



Songwriters, listen up! Lee Duffy, director of the Austin Songwriters Group since 2004, is herding cats! Well, that is reportedly what Bob Wills said about having women in the band. And Lee is herding songwriters. She leads an organization founded by Christine Albert almost 30 years ago that gives songwriters a chance to be heard, a chance to learn, and a chance to contribute. The ASG, based in Austin, hosts several events including a weekly song session on Tuesday from 7-10 called the "Song Doctor", where songwriters are invited to join the circle, share a song, and get the feedback.

One important way to nourish the profession. She also has an annual conference being held this year Jan. 13-17 at the Holiday Inn Midtown in Austin. "My husband is a martial artist, and he had a camp each year where he brings in the best instructors in the world to work with his students. I got the idea of creating a similar event for songwriters to get together and bring the industry to them. And that is what we do in January. The best known publishers come to us. We also bring in great writers, such as Chuck Cannon, Alan Shamblin, Gary Burr, Rodney Crowell and many others."



Freddy Powers

Last year I presented two workshops at this event on creativity and writing. What fun! I took the theories from my creativity class at Schreiner, and the writing information from

my PH.D. dissertation (Writers on Writing), and combined these threads to provide an experience with songwriting. I will also be presenting a workshop at the February San Miguel de Allende Literary Conference on creativity theories and writing. An aside.

Back to Lee. I met her at the suggestion of Catherine Powers, the woman behind the man Freddy Powers, a songwriter with a long list of hits, including, "I Always Get Lucky With You," a favorite of mine. We were at a Merle Haggard concert at Floore's. (November 13 while writing this article, I headed out to Floore's again to see Merle. Synchronicity.) Lee, Catherine and I met up in Johnson City for our interview, one I used in my second book, WOMEN IN TEXAS MUSIC: STORIES AND SONG, 2007, UT Press. I entitled the interview "A Life of Miracles." At one time, Lee gave up her life recording (as she was invited to use Willie's studio to record) to give her attention to her own children and family.

One dream she had was to sing with her heroes. She ended up singing with Merle Haggard, to name one hero. Her first CD was produced by Gabe Rhodes, son of Kimmie Rhodes. She said, "I got my nerve up and sang my first song to Joe Gracey, one of my heroes and Kimmie's husband. He said to change one word, so I did. I sang it to Gabe, and he asked if I had any more.



Joe Gracey

I have lots of songs that I hear in my head. I can tell you what the music is doing, bass and

horns. I can hum or whistle the song. It's hard to tell someone what music is in your head if you don't play an instrument. Gabe, by the grace of God, had been playing with Kimmie so many years that he listens in a certain way. He played it back to me, and it was gorgeous. He actually was hearing the same music that was in my head. He went on tour with Jimmie Dale Gilmore to do the Jimmie Rodgers thing in New York (120). When he returned, I recorded 12 songs with him." The album is called "Lee Duffy."

She also told me at that interview in 2002, "One of the sweetest little moments was one night when I got to go on tour with Freddy and Merle. Merle had us up in his room, a handful of us. Freddy was playing rhythm, and Merle was playing lead.

I had to pinch myself to believe this was happening in front of me. I got to see Freddy do some songwriting, and I got to experience Merle working on a couple of songs. Incredible. I've had so many beautiful moments in my life. I've been around Willie's studio for 40 years through my association with Lana, his daughter and my best friend (121).

We ended our interviews in 2004 with Lee saying, "As I said, my life continues to be blessed, and I look forward to whatever opportunity the future holds for me. It's all good (122).

We had another good chat at the annual Texas Heritage Music Day in September, acknowledging we needed to work together. Share our energy. And Friday night, November 13, we stood outside Merle's Chief bus at Floore's Country Store again.

This time we planned ahead, agreeing to collaborate on our mutual 30th anniversaries in 2017.



Merle Haggard

The THMF has some funding to start a songwriting school for young people. Of course we should work with the ASG. At the heart of Lee's passion is her ongoing love for music, and she found herself with a bucket list that was complete. Time for new projects.



Marvin Dykhuis

She had performed in Europe several times, and been on the stage with Sonny Throckmorton, Merle Haggard, Kimmie Rhodes, Willie Nelson, Stephen Bruton and Kris Kristofferson. "I have been very blessed in my life." Lee also writes and sings. "My favorite gig is in a trio with Marvin Dykhuis and Joe Manuel doing songs that we wrote." "I love sharing songs in a song circle at ASG," she added.

The ASG celebrates 30 years in 2017 just like the Texas Heritage Music Foundation. In September the ASG brought a group to the annual Texas Heritage Music Day, and 4 songwriters worked with over 1,000 students that day in another way of learning.

We have big plans for 2016. One local songwriter, Paul Hilliard, joined the group in Austin, and performed at a venue hosted by ASG. He said, "Lee Duffy is a gift to the songwriting community. For years she has been committed to the craft, the artists, and the business of songwriting. Her passion for the art is contagious! I am thrilled to be a new member of ASG." Ils sont partis.



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