we went, I think we stayed for like three or four weeks and just filmed and maybe I would sit there all day. You would go down every morning and get your makeup on and your hair done and you might sit there all day and do nothing because they were just figuring out how to make it work. But as they got... years went by, it got to be where you didn't, it wasn't as much fun because you didn't see everybody as much, you'd just fly in, do your part and then leave. But in the beginning, it was more of a big family. One year we had Thanksgiving together because we were there over Thanksgiving and one of the producers or somebody from the TV station had a big home out in the outskirts of Nashville and invited all of us out for Thanksgiving dinner. And we all came together and had Thanksgiving Dinner together. So it was more like a big family.

CA: So you knew all those people that were on the show?

SW: Oh, yes. You got to know them. Yes.

CA: Like Grandpa Jim?

SW: Oh, yes. He was wonderful. What a nice man. Yes, and a nice, nice man. And his wife was sweet. Ramona. Really nice people.

CA: There was the comedian--Stringbean. He was a musician also.

SW: Yes. And he was the one that was murdered.

CA: Was he murdered?

SW: Yeah. And I don't... I don't know when it was because he was on the show when I was there, but then somebody came out to some place where he lived in some little out of the way place and murdered him. And I don't think it was ever..., I could be wrong, but I don't think it was ever even figured out why or who did it. But I did see him before... Yeah.

CA: But those people must have been from the South.

SW: They were from Nashville. And that is why they filmed in Nashville because they could get all those kinds of people that would fit the show and not have to... you don't have to pay a cameraman as much as you do an entertainer to be on a show.

CA: Did you know Roy Clark as well?

SW: Yes. We saw Roy Clark in Nashville. I mean, in Vegas. I saw him in Vegas first—do his show. And then I saw him, of course, at “Hee Haw.” I saw him more because he and Buck did a lot together, so he was usually there when we were all there.

CA: I guess you didn't really... This question doesn't apply to you too much. What other things did you do to support yourself while you made a name for yourself in music when you started out with a name for yourself working for Buck?

SW: Well, yeah. I mean, when I was young, I mean I worked as a DJ. I worked as a model. I modeled, I went to John Robert Powers Finishing School and I modeled sportswear and swimwear for Jantzen which is an Oregon company. They have a swimsuit company. And then I would do modeling for big department stores for they wanted to see the new things. I did some Tea Room modeling. I didn't like that at all!

CA: Why is that?

SW: It is where they are eating lunch and you come out while they are eating lunch. And you do a little fashion show while they are eating lunch and I just kind of felt like I was interfering. You know, somebody is having lunch and I am out there parading around. I don't like that very much.

And then I, what else did I do? I worked in Meyer and Franks department store which was a 13 story, covered the whole block in Portland, Downtown Portland. I liked that, but it didn't pay anything and I really couldn't even afford to work there because I lived in Forest Grove and I

had to take a bus forward and backward to go there and I thought, "I really like the family here but I really can't afford to do this." So I didn't do that for very long. And when I was 18, I think, I actually worked for a short time at Bird's Eye canning company. I worked midnight to 8:00 a.m. canning green beans.

CA: Oh, brother!

SW: Yeah! That was a fun thing.

CA: I bet it was!

SW: But that is about it.

CA: I was intrigued by the "Hee Haw" stories you were telling me. Are there any more you can tell me about?

SW: Well, there's... I guess the most interesting or intriguing "Hee Haw" story I know is Lulu Roman. And it is probably common knowledge now that she was a stripper in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Comedic stripper because she was very large. And I am assuming that Buck or somebody saw her at a strip club and they suggested that she would be good on "Hee Haw." So she was on the show and I always was very uncomfortable around her. In fact, I took my son, (he was about eight) and I took him back to the filming and I said, "Don't...if she starts acting weird, just leave the room. Because she just, she didn't feel good about herself and she would like... if a nice couple came in from Ohio to watch the show, she was liable to just start cussing, you know, on stage, or doing inappropriate things, so I was kind of uncomfortable around her. And then, of course, she was put in jail for drugs and I remember she had a baby, I think while she was in jail. And just a whole different thing. And then years, some years later, I was flying through Dallas and who comes up to me but Lulu Roman? And I hadn't seen her in years and she had been in jail and was now out and whatever, and I was just blown away by her because she had become a Christian and it was like she was a different person entirely and she was now singing Christian music and she said, "I didn't even know I could sing." And she told me what a horrible place she had been in and what happened to her and how she had changed so and I remember just walking away just so excited thinking, "Wow! If God can change her life, he can change anybody." And it was the first time I think I had seen such a drastic change between somebody the way they were before and the way they were after. So that was...

CA: See her a lot after?

SW: She actually came and sang at Buck Owens' funeral.

CA: Oh, did she?

SW: Yes. And she is still singing Christian music and it is pretty exciting.

CA: I watched the funeral on TV.

SW: It was very impressive.

CA: Can you talk a little more about Buck? You worked with him a lot. He got you your start in music.

SW: He did.

CA: He was known as a person who was kind of hot-headed.

SW: Yeah, he could be. He was, like I said, he was a very aggressive business man. And he did what was good for Buck Owens and to make money. And he did. He was successful in just about everything he did. He and I had an unusual friendship because I was this little conservative girl from Oregon, not at all his type. And yet, we were friends because...I think it was because I didn't want anything from him. You know, like a lot of people probably come up to him and, you know, "Make me a star and, you know, whatever." I just wasn't like that. In fact, I guess the first time I traveled with them, he asked his manager, "Does she not like me?" Because, and I told Jack, I said, "Well it is not that I don't like him. I just don't know him." I mean, I was young and conservative. And I didn't know...I didn't have much to say to him. So I was just kind of quiet and we just became friends. And actually, he was Best Man at our wedding.

CA: Really!

SW: And he wore a tuxedo for me at our wedding. He wouldn't wear a suit at his own son's wedding because he didn't like suits, but he, you know, we just had that different relationship. But I saw the tough side of him at times. I remember once I went in and said, "you know, I have worked for you for this small amount of money for years because of all that you did for me, but I need to have more money because I don't want to spend my time, I have to spend my time working for you, and then I have to go out and work on my own because I made way more money singing--performing on my own than I did with him. And I said, "I don't want to work that much." And, at first he got really, and I just said, "You know, I just can't work for that amount of money and be away from my family that much." And first, he got upset and said, "Well, you want me to get somebody else?" (You know, real gruff.)

And I said, "Well, it is not my first choice. But do as you gotta do. I just know that I don't want to be away from my family and it is not fair, you know, for my family." And then he gave me what I asked for. I mean, I wasn't asking for the moon. I wasn't being greedy. I just, and I accepted to work for him for less because he was the one that made me who I was. And I felt I owed him some loyalty but I figured that I had paid that loyalty. I had done it for like eight years or something and it was time for me to either go out on my own and make more money and work less, or get more money so that I didn't have to work on my own that much. So that was the side that I saw of him. He tried to act gruff and like he was just going to get rid of me if I was going to give him any trouble, but he didn't.

CA: You know, musicians generally have a reputation for parties, drugs, alcohol and that type of thing and you have said several times that you are very conservative...

SW: Yes.

CA: So you weren't involved in that but ...

SW: No.

CA: You must have observed...

SW: Let's just say I have never tasted beer.

CA: But you observed...

SW: I have never smoked a cigarette. No. I saw them... Buck never drank or smoked or did drugs.

CA: All right.

SW: Ever. And he ran a tight ship. When we were performing, you'd best not be... If you were doing drugs, you would be out of there. If you were drinking, it had better be after work is over. So I felt comfortable working with them because I wasn't... I was still somewhat sheltered from, you know... And now I hear some stories and I think, "Oh my Gosh, I would have never wanted to even be in the business if I'd had to be around that."

I do remember one time when we were doing the State Fair in Sacramento and I was flying in from a show on my own and Buck and the guys were flying in from somewhere else from a different show, and the Hager twins who were also on "Hee Haw" were also on this show. We were all on it together. And so when it came time to go to the fairgrounds, I was to go in a cab with Buddy, Buck's son, and Jim and Jon Hager and then the other guys came when they got there. And the Hager twins were smoking marijuana in the back seat of the car and I was livid because.... And Buck was livid when he found out because, like he said, "You know, if they get busted, the papers are going to say "Buck Owens" and my name is going to be front of them. And I said, "Well they would have assumed that I was doing it, too." And I was very upset. And we were going through security police to go in to the fair and I am thinking, you know, "I am stuck here with these people." And I remember telling my husband, "I will never ride in a car with them again." Because that is not okay.

CA: No.

SW: So, but, by and large, I was pretty much, you know, that was good for me to work for Buck because.... Now I did see things that I wouldn't have approved of. I mean I didn't see it, but do you see girls hanging around and you know, you can put two and two together and figure what's going on. So, no, I respected him as an entertainer. I didn't always respect his choices.

CA: Can you describe other artists and musicians who influenced you? Or who you worked with?

SW: Most of my influences were probably just not in person. I think I was influenced by Jim Reeves who was killed in a plane crash before I actually ever got into. But I listened to his music and I liked his style. And I was probably... I was more influenced by the male entertainers than female probably because I knew that I needed to have my own sound. And, like when I did the TV show every week, I usually would pick a male singer's song because when I sing a song that was done by somebody else that's a man, I am not going to sound like them. So, it was easier to not, because I was young and just getting started and I would have probably just copied the girl singers and sung the songs to where I sounded like them. To my best ability. So, my biggest influences were probably male singers and I loved Larry Gatlin. I loved Vince Gill. Still do. Now, today, I love Brad Paisley. I just, I am more drawn to the male. In today's society of music, I think Carrie Underwood is... nobody can out-sing Carrie Underwood. She is amazing. But I like to listen to female singers, but when I was singing, I was more inclined to sing, you know, the male singers' songs.

CA: Were there musicians that you helped get started, at all?

SW: No.

CA: No. Okay.

SW: I helped six children grow up and be responsible. (Laughs.) And that was a full time job. (Laughs.) I mean, I would answer people when they talked to me and asked me, "What do you do?" I would talk to them and encourage them. But I just wasn't involved that much. I just happened to sing for a living and I liked the people I met and I had friends all over the United States. And I traveled and took my kids with me on the road. Like in the fair dates in the summer when I had a tour date, I would call people. I usually knew somebody in every big city, we'd been there before. And I had a fan club. So I had people in my fan club all over. I would just make phone calls and say, "I am going to be coming through. Can you hold Brianna while I sing? Or can you hold Brock while I sing?" And they would say, "Yeah, sure." You know, and if I had every... like one time I had somebody for the baby of the time for everywhere except one place. So I called the head of the fair there, whatever, and I explained my situation and I said, "Can you recommend somebody that I can just have backstage with me just to hold my daughter or my son while I am on stage singing. Because my philosophy was: Yes, it is harder to travel with all of your stuff and all of the baby's stuff and haul a baby around, but once you are through with your show, you are in a hotel room and you can spend every minute with your baby. You know, why would you just lie around in a hotel room, especially if you are working more than one night? You know, you are there and so and I didn't sing that much. Maybe I would sing for 45 minutes. So, the rest of the time I could be with my child. So I kind of... and I also didn't have my own band for that same reason. Because I had seen... my role model was Loretta Lynn who was big and traveled, but she paid such a huge price because she was never with her children. And she was on the road, living in a motel all the time or in a bus while somebody else was living in her fancy house taking care of her children. And that didn't make sense to me. So, I thought, "If I have a band, then I have to have a bus, or I have to work so many days a year to pay, because I not only have to pay for my family but have to pay for all of their families." So I made a decision that I would rather work on my own. And just fly out, work

a few days and work with the bands that they set up for me. And for the most part, my booking agent was really good at getting the bands and it was harder because you had to fly all day, and then you had to go rehearse with the band. And then perform. And then go to bed. And then do it all again the next day. And then do the same thing over and over again. But, it gave me freedom, like when I wanted, I would take the whole month of September off so that I could get all my kids in school and give them a good start and be there. And then, I would take the month of December off because I had a big family to shop for and prepare Christmas for. So I could do it under my terms if I bit the bullet and... I always said, you know, working with bands everywhere you go builds character. (Laughs) And there are some great horror stories of times when it didn't work out as planned, but it was worth it to me to do it on my... you know, my children knew that if I was, if it was at all possible, I would be there for them. You know. And they didn't begrudge me the few days I was gone.

CA: Did you play any venues in Bakersfield, ever?

SW: Only thing I have ever done really in Bakersfield is I did the Toys for Tots Shows that we did every year at the Civic Auditorium before it was Rabobank Arena.

CA: That was with Buck?

SW: With Buck.

CA: Do you remember when that was? Was that in...?

SW: I... like 1970? '71? '72. We did it every year for a while. And then I did some... we did golf tournaments where we performed and had people come out and do the golf tournaments. I did some... I did a rodeo in 1978. It is kind of funny because in 1976... the reason I know it was in 1976 was because I was pregnant with Brock. And he was due. I... he should have... I should have still been pregnant when I was in the rodeo, but I knew my babies all came early, so I said, "I am pretty sure that I will have this baby early and I can do it." And so he came early and I was able to do it. And then after that, Buck didn't like that I did it for charity and for cancer, I believe, and then Buck didn't like that because he had a lot of people that died of cancer, so he took it over. And then he took all the credit for it, which was fine. I just did it for the one year anyway, but my husband always thought that was funny because he made a big thing about how he was doing all that. Well, he didn't do anything. He had the Buckaroos play. He had his office do all the work. And he just took the credit. (Laughs.) I don't think he even sang half the time. But, so I sang at the rodeo. But not much. Again, I lived here. I didn't... You never profit in your home town thing, kind of. I did do... I take that back. I did another concert at Harvey Auditorium. It was, I think it might have been for Teen Challenge or something. And I sang half of my hits and half of my Christian music.

CA: Did you have... this is later, this is not Bakersfield either, but play in LA for the Airport?

SW: Oh, I sang for their 75th anniversary. And they contacted me out of the blue and I am thinking...

CA: That was later, like 2000.

SW: Oh yeah, it was like, when was it? Well my son played...sang harmony with me and my daughter-in-law sang harmony and my husband got the band together so it was not that...it was probably about 6, 7 years ago.

CA: Wow!

SW: It was maybe a little longer, but not much. It was the 75th anniversary of LA Airport. And they did a huge thing and they paid me to come down and I did a little concert for all the airport employees out near the airport. They did a contest of singing "LA International Airport" and I was to judge it. And the winner got a trip to Nashville or something. They did all kinds of things. And then, ever since then, they have put on their stationery: "LA International Airport, The only airport in the world with its own hit song."

CA: (Laughs.)

SW: So. And then they were really nice to me after that. I mean, they paid me well to do that. And then, which, I was surprised. Why now, after all this time? And then, the head of the airport was a big fan of mine. The Administrative Head of the airport. And so he contacted me. He is the one, I think, that got me. Found out where I was and got me to this. We became friends and every time my husband and I would go to Hawaii for a timeshare every summer, he would meet us down there and put...he would have a car put in his parking lot which had a security guard the whole time, and then he would take us over to the ... put us on the plane, and for three weeks our car would be in there and we didn't have to pay for it. It was wonderful! And it was convenient. You know, you wouldn't have to go find a parking spot. Then he retired. And I thought, "Oh man?" So then I lost my in at the airport, so now when we go to our timeshare, we have to find another way. We usually go to this hotel around there. If you can spend one night, then they will let you park your car there while you are gone. So you have to do that now. But, yeah, so that was an interesting thing.

CA: Do you think the lifestyle for country musicians has changed?

SW: Probably. I am an optimist by nature, but probably.

CA: Do you think that you see differences in the country music of today and when you were...?

SW: I like country music today. Like a lot of the Old Timers will go, "Oh I just don't like it. That is not country music." I guess I am just progressive. I mean, I just turned 70 years old and I am still singing. When I sing in church, I don't sing with the conservative first service. I sing with the Praise Band in the second service that's got a lot of musicians and drums and, you know, more up tempo.

CA: What church is that?

SW: Calvary Bible Church over on Manor Drive down on the Bluff. So I like the new music and, you know, I just kind of change with the times. I like some of the old stuff, but I don't get bent out of shape because it sounds different. You know, I like the new stuff.

CA: Can you describe your post-musician life?

SW: Hmm. Well, I got my Master's in Psychology, minor in Sociology. And I went to work in a private Christian counseling office for four years. And then, I went to work in a private Christian social working office for four years. And then my daughter said, "Mom, why are you working so hard when you are on call 24/7 and you can get paid more if you were a high school counselor." And so I became a high school counselor for two years and then I was offered the job at Panama Buena Vista School District where I ran the Parent Resource Center which was an amazing job. It was kind of like my musical world because they would say, "What do you like best?" I said, "What I like best is that I don't do the same thing all the time. I go to concerts, I record, I do all these different things and that's what makes it fun."

Well, that is the same thing at the Parent Resource Center. I gave workshops for parents. I helped at risk students in our Opportunity Schools. I worked with families. I checked out books at a library we had to help families. So I liked that I did all these different things and it was a wonderful job to end on. And then, three years ago, the money was really tight in Sacramento and they offered a good stipend to retire early. Well, technically, I wasn't early to retire because I didn't start in the schools until I was 55, but I was healthy and enjoyed it and thought I will work longer and get a better retirement, but when they offered that, I got to thinking and I thought about it and prayed about it and I thought, you know, money is going to be tight next year, too. And they will be trying to get people to leave, but they won't be offering them \$50,000. So, I had better take it. And move on from there. And I thought, "Well, this is sad because now I won't be making any money and now I will have time, but I won't be able to afford to do anything." You know, it won't be fun anymore. And I immediately went to Beijing, China for two weeks on a mission trip with our church, which was a great adventure. I came back and got involved with other things within church. I have gotten even more involved with my grandkids because I didn't have to work. I go to Santa Barbara a lot because my daughter and her husband have three little boys and they (I love how things work out.) They fly me first class to the Ritz-Carlton in St. Thomas for two weeks every summer with them.

CA: Oh yes. Really (something unintelligible here.)

SW: My daughter and her family. They fly me, in fact, I am leaving in two weeks, to go up to the Ritz-Carlton in North Star Lake Tahoe for a week's skiing with them. And it is kind of fun, you know. I get to go and it just doesn't cost me a penny. I mean, I never flew First Class. I never stayed at the Ritz-Carlton. So it is kind of, I thought, "Thank you, God." Not only do I have something nice to do, but it is even better than what I would have done and I have my family. So I spend a lot of time taking fun vacations with family. My husband and I have timeshares, a couple of them in Hawaii, and we go spend two or three weeks in Hawaii every summer. And I spend time with my grandkids when they have a spring fling or Grandparents' Day at their little Christian pre-school. I drive over to Santa Barbara and enjoy the time with

them. And I ran my first, I ran my first half marathon a year and half ago and I ran the LA Marathon this past March. It is coming up again. With my daughter and my youngest son.

CA: Wow! That is pretty nice.

SW: Yes. So I am just doing fun things. I am still busy all the time. But I am just doing things that I enjoy.

CA: Could you describe your experience attending CSUB?

SW: I loved it! I absolutely loved it. I enjoyed my classes. I enjoyed the teachers. I enjoyed the whole process. I have always liked school. I think when I was young, I always intended to go to college, but when I started singing country music, it was kind of like, you know, my parents weren't... they were okay but they weren't wealthy. And I thought, well, why should I pay, have them pay all this money to send me to college, when you don't need to go to college to sing country music? So I didn't go. But I always loved school. So when I was 40, I decided, you know, like I said, old singers aren't in great demand, so let me do something else that I really love. And I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to be a counselor. So I went to start in right away and if you had told me at Day One that I would have had to take some of these classes, I would have said, "There is no way I can do that." But I just went in and I just did it and so then I got to the point where, yeah, I thought that was bad and I made that, so we'll just keep going and I went non-stop, you know, like some people start and they will take a class and I thought, "No, I am 40 years old. I need to keep going so that I can graduate before retirement age." (Laughs.) So I went and got my A.A. at B.C. and transferred immediately over to Cal State. I got my Bachelor's Degree, started summer school towards my Masters two weeks after I got my Bachelor's and it was a very good experience. I really enjoyed it.

CA: Do you remember any of the teachers that you particularly were...

SW: Gosh, well, I had, I remember Steve Suiter was one of my teachers. A lot of them I don't remember their names. But Steve Suiter's ex-wife is my eye doctor so I remember that he is here. I had Kathy Ritter, of course, who is head of the department.

CA: Mmm-hmm.

SW: There was a gentleman that I really liked. I can see him in my mind's eye, but I can't...

CA: Was he Asian?

SW: I did have him, too.

CA: Oh, yes.

SW: What was his name? Do you know?

CA: Ken Yasheda?

SW: Yeah. I had him. Yeah, I did. I had the blonde lady. She wore her hair back in a bun, wears glasses. What is her name? She came, I can't think of her name. I can see her in my mind's eye, but I can't think of her name. But, I only had one teacher, and I don't even remember his name, but I had one class that I did not appreciate because it was a one unit class and it was about the DSM for Psych students. And, I mean, all it was was a one unit class so you would know how to use the DSM. And if you could... you don't have to memorize, you just have to know how to find what you need in it. And he took it very literal. And his tests were not...I mean, they were subjective to what he thought.

CA: How was that teacher... Was he a member of the faculty in Psychology?

SW: I think so. I don't remember who he was, but I ended up getting, I think, like one or two points below. So I got a C and you can't have a C in a Master's program. And I had to wait an entire year to take it again. And I had to take it from him again. And I barely passed it then because he just looked at things differently than everybody else. And I am thinking, "This is so ridiculous. I have to wait a whole year. And then take it from you again. And it is so subjective to you that I have no idea what you want." You know, so, but fortunately, I don't tend to dwell on things like that. So, that is the only thing that comes to mind. I remember that class, but I don't remember him.

CA: What were the best and worst parts of your life as a country singer?

SW: Well, the best part was probably making friends all over the country. I have friends to this day in New Zealand. I have people who named their babies after me. And I keep in touch with them. I have friends all across the United States and that was fun. And I was able to take my kids with me different places. I took them to New Zealand. I took them to Alaska. You know, I took them all around. And that was fun. And I just shared it with them. The worst part is probably having to leave your family when you do. I remember once when I went skiing at Lake Ming and had a new single ski and hit a really bad wake and the ski was too tight for me and my husband bought it for me. He didn't ski on one ski. I told him it was tight. And he said, "Oh, no, it will be fine. It will be fine." And it broke my ankle. So I had to go to the doctor that night to get a cast on and was awake all night in pain as it swelled, and I had to get up at 5:00 and fly to Charlotte, North Carolina or somewhere. And then, you know, so whether it is convenient or whether it isn't convenient, you know, you have a contract and you have to go. So, the same thing that was a thrill was also a drawback because sometimes, you didn't want to go. You know, you have a sick child and you still gotta go. You know, so, um, but over all I enjoyed it. It was a good part of my life. Did I miss it? I missed the friends I knew. But I didn't really miss singing. I guess because I never had that burning desire to be a singer. It just happened to me. And I thought, well, okay, why not? So I held it rather loosely, probably. But I worked hard. What was important to me was that people thought that I gave it my all and that I did my best. And no matter how tired I was, I would be polite to everybody. I would never go sit in my dressing room because I was tired. I would go out, and think, "If you came all this way, you needed to meet the people that came here to see you." You know. So it was more important to me that they felt like I was a good person and that I wanted to meet them and interact with them. I am just a people person, I guess, more than...

CA: Do you think that might have been one of the reasons that you got along so well with Buck because he was...

SW: I think so.

CA: I have been told that he didn't have much patience with people that didn't have his work ethic and his ...

SW: Yes, that is true. Although he didn't care that much about the people. You know, he would go hide in his dressing room. And when he used to play, part of the reason he played for four hours without ever taking a break, everybody was impressed. But my husband said the reason he did it was because he didn't want people bugging him. (Laughs.) He would rather be on stage. And this was after, you know, after he had gotten so tired of it. You know. And I am sure if I had had his level of success, I wouldn't have probably worked quite so hard to be so nice to everybody if there thousands more everybodys wanting my time. You can only do so much.

CA: What songs that you have performed are your favorites and why? Name how you came to perform those songs.

SW: Hmm. That is funny. We were just talking in a class I took today about how the man teaching Norman Wright couldn't even remember the name—the titles of his own books. And I said, "That is funny because I can't remember the titles of my songs, either." I did pick a Larry Gatlin song once and sang it. I totally don't remember what it was, but I loved it. So, because I loved his singing and his songwriting. So I really enjoyed singing it, but I didn't sing it a lot, so now I don't even remember what it was. Usually, if somebody asked me, "What is your favorite song, at the time I would say, "My newest one, because I am so sick of singing the same song over and over and over and you can sing "LA International Airport" and think about your list of things you have to do. You know, for the next week, because you can do it in your sleep, kind of thing. So, mostly, I just like doing new things. You know, doing something different. I enjoyed doing Christian songs. I would usually do one Christian song.

CA: What is your favorite Christian song?

SW: Oh, that changes all the time, also. At the time, I sang "Why Me, Lord?" by Kris Kristofferson a lot because I felt like that was... And I, funny, I made a vow that if I ever got called back to do an encore, I would do a Christian number. And so I always did. But that is what I did then. Now, of course, I sing Christian music all the time. And it changes all the time.

CA: Are you in the choir at your church?

SW: I have been in the choir for years. I sing in the Praise Band in the second service, so that is different from the choir. So, and I kind of got out of the choir this last year because my husband was so sick. From double bypass surgery and had complications and was in the hospital for 72 days in Santa Barbara and it was touch and go for a long time, so when I finally got him home, I did not sing in the choir and haven't gone back. I am just now thinking I want to

go back because I really miss it. But I sang in the Praise Band, so that was like.... Because if I sing in the choir, then I have to go to choir practice on Thursday night and I have to go to Praise Band practice on Wednesday night. And I am a Bible Study Fellowship leader, so I go to Bible Study Fellowship on Tuesday night and then I have a leaders meeting on Saturday morning, so I had to let something go. And then, of course, I am in church on Sunday. So I had to let something...I felt like I needed to be closer to home more with my husband at that point in time. But I am just about ready to go back, because now that he is retired because he can't work anymore, I see him all the time. So I figure, "What's the difference if I go for a couple of hours at night?" He is watching football or Fox News or something that he wants to watch, so, and he is an old drummer so he can't hear, so he turns the TV up so loud.

CA: Do you think he would be interested in being interviewed also for the Bakersfield Sound Project?

SW: He probably would.

CA: Okay. I will ask him.

SW: He has a lot more knowledge than I do because he was here before I was. He worked for... he traveled with Buck and all the Buckaroos and he knew all the... and he has worked in all the clubs around here before he, you know, quit doing it, so...

CA: Yes. I will have to talk with him also. Can you think of anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to talk about that relates to our project?

SW: Not really. I think you have covered it. Just that I think it is a valuable thing to do. I think it is a viable part of Bakersfield. And I still get people... which amazes me. I mean, like I said, I am 70 years old. I have been out of the music business pretty much since I was like 45, 50 at the most, by then. And so you wouldn't think anybody would even know who I am anymore. But I still get people that would come in and I don't tell people that I am Susan Raye. I just say that I am Susan Wiggins. And then, it is funny. Over and over again, people at Panama Schools, they would come up and say, "I just found out who you are! I was down at the Crystal Palace and they played videos of you from "The Buck Owens Ranch Show." There are pictures of you..." And I am always surprised that they will say, somebody on my so and so is a big fan of yours and I'll think, "I wouldn't think there would be any of those left. It has been so long ago." So, in fact, we just had solar put on. And the young man is from Alabama that came out and did the solar system. And he came back the other night to check on how we were doing and if we were happy with it and he said, "I just found out you are a big star!" And I said, "How did you find that out?" He said, "The neighbor told me." And I thought, "Oh, great." And he looked me up on U-tube and, "You were a star!" I am going, "Oh my gosh!" And he said, "I told my uncle and he remembers you." And I am thinking, "It just amazes me." So, obviously, it is something of value and it is part of Bakersfield and I think we should preserve all of that.

CA: Well, thanks. Are there some other people you would recommend I talk to for this project?

SW: My husband could probably tell you more about that. Like I said, I don't hang out with everybody, so he could probably tell you a lot more than I could.

CA: It is Jerry.

SW: Jerry, yes. If you want, I'll give him, is there a number on here? I can have him call you.

CA: That would be great.

SW: He is hard of hearing now because of all the years he played drums. If you interviewed him and he said something that didn't make any sense at all, he probably didn't hear you right.

CA: I would love to interview him.

SW: So how long have you been working on this?

CA: Well, we actually have been ... Let me close this out. This is the conclusion of the interview. It is 4:25.

END OF INTERVIEW

California State College, Bakersfield
San Joaquin Valley Oral History Project
Recorded History

INTERVIEWEE: [name]

INTERVIEWER: [name]

DATE OF INTERVIEW: [date]