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HOGUE: Today is November 21, 2005, and we're interviewing Flip Breskin and I'm Coty Hogue. Before we start, I would just want to ask your permission to record this, if it's okay.

BRESKIN: Yes, it's just fine.

HOGUE: When we start out, I would just like to do a little background information, so if we could start a little bit with where you grew up and maybe when you were born?

BRESKIN: Ah. Yes, August 27, 1950, Renton General Hospital just south of Seattle. We started out down near the airport in Burien or Des Moines; I don't know which way the city lines wound up. And as a five-year-old, my parents moved us out the 'burbs. We were the first Jews on Mercer Island. This was not a good thing. [laughs] The woods were nice, but the rigidity of an urgently upwardly mobile, conformist Goldwater Republican area was pretty hard. Yeah.

HOGUE: Can you talk a little bit more about that, growing up, at all? With the rigidity and ...

BRESKIN: Mostly just wouldn't nobody play with us. My mom didn't get it, and my dad wasn't paying attention. They were both hopeful. Mother was not raised as a Jew; Dad was raised in an orthodox home. This is right after World War II and the Holocaust, and they were trying to solve anti-Semitism with their own lives. They put their own lives on the line – not like you'll get killed for it, but like you have to live with this every day and try to figure it out, and they tried. They're still trying.

HOGUE: What were some of your ways of dealing with, you know, sort of being outcast from kids?

BRESKIN: I read. I read lots and lots and lots. I liked to go wander in the woods. I was a free-range child. There aren't many left in North America, at least not in the cities. Getting out was good. I think music got in so deep right from the beginning because Mom sang to us, and there was the music box, and there was music around the house.

HOGUE: Did you play music yourself? When did you start doing that?

BRESKIN: Depends on how you measure it. I got a little portable record player for my sixth birthday, and I got a – oh, what's his name? – Burl Ives record that went on it, and it had a little white duck, blah blah. It had the Golden Vanity on it, and I had the entire child ballad memorized in short order. I just loved it; I still love that story. I also remember I had all these little bitty china animals and other doo-hickies, and I figured out I could put them on the record

or on the turntable, and then I could turn the turntable with my finger and make it go faster and faster until the stuff flew off. So – [laughs]

HOGUE: Was that very good for the record?

BRESKIN: I didn't notice! Probably considering the quality of sound reproduction, it didn't make a whole lot of difference. I got piano lessons for six months when I was six years old, and I adored it. My dad had showed me how to play chopsticks sometimes before that, the kind where you curl up your hand in a fist and you roll it down the black keys and go bomp – brrum-bum-bomp, brrum-bum-bomp, brrum-bum-bum – that routine. But I went from there to playing Bartok Mikrokosmos within six months, and then lost getting to play piano.

HOGUE: Why was that?

BRESKIN: Well, my recollection is that I was told that I didn't practice enough. My mother's more recent recollection was that she was worried that I was going to compete with my older sister, and my older sister needed some area to call her own. It horrifies me that duets didn't appear to be an option. Somewhere in the middle, I was also told that my eyesight was failing and so they didn't want me reading, so they took away the piano so I wouldn't be trying to read music. But part of the struggle was, I didn't want to read music; I just wanted to play it. The teacher would play it so I knew what it sounded like, and then I'd go figure out how to play it.

HOGUE: When did you start picking up an interest in folk music and that kind of ... ?

BRESKIN: Well, there was that child ballad. Burl Ives was considered folk music, and Theodore Bikel, and I heard him. Somehow, we didn't have the Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger stuff. There was ... oh, no, what was his name? Mr. Obnoxious. Tom Lehrer. In the Fifties, Tom Lehrer was about all there was of dissent music, revolutionary music, that was available in Middle America. You know, he was speaking truth to power rather cheerfully, and my folks had that. And that was kind of what there was. It was that and Mad Magazine and all their song parodies, and I still remember some of those. Punch the right button and all of a sudden out comes a whole song parody from the 1950s Mad Magazines. Oh, and all the stuff around the neighborhood, the naughty songs kids teach each other: "Hello, Operator" and "Great big gobs of ..." Everybody else seems to sing it "greasy, grimy, gopher guts"; in my neighborhood, it was "goeey, green, gorilla guts." And everybody has a different version. I'll call for a table at any kind of workshop I go to – I call for meal-time tables and say, "I want you to come sing to me all the naughty songs you learned when you were fairly young children. I don't want the grown-up naughty songs; they're gross. I want the ones we learned as kids." And they're hysterical! But everybody will know a different version of that one; no two people seem to have the exact same version, but everybody knows it! And then there are ones that people only know within a specific slice of age because they are like parodies of an advertisement, so only the people that got hit with that advertisement know that parody. But it appears to be sort of North America-wide, a lot of them. Oh, no: [sings] "I hate Bosco, it's full of TNT." You didn't learn this, right? You're [the] wrong age. "Mommy put it in my milk to try to poison me. I fooled Mommy; I put it in her tea. Now there's no more Mommy to try to poison me!" The original was something really gross about, [sings] "I love Bosco, it's rich and chocolaty. Mommy put it

in my milk because it's good for me!" Something about fortified with vitamin C, blah blah. You know. It was fairly early TV based on radio with singing commercials. And there was some good stuff out there, but that wasn't some of it. Oh, and camp songs, camp songs! Oh! I went to summer camp when I was six, and there was a guy named Steve, and I don't know what his last name was, but he had red hair and he played the guitar, and he sang "Five Hundred Miles," and I was in love. That was just the most wonderful thing.

HOGUE: When was that? How old were you?

BRESKIN: It should have been 1956, maybe '57, so early. But Hedy West was out there singing that song, but I think that was well before Peter, Paul, and Mary, so he'd picked it up somewhere else. But that was very cool. Oh, and we always sang going anywhere in the car. There might have been a radio in the car, but we got in and we sang "Coming 'Round the Mountain" and all that stuff.

HOGUE: Was that important for you, singing with your family and developing sort of a musical interest?

BRESKIN: Yeah, and I learned a ton of songs. It's really funny because I go play nursing homes and elder hostels and all that stuff, and get paid for singing those songs that I learned as a kid. So I owe my mom for "Five Foot Two" and "Bicycle Built For Two" and all the old songs, "When You and I Were Young, Maggie," "Grandfather's Clock," "Red River Valley." I knew them because we sang them.

HOGUE: When did you actually start playing yourself or really getting into a scene?

BRESKIN: Two separate questions. My brother played guitar from the time I was three, and he got good. My sister played classical French horn; you know, she played in the band, she played in the orchestra, sang in the choir, did madrigals. Joe learned jazz and went for rock n roll as soon as he could. And I was outside of that, and by that time I wasn't singing because ... because it looked like singing girls had to sound like Joan Baez. I mean, Bob Dylan sounded like himself, and it didn't qualify as music in my parents' household, but at least guys had some slack to not sound pretty. When I was a teenager, there was not slack for girls to not sound pretty. So I sang along on stuff and loved that, loved going to camp because I got to sing. I was fifteen ... my sister had ... a guitar that was – back then what you got were built mostly in Mexico, and the action would be, you know, a half inch, three quarters of an inch. It was a long ways down, built for the tourist trade, and they didn't play in tune, and they were junky, but it had six strings, frets, and my sister had one of those. You can get really good ones in Mexico too, but you have to know where to look. My sister had one of those; then she got something better, and my brother wound up with it. And he painted it. [It] didn't hurt the tone one bit, there wasn't much tone to hurt, but he used acrylics, which were new then, and he painted it wood-grain hot pink. And then this amazing explosion coming out of the sound hole and going all over the place, and then different colors all over the neck, each string, each fret, so that you could look to see: two frets that had the same color on it would be an octave apart. So it was supposed to teach you to play, right? But mostly it was just unbelievably garish. My guess is that he painted it on an early acid trip, and he had a really good time, but it predated Peter Max

by quite a bit, and the detail was wonderful. I would guess that guitar is still out there somewhere because it was good art. But who knows where it wandered on, acid dripping from the strings? [laughs] But I had that for a while and messed with it. I wanted my own guitar, and I worked all winter vacation from school, made twenty-five bucks, and my brother said, "Go to the pawn shops on First Avenue, Seattle." So I went to the pawn shops, and my father accompanied me. His fifteen-year-old daughter was not going there alone. And I found an old tater bug mandolin, bowl-back mandolin, and was "Tangents R Us" – there I went. It's "Oh, this is beautiful, how romantic. It looks like a lute – I'm there!" [I] brought it home, didn't know how it was tuned, didn't know how to play it, didn't know what it sounded like. The guy we got it from said, "Well, I think you tune it like a violin." We eventually found somebody to tune it, and I took a few lessons and once again got busted for not practicing enough. After which, I started hitting up my friends, and me and Jeannie [Rosner?] would get together and she'd play recorder and I'd play mandolin, and we'd play tunes, early Paul Simon, Simon and Garfunkel stuff, this and that. And then I got a real guitar. It was a little bitty Martin because I was scared to go to a big guitar; it felt like my fingers weren't big enough. So old Mr. [Tafoya?], Phil [Tafoya?], found me a 518 Martin, which I kind of wish I still had, because everybody is doing these Baby Taylors and stuff. This was that scale, and it was referred to as a cowboy guitar, you know, a saddle guitar. A little fragile for saddle guitaring, I think, but ...but there it was. And then I behaved badly. I found everybody that I knew my age that played guitar; I got them to show me everything they knew, and when they didn't know anything else to show me ... I was off to go play with somebody else, so I was very rude. But I took off like a house on fire and learned a ton really, really quickly. It would have been the year I was seventeen. I'd forgotten: there was a boyfriend who had the early Tim Harden stuff, and I don't know where he got this from, but one day he played me this really cool thing, and I said, "I want to learn that." And he said, "Oh, it's too hard, girls can't do that." God, I was pissed! This was before bra burners were even on my horizon for feminism, but I was pissed. I went home and I stayed up all night [plays] and I came back the next morning, and I played it for him, in two different keys yet, and my recollection was that that was the end of the relationship, but it was definitely the beginning of a whole bunch more guitar.

HOGUE: For you, it seemed like you got in trouble for not practicing enough. What do you think the importance is for really learning – sometimes this kind of music is just going out and being with people and learning from others. How important is that, and how important was that for you?

BRESKIN: That's incredibly important. The other really incredibly important thing is to decide to teach yourself, at which point, if you're taking lessons, your teacher becomes your assistant, your learning assistant, your guide. It's kind of Lewis and Clark: you still have to walk there yourself, so it's not a passive thing at all.

HOGUE: When did you first actually get up into Bellingham? What were some reasons for bringing you up here?

BRESKIN: I moved up in 1970. Jeannie Rosner, whom I mentioned a little earlier, had come up here to go to Fairhaven when it opened, and Ken Dean and Doug Stern, and I thought, "I'll come where they are. This looks good." So I moved up here. And I got up here, and I encountered

the [Hunger Brothers?]. I encountered Jack Hanson and Clifford Perry and Gordy Bracket playing Carter Family stuff. I had heard Jack Hanson play at some sort of benefit for the Joffrey Ballet or something that my parents took me to. Jack was down there in a suit playing finger-style, Chet Atkins-style guitar. I went up to him afterwards – I would have been maybe fifteen, sixteen – and said, “Please, Mr. Hanson, do you teach guitar lessons?” And he said, “I’m sorry, little girl, I’m moving to Bellingham next week.” So I got to Bellingham and went looking for Jack and showed up and said, “About those lessons...” Jack was a dear heart. You know, it was full-fledged hippie days. Jack used to play with a band in Seattle called Fat Jack that was rock n roll; it was the sweetest-hearted, mellowest rock n roll you ever heard. It was really good. I think I went to hear [Kent Heat?] one time and Fat Jack was opening, and I had a wonderful time at Fat Jack, and then [Kent Heat?] started, and it was like, “Oh, this isn’t very good,” and I left. It was a great band. They didn’t give Jack any veto power over the name; it was sad. But it was a good band. And their roadie manager was Robert Force. Robert Force and Albert d’Ossché wrote a book called *In Search of the Wild Dulcimer*. They were up here. Robert was one of the people that started Mama Sundays. Robert and Albert, the Bert Brothers, recast how the dulcimer got used as a folk instrument all over the world. It made a huge impact, and they were here in Bellingham at the time, and they were good fun to hang with. Hunger Brothers morphed into South Fork Bluegrass Band. None of those were people that I sat around and jammed with, but they were people whose music I marinated in, and it influenced what came out of my fingers.

HOGUE: Can you talk a little bit about that?

BRESKIN: The sounds were really beautiful, so it caught me. Oh, I’d forgotten: before that in Seattle, there was the Morningtown Pizza Collective. Morningtown was on Roosevelt just north of the University Bridge, as you’re going southbound, on your left. The building is still there. And they had several houses; there was the one on Burke Street and the one on Sunnyside. There was another one I’ve forgotten. It was the first place I ever met crunchy granola. Somebody had a big recipe for it taped to the kitchen cupboard, and they were making it. And they had the farm out at Maltby. Oh! And Mary grew up without spare money around; I think she grew up pretty poor in the South, and she was not scared of hard work, and they were trying to clean up the farmhouse, and she was in there with a scrub brush and a big thing of ammonia. She said, “What I really want is to close all the doors and windows and fill the house full of ammonia: pour it down the chimney, pick it up and shake it real good. That’s what this place needs.” So – [laughs] She was definitely not from here. She was pregnant, and one day she announced, “I’m hungry for watermelon. I’m going to eat a whole watermelon myself.” I trailed into the kitchen to watch this happen; I’d never seen anything like that. I just had this vision of her eating a whole watermelon, you know. She split that thing open – a big old sucker – split the thing open, took a big spoon, ate the heart out of it and left all the rest. She came from a place where watermelons were cheap, and in her book she had eaten the whole watermelon. It was a hoot. Boy, Clifford was learning to play dobro, Gordy was playing bass, Jack was playing in the Hunger Brothers; he was also playing with the Morph Brothers playing ... Boy, he had a folk band and a rock and roll band and a bluegrass band and a jazz band and something else. He was playing with all of them at once. A lot of people these days talk about playing an eclectic blend of folk and bluegrass and country and new age and world music and blah-blah-blah, and it’s all sort of turned to mush. And Jack could play in each of the different styles and do it exquisitely well and completely within the genre. He really knew what he was doing. So if he

was just goofing, you never knew what would come out next. It left me with very high standards, that if it all turns into mush, I'm not horribly interested. But if people really know their genres and can make it come out sounding real in the different styles, that gets really exciting.

HOGUE: What was some of the earliest – was blues – ? I mean, what you played there it seemed you were really influenced by that. Was that the first style that you really started playing in?

BRESKIN: Oh... well, it was sort of what I was hearing for a while, so ... The real early stuff was Simon and Garfunkel and Peter, Paul, and Mary and Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. But the year I was, I think, eighteen, I heard Elizabeth Cotten play live, and that was it. I went home and turned off the radio – there wasn't anything there anywhere near as compelling – and started trying to figure out what she was doing, you know, with that alternating bass and the melody sitting on top.

HOGUE: Can you talk about how you got to see her live or how that influenced you so much? What did she do that made it so emotional?

BRESKIN: Well, the first time I heard her it wasn't. I had showed up at the community college and was taking music theory courses, and you know, I went and talked to the teacher and said, "I don't read music. Can I come to your class anyway? I can really hear well." And she said, "Sure." So I was trying to figure out how music worked because it was pretty interesting. And she approached me because I was the closest thing to a folkie she knew and said, "We have this guitarist Elizabeth Cotten coming to play; we need a student to get up to introduce her; would you do that?" I didn't know who she was, but I got up and did my best to introduce her and sat down and listened politely. It was in the Student Union at lunch time with everybody eating, rattling silverware, talking, playing cards – just horribly noisy, nobody paying attention. And she sat up there on stage, and she did her best because she was a lady and she always did her best, but there wasn't any magic to that, you know, for her or for me. A few nights later, Doug [Stern?] wanted to take me to hear her in concert, and I was like, "I already heard her," you know. But he was firm about it, and so I came. And she was at the Friend Center in the U District, and every person there was there to hear her play. And it was also a space that – huh! If there's such a thing as a sacred space, it's a place where people are inclined to listen, whether to themselves or to each other or to what's happening around them. The act of listening makes a difference in what happens. So she got up to play and everybody was listening in a really deep way, and she responded to that and played beautifully and played with deep feeling and really offered us what she had to give. And she was able to because of the way we listened. And there wasn't room inside for all that music: it was so beautiful! And she was playing *Washington Square Blues*, and my heart filled up. There wasn't room inside; it overflowed as tears, and I just sat there and shook with tears running down my face. When I went home at the end of the evening, I felt like she made it look so simple – you know, I could do that, and that's worth doing. So then I dug in. There were lots of late-night sessions trying to figure out what did she do? How did she do that? There was a lot I didn't figure out, but I tried really hard and burned the midnight oil, just sitting there by myself trying to figure out how it worked.

HOGUE: And you had the opportunity to host her at your home in later years?

BRESKIN: Yeah, a bunch, and get her to guitar camp and all sorts of stuff. Yeah. When I had moved up here and wound up running Mama Sunday's up on campus, that's now the Underground Coffeehouse, I had the opportunity to have Libba come do concerts, so I did, and I did it as often as I could and got to know her some. For me, it was a little baffling about why ... why she'd be so generous to give her music to this young middle-class white girl. At this point, it's a whole lot clearer to me. Part of it was her people didn't want it and it broke her heart. Part of it was I really listened and she could tell that I would cherish this music and keep it going after she died. She was an old lady, and you know, that looked good. I think probably she just liked me too. But I would be so excited she was coming, I would tell everybody and I'd be in line at the grocery store, and I'd be explaining to the people in front of me and behind me in the checkout that they *had* to come. I had a budget: it didn't cost anything to get in, so I could tell people, "Free Concert! World-class music! You've got to come!" And they'd come. You know, a regular night we'd have a couple hundred people. Libba would come and we'd have four hundred people, and that was a good thing. And she got paid, and I'd put her up. She'd sit on the couch and play guitar with me. Her version of learning was to sit on the couch and play guitar with me. She played the tunes all the way up to speed with all the complexity, with all the quirks. She didn't dumb anything down, she didn't slow anything down, but she respected me as a learner and completely expected that I could figure out, and we'd just play until I figured it out, even if it was a couple of hours. It was very cool. She didn't, like, you know, make all these encouraging noises and tell me I was getting it or any of that. But when I'd get another little section that that time when it came around I'd manage to catch that little spot, there'd be this teeny bit of smile at the edge of her eyes; there was an acknowledgement that I had that this time. It was really precious. It was *good* teaching! I learned so much from that. And since she played upside down and backwards, I couldn't look at her hand and go, "Oh, that's a C chord." I had to look at the fingers and go, "Which frets is she pushing? Which string's down against?" – as it flew by. You know, she didn't play real slow. So that was really cool, and I learned a whole lot from it. She got this beautiful tone because she was playing the bass with her finger, which gave her really crisp bass tone. She was playing the melody – wrong hand – with her thumb, which gave her this really round, sweet melodic line. It was pretty. She was all over that thing. I learned *Freight Train* from her, I learned [*Fast Paul?*], I learned *Wilson's Rag*. It was really cool.

HOGUE: Do you maybe want to demonstrate something, her style?

BRESKIN: Oh, a little bit. Let's see what I can do. [plays] No, can't very much, but a little bit.

HOGUE: So you talked a little bit about Mama Sunday's and bringing Elizabeth up there. How did you get started doing that, and can you explain a little bit about the history of Mama Sunday's?

BRESKIN: Well, apparently it started life as Mama Sunday's Hot Rod and Hamburger Haven. That's "Hot Rod." Bob Force was in on the creation of that, and I think [Tee?] Thomas may have been too. It was an open-mike format, and it was held up where they now serve pizza down at the far end of the ... that would be the northern-most top floor end of the VU [Viking Union].

I don't know how much it's been remodeled; I haven't been in there in some years. But there was a stage, and it would be an open mike, and people would show up and play, and their friends would come with them, and some would show up early, so there were a bunch of people at the beginning, and by the end there were only a few buddies of the last person playing. It dwindled and people went away. But then they got a budget to pay a featured performer, and they probably had twenty-five bucks or fifty bucks or something, and then there was a featured performer, and everybody left anyway. [laughs] Then Bob took off. I think that was the February he met Albert and went to Iceland and played all the Icelandic things that were like a dulcimer and just learned a ton and had a really good time. [Tee?] Thomas was running it; there may have been somebody in between. We should check with [Tee?]; he's still down at Skagit Valley. [Tee?] and his first wife Mindy were running it. And then [Tee?] and Mindy broke up, and they asked if Dave Auer and I would take it over. I was married to Dave at the time. So we took it over and I started getting to hire people like Jack Hanson, people like Clifford, people like Larry Hanks. Oh, man, I had fun! Linda Waterfall, Peter Langston, people who remained in my life as musical inspirations, wonderful folks, and occasionally, people like Libba Cotten. I was so excited about it, I'd go everywhere I went, telling people they had to come here, and I was excited enough that they'd try it, and they'd like it and they'd come back and they'd bring their friends, and it grew until there were a couple hundred people most weeks. You know, it was every week during the academic year, so it was nine concerts a quarter, and I really had fun doing that. It was one of the greatest gifts I've ever received, getting to run that thing. When Dave and I broke up, I kept doing it. Eventually they budgeted for me to have an assistant, and I hit up Bridget Jennings and got her to be my assistant, got her trained up, and then she took it over and kept it going. I think she handed it on to Tim [Mixum?], and she went on and became road manager for the Flying Karamazov Brothers. I think she's now maybe ... She was at Microsoft, but she may be back doing concert production doing Music on the Pier for the city of Seattle. I'm not sure, but she was at some point doing that. Anyway, you know, we kept passing it on to other people who were wildly enthusiastic about the music, which is what you really need. If you're going to put on a concert, you'd better be just thrilled to death and ready to jump on everybody and drag them in the door.

HOGUE: How long did it take for numbers to really go up when you started running it? I mean, you mentioned that before when they had the featured performer for this open mike, a lot of people dwindled off; how did you sort of reverse that trend?

BRESKIN: By being madly excited about who was performing, by shortening the open mike so that it really was the introduction instead of the featured performer getting on at, like, ten at night, or something, and by hiring just killer musicians. And it worked. Lots of people wanted to play the open mike, and we shortened them to three songs or fifteen minutes, and there were like four people. I remember one time it was the Gypsy [Gippo?] String Band; [they] came and did a cameo before they played down at Fast Eddy's, which was on State Street – oh, they're still doing music in that space. It's just south of Holly on the east side. I can't remember what it's called now. You know, there's the frame shop and there's the pizza joint and there's the – you know, next to the pizza joint.

HOGUE: The Up and Up?

BRESKIN: Yeah, I think it – oh, there’s one further south than the Up and Up. The Factory or something? I don’t know. They do rock and roll. But they used to serve pizza and have music, and the Gippos were going to play that. They were the house band for the Morningtown Pizza Collective. It was Jack Link and Warren Argo and Hank Bradley and Sandy Bradley. They were great musicians. So they came and did a cameo and did a few songs and just knocked everybody out. You could tell people were going to go down there when Mama Sunday’s let out. And the next person up was a lone banjo player I’d never met, standing there with a long-necked banjo, and oh! I was feeling sorry for him having to follow the Gippos who were incredibly tight, doing string band music – you know, the Harry Smith anthology stuff, the stuff from *Oh Brother Where Art Thou?* Except this was 1974. And this guy with the long-necked banjo gets up and I’m feeling sorry for him, right? He gets up and he looks at the crowd and he takes his time, and he tunes up the banjo, and he starts to play, and he has them in the palm of his hand. It was like: no, they were an appropriate opening act, right? He knew just what to do with all that attention. His name was Mike Marker; he still lives in town. He’s a friend of Pete Seeger’s and he’s a real strong musician. Boy, is he good! So it is my belief that I hired him on the way out the door and booked him to do a gig because he was great.

HOGUE: Was this your first experience really, booking concerts like this?

BRESKIN: Oh yeah, absolutely. No, I’d never done anything like this, but it seemed so obvious once we started. It was exactly what I wanted. Having grown up in so much isolation, it was also the gift of a lifetime that I could go gather people and they were gatherable. I didn’t know that, so it was really exciting to not get pounded down for bouncing up to people and saying, “You! You! You! You have to do this!” It was a great gift.

HOGUE: What were some of your stand-out memories of your time working there?

BRESKIN: [laughs] Hiring Clifford Perry and Larry Hanks to share an evening and sit there and trade songs back and forth. It wasn’t like they had rehearsed and figured out – you know, they were just both very, very good musicians with a similar enough repertoire that I knew they’d be able to do that. I got to be the musical yenta and introduce musicians to each other and we all got to watch. And it was really lively because it was so real, so right-this-minute. The two of them came out, sat down, looked at each other and then double took. It was really funny because they were a matched pair with hair way down their back and little bitty glasses on their nose before anybody had those little wire-rimmed things. And big old guitars. And they looked just alike except Clifford was in tasteful grey and Larry was in tasteful red and gold, with the beard like shredded wheat, right? It was really sweet, and it was really fun watching them discover “Oh, that tune! Sure!” Vroom, and off they went. It was beautiful, all these great old songs. That was a great night. South Fork Bluegrass Band: my old friend Tony Trischka came out to visit and sat in with South Fork, and they were like, so blown away to have Tony Trischka playing with them. This was a big deal. I’ve got some photos of them clowning around onstage and having a really good time. They were good enough that Tony was just having a ball. It was good. Um ... hmm. Frankie Armstrong. We stuffed the place for Frankie. I could show you that poster; I found it. Somebody built me this stunning – I had a really good photo of her, but somebody built me a world-class poster, and it worked – just this stark black and white, no grays, black and white – bam! Picture of Frankie singing her heart out, head up like a bird, just – And

you know, just where and when and who, and this little thing at the bottom, “Voted Britain’s top female folk singer” or vocalist or something. And it was enough. They’d never heard of her, but they came. For me there was a moment, there was one song: she sang *Van Diemen’s Land* a cappella, which is how she sang. She was sitting up onstage – she was most of the way blind at that point; she still had this little teeny window she could see through. She entered into the song completely as she sang it, a song of grief and permanent loss. Convicts got shipped to Australia – that was Van Diemen’s Land – and never came home. You could be convicted of anything: stealing a loaf of bread when you were starving got you there, transported. And she sang that song. When she finished singing – sitting in a low chair just singing, right? – when she finished singing, she shrank – I mean physically. She shrank, maybe by a fifth of her size. She just contracted; she’d gotten so large in the song. It was like putting a candle out when she stopped singing. It was really something. We were all so deep in the song that we’d built something together, the listeners and the singer. And when it was over, it was vivid that it was over, that it had stopped. It was completely different in the room. But it was also silent for a long time before people clapped. I got to bring Eric Schoenberg out – repeatedly! That was really cool. [He] played guitar; God, he’s good! And Mike Cohen brought over a vinyl over one time, a disk of Richard Ruskin playing. I said, “Ooh, this is good stuff! Where is he from?” He said, “I think he’s from L.A.” I went up to my office at Associated Students and I used the Watts line and I called information for L.A., and they had two Richard Ruskins. I called and I said, “Is this *the* Richard Ruskin, the guitarist?” By that point, I was able to offer him – he didn’t mind being approached as *the* Richard Ruskin – I was able to offer him, “I can do you a block booking for five community colleges, I think, up here, including Western, and we can pay your way up and get you all these gigs so you can actually go home with some money. Would you come?” He was like, “Would I come?!” So he came and did a wonderful job and eventually relocated up here and is living in Seattle, taught for guitar camp, all that stuff. Yeah, they were wonderful musicians.

HOGUE: You mentioned guitar camp, so can you explain a little bit how that came about?

BRESKIN: Oh, God. Summer, 1972, I was at Mariposa Folk Festival because I had gotten married and I was living in Syracuse, New York, because David was stationed back there. I was lonelier than I think I had ever been in my life. I didn’t know a soul, and it was early enough [that] we hadn’t made many friends yet. And we went to Mariposa. I saw a face across the crowd and recognized him, and I thought it was this piano player from back at the community college in Bellevue, and I ran across the crowd and threw myself into his arms and then backed up a little and realized I did not know this person. [laughs] Oops. And it got worse rapidly because then we sorted out that oh, he was Eric Schoenberg. Actually, he looked a lot like Kinky, but actually what it was, I recognized him from his album cover. [laughs] Oops. Fortunately, this was not something that happened to Eric constantly from that album. The album was *The New Ragtime Guitar* with him and his cousin David Laibman. They had learned to play at camp and had taken Scott Joplin rags, broken them down for two guitars as duets and figured out how to play them and did a recording of it. Wonderful stuff, wonderful stuff! So in the end, we wound up going down to New York City and taking lessons from Eric once a month for the rest of the time we lived in Syracuse, which was cool. And he was such a dearheart; he was *such* a dearheart! He taught me all kinds of cool stuff. When Nathan was born, I named him after Eric: he was Nathaniel Eric. Then we moved home in January or February of ’73. I

think early February: God, it was good to come home. But we came home to Bellingham, even though I grew up in Seattle, and I had only been in Bellingham for six months, but by gum, I came home to Bellingham. It was home. And Eric came out to visit us that summer. We took him out to the islands; I don't think he had ever been anyplace that quiet. I have to back up. I met Dave Auer at a guitar camp, which Dan and Sherry, whose last name I have forgotten, who had Queen Ann Music, or a music store up on Queen Ann Hill for years and years. In '70, maybe '71, they had done this music camp: Guitar Camp for Kids. Their vision was for black kids from the ghetto, and who they got were the children of unemployed Boeing executives and engineers who knew how to apply for stuff and thought to send their kids, so it was pretty much all white. Who comes is who you know. So if you don't have any friends who are people of color, they aren't going to show up at your events. But I didn't get it that it was for children, so I showed up and Bill McClarty showed up. He was the guy that I stole the Sweet William strut that I played for that counterpoint thing. David Auer showed up. He was smart about the whole thing and got himself signed on as "teacher of beginners." So he got to go for free and be staff. But the three of us were the only adults besides the organizers and the formal staff, which was Jerry Corbett of the Youngbloods and Janice Ian, who was pretty famous back then but not like she is now and barely past teenager. And Peter Childs: Pete Childs played ... he was a studio musician. He was actually the person who deconstructed what Libba Cotten was doing for me and showed me how it actually worked, what the alternating bass did, and boy did I have my homework. I went home from that camp and I settled down and I had to refigure out every tune I had figured out for the last year or so, and there was a lot. It seemed daunting but absolutely necessary. I sat down and I did it. Then I knew and my thumb was educated for that alternating bass, for how it really worked, which was great. Anyway, there had been that camp, and the "grownups" – I mean, I don't think anybody was over – well, actually I think Pete Childs must have been in his thirties or forties and everybody else was in their early twenties. But we were the adults and we stayed up all night and played music and had a wonderful time. So there was that, but it was in a terrible space. It was in old Army barracks and there was no place to go for privacy, no place at all. I mean, there was a boys dorm and a girls dorm barracks and no dividers and no acoustic privacy to try to practice what you were trying to learn, so it was maddening. Oh, and Dan and Sherry had just gotten married. This camp was their honeymoon, and they had to spend their entire camp trying to keep the teenagers out of the bushes [laughs] when they would have preferred to be there themselves. [laughs] So years later out on Orcas Island, we were up at the group camp on top of Mount Constitution, cruising through, and there were all these cool little cabins. I have no idea if it was me or if it was David that said, "Now that would be a good place for a guitar camp," because, you know, you'd have acoustic isolation so you could actually play. But then we were both teaching folk guitar at Everett Community College, going down, and David mentioned it to his advanced class. The following week, one of his students, Larry Squire, came back and said, "Well, I have a friend who runs a Campfire Girl camp, Camp Killoqua" – Smokey Point these days – "at Lake Goodwin. I teach extension classes for Central Washington State College, and I called them, and we can have the camp the third week in August, and Central will give credit for it. Why don't you do a camp?" So we called Jack Hanson and Cliff Perry [laughs] and, you know, rounded up our buddies to teach and did a camp. That was Puget Sound Guitar Workshop, and if I had known it would last so long, I would have come up with something easier to pronounce. [Laughs] We gradually figured out how to do it because people kept coming back year after year. Most people came back every year. We got to keep building the staff bigger, and it was really fun. The original impetus was a

scam so that we could pay for Erick Schoenberg's plane ticket so he could come back and visit again, and it worked beyond our wildest dreams! A lot of people, a lot of people have gone through that camp and gotten better at playing music for it. When I was a kid, my sister went to music camp, but I couldn't go to music camp because I was a beginner, right? So when I started music camp, there was room for beginners. So I teach beginners and I love it. I teach advanced students too and I love them, but I learn so much from teaching beginners. They ask really smart questions.

[Telephone interruption]

HOGUE: So we were talking about the Puget Sound Guitar Workshop and its history and how it started. The format that you had when it first started: can you explain how it has morphed into what it is today?

BRESKIN: Oh, my. Yeah, we didn't know what we were doing at all! That first year, as part of registering people [and] intake, I attempted to listen to each person and then suggest which classes would work for them. And then we had one morning class and one afternoon class, and each one was three hours long. People were staggering out of the cabins and falling over whimpering, the teachers along with students. It was like, "Oh, this doesn't work!" And we were lucky because lots of people came forward with their thinking about what would make it better, and it got better. It wasn't just people who were thinking well; it was also people who were willing to do work to get it to happen. So many people picked it up and kept it going and contributed to it and felt a sense of ownership of the event that included taking responsibility for it, not just liking it. So that was cool.

HOGUE: How did you get the word out about it when you first decided to start this?

BRESKIN: Oh dear! We had our Mama Sunday's crowd, our Bellingham crowd. So we and Jack Hanson, Cliff Perry, the people that we hired to teach, and I think it was probably Jack and Clifford that said, "Oh, you've got to have Dudley Hill," who I guess died recently. It's like, "Oh, crud, we're getting old; I don't like this." Anyway, there were a bunch of good musicians, and then Dave and I were inviting everybody we knew. On the other hand, Larry Squire was inviting everybody *he* knew, and who he knew was schoolteachers. And so [we] wound up with all these teachers in their late thirties and early forties who were much better at looking normal than we were and much more committed to looking normal than we were, right?

[Telephone interruption]

HOGUE: We were talking about the first camp and how there was a mix of people.

BRESKIN: Oh, Lord, yes. It is my perception at this point that those schoolteachers were nowhere near as 'normal' as they had figured out how to appear. But at the time, boy did they look normal, and we were really committed to not looking normal. [laughs] So these two groups of people get to camp, and I think maybe me and Julie Sakahara may have been the only females in the hippie contingent: it was guys who wanted to learn how to play hot licks. It was somewhat older women who wanted to play John Denver songs. And things were out of phase,

out of sync, and it was like, “Uh-oh, what are we going to do here?” And they were sort of standing in two clumps, eyeing each other. And also the ages weren’t right for – you know, there was enough of a gap in age that they weren’t sniffing each other. And we had the good fortune to have Frank Farrell coming in teaching contra dance; it was the first place I’d met contra dance. But he’s a great fiddler. He’s now in Maine. He did a stint at the head of the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes over in Port Townsend. And I also – you know, I bet that might have been [Wheezer?]. Huh. I bet it was. That’s a new thought. [We] stopped in at a fiddle festival when we were driving cross country in ’71 and ... Nah, it couldn’t have been [Wheezer?]; it was something else. Anyway, [we] watched Frank win first place at a fiddle festival. Oh, he was good! That was fun. Anyway, Frank came in and called a dance, and there was so much homophobia running around that nobody dared dance with each other, and therefore they had to dance across the lines with the people of the opposite gender. And it really helped – it *really* helped! The women got to figure out that they didn’t actually smell bad; they weren’t actually filthy. And some of them could sure dance. And the guys figured out, “Well, this wasn’t actually *my* third grade teacher who treated me so traumatically, and she can dance.” So it was very helpful, after which we could settle in and be human together. But there was still that John Denver stuff. John Denver came later, you know; the first soft sell of folk music was Peter, Paul, and Mary trying to smooth stuff out and make it more palatable and more commercial. But that didn’t keep them from politically oriented stuff. We had them doing *Times They Are a-Changing* and *Blowin’ in the Wind* and *If I Had a Hammer*. You know, it was still a statement about changing the world, a real clear, strong statement about changing the world, and it led a lot of us into the older music, the ‘real’ folk music. For people, even five or ten years younger than me, and people from different areas, John Denver was their path in, but it didn’t really lead them to the fiercely politically active music. Interesting. And so [for] those of us who had gotten our foot in the door into music that led to “We’re going to change this place – my song is my weapon for changing the world,” there was tremendous upset coupled with contempt for what John Denver was doing. So instead of adoring him, we were furious at him for selling out, for not reaching for the deep political content, for the analysis that this is not fair and we’re going to change it. So we had that divide to deal with. One of the biggest things that held back that huge, wide movement in the Sixties where we really did have a sense that everything had to change, and that what made sense was to change it from the ground up and build a world made right that worked for everybody instead of just for rich people ... You know, instead of singing about “Oh, those poor people,” it’s like, “Well, fix it!” But the biggest thing that we did that got in our own way was that contempt, because as soon as you put contempt on the table, nothing’s going anywhere. Nobody’s changing, including the person being contemptuous. So that was sad. But somehow we managed to kind of cobble together a community across that divide because everybody was there because they loved music and respected it in each other.

HOGUE: And it’s been going for ... ?

BRESKIN: Well, since ’74. Summer of ’74 was number one, so ... the one of ’04 was thirty-one, and the one of 2005 was thirty-two, so this will be the thirty-third year.

HOGUE: And during that time, you were also running Mama Sunday’s as well.

BRESKIN: I was running Mama Sunday's till '78.

HOGUE: When you start Mama Sunday's?

BRESKIN: I didn't start it, but –

HOGUE: I mean, when did you start working?

BRESKIN: I started working in '73.

[Pause]

HOGUE: It is November 21, 2005, and this is the second part of the second interview with Flip Breskin, and I am Coty Hogue. One thing that comes up a lot in the interview and something I want to explore a little bit is the sense of building community and the importance of community in people's lives, and I wanted to know what community means to you?

BRESKIN: Bottom line: it's people caring about each other and taking some responsibility for the way that we care about each other. Community is a project, not a resource. It's not just something to latch onto and suck on; it only works if the bulk of the people are taking some responsibility for seeing to it that it happens. We watch for each other and enjoy each other and take the time to get to know each other and hang out.

HOGUE: How has community, especially within music, affected you personally, and how has that been an important part of your life?

BRESKIN: Having grown up excluded from community, when I met it and recognized it, it was an incredible gift to me. The big social movements, political movements to change things – the unions, the Civil Rights movement, the African end to Apartheid – the big social movements have been singing movements, because when you join your voice with other human beings and sing, all together you are physically actually touching each other. You cause the air to move, and it touches everybody else's skin. You breathe in the sounds, and it is actually a physical connection with other people. There's a way that music will go right straight into your heart, where words just wouldn't. And people can be more courageous when they're singing together than when they're not. It's harder to break a line of people who are singing together than of people who are not.

HOGUE: The community here in Bellingham and in the Northwest – you've been involved with the Puget Sound Guitar Workshop and building up Mama Sunday's and the Whatcom County Homemade Music Society. Why do you think there has maintained such a strong community with this type of music and this type of scene in Bellingham and in this area?

BRESKIN: I think it has something to do with people who have been involved long term who are willing to do the work, not just enjoy it and go away. There are people who show up for music circle even when their lives are busy or the music at Music Circle isn't going wonderfully,

or whatever – hang in for the bumpy times as well as the times where it’s just, “Oh, whoopee!” I think it has to do with the individual people who just keep showing up.

HOGUE: And did you consciously ever make a decision, “I’m going to build a community of people in this area,” or if it just sort of happen?

BRESKIN: I’m guessing that Richard Scholtz made that decision, and I signed on. It looked like a good idea. There’s also a way that the music is so valuable to me that I’m eager to give that gift to as many people as possible.

HOGUE: Can you talk a little bit more about that value and how that developed?

BRESKIN: Well, it starts with, “Oh, it’s beautiful!” and it’s shared, and it’s [laughs] ... There was a point doing guitar camp when we were getting all these demo tapes from people and publicity packets. And there was a point at which we realized we were completely sick of ‘slick;’ [we] didn’t want to see anymore. Give us real people playing real music. These days, for me, it extends to if it’s possible, I avoid having microphones because as soon as there are microphones, it looks like you can’t tell if it’s real or not, because, you know, it might all be effects, pedals, and computer stuff, and all that, like recording so often is these days. When it’s just a person and an instrument, it’s much simpler and it’s much clearer. And if there’s magic to it, you can tell that it’s real magic instead of being manipulated somehow. And there’s a piece of that real magic that – oh, boy. There are people that, when they sing, they are consciously out to try to get you to feel some particular way. It really upsets me when people do that; I actively dislike it. I find myself rebelling, and my spine stiffens, and my heart closes to their music because I don’t want to be manipulated. It feels dishonest and condescending when I encounter it in someone. You know, “Oh, I know I can make you feel this particular way.” Thinking of Dave [Wrong?], thinking of Frankie Armstrong, thinking of Elizabeth Cotten and Tony Rice, there are people who, when they sing – Gordon Bok – when they sing, they are going to the deepest part of themselves, and being there with that song, feeling their own feelings about that song. And as an audience member, I’m invited in, but I’m invited in: it’s my choice whether to join or not. That’s a great gift for them to invite me into that kind of intimacy, and I accept it as a gift.

HOGUE: Do you think it’s important as a whole to have a sense of community, whether it be for someone in music or something else? What’s the importance of having that?

BRESKIN: There was another kid in my grade school who was even more ostracized than I was. I don’t know what was happening in his house, but he was a very tense child and awkward in his physical movements, uncomfortable in his body. I think he was just scared spitless, but as a boy he got beat up really bad and treated with contempt by everybody. I didn’t go anywhere near him both because he was gawky and awkward, and also because boy, I already had it hard enough. But once I escaped that small community where everybody knew you by the time you were out of kindergarten and was in the wider world where I could find peers to hang out with that were happy to hang out with me, when I went back for my ten-year high school reunion, I went and found the guy and apologized and sat down and asked him what kind of life he had figured out to make for himself after that incredibly difficult beginning. He bowls. I hope he is

still bowling. He lives alone; he may have a pet but doesn't live with other humans. Probably they don't seem safe enough. But he bowls like five nights a week, so he's found some kind of community and, you know, the best he could figure. [He] works as an engineer so he makes a living and gets to do work where he doesn't have to work too closely with other people. And in part that's a picture of a tragedy, and in part it's a picture of the triumph of the human spirit that he found some way to find some community anyway. Winnie Mandela, spending all that time in solitary confinement in South Africa, described choosing to love the ants in her prison cell, that they were other beings there for her to be connected with. I think we're born expecting to be fully connected with other human beings and be welcomed, be cherished, be thought well about, and for everyone of us it's a shock and tremendously confusing when we're babies to be born into such chaos where everybody's too scared and too overloaded to really be able to think well about and get right in there close with other people. And music gives us moments where we can let go of it all, blend our voices with other people, or at least have other people's voices wrap us in the arms of the voice and get to be welcome. When my youngest was ... Clearwater years, I don't know, eight to twelve years old, maybe something like that, maybe up to fifteen, he got into going to science fiction conventions. I went with him; I was bodyguard, thank you. And I'd get there and there were some people having just a wonderful time, you know, playing with costumes, playing with games, interacting with other people. And then around the edges, there were all these other people who didn't know how to plug in, didn't expect to be welcome, and they stood around the edges looking desperately lonely and bitterly resentful about it and just vibing everybody with huge amounts of anger, you know, but simmering under control, just standing around looking like they felt like losers and it was everybody else's fault for not recognizing their genius, and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. Oh yeah, I've been there! So the first time, I turned around and went back home and got my guitar and settled down in one of the hospitality suites and got a sing-along going. And all those lost-looking, grumpy-looking people came in and sang and stopped looking grumpy really fast because they were welcome. And it was a level at which I could welcome them without exposing myself to really extensive risk of taking charge of their life and, you know, being their only friend and, you know, all of that. But I could open the door wide for that evening and say, "You come on in, you're welcome here." And the whole feel of the thing changed, and I felt like my son was now much safer. He knew where I was, and if he got into trouble he could come get me and he did and, you know, it worked okay.

HOGUE: Did you ever think that you would play such a prominent role in this kind of community?

BRESKIN: Never had a clue. Never had a clue. It was beyond – in some ways, it's beyond my largest dreams for myself as a child. In other ways, it isn't. Hopalong Cassidy: when I was a kid, there was Hopalong Cassidy. Nope, nope – got the wrong guy: Cisco Kid. Cisco and Pancho. They rode from town to town; they were sidekicks who really liked each other and would go rescue people, set things right, and ride off into the sunset. It was very 1950s cowboy. And the racism was unbelievable, looking back at it. But what attracted me as a 3- and 4-year-old was buddies who loved each other and weren't afraid to show it and stuck with each other through thick and thin and stood up for each other in any way necessary and went out and made the world better, fixed things. That was my little girl dream of what I wanted to do when I grew up.

HOGUE: And you have sort of done it with the music.

BRESKIN: Oh, a little bit.

HOGUE: And how do you keep the motivation and energy to keep doing all this after all these years?

BRESKIN: Well, the music – I mean, beauty makes its own demands. It just does; you get out and you do. And sometimes I burn out and I don't do any concerts for a long time, and sometimes I'm a total fool and tell too many people in a row that I will help and get in over my head and then I'm fried and won't do anything again for a while. And some of it is figuring out how to get help. And more and more people do step forward and say, "Okay, I'll take a piece of this." You know, Richard Scholtz figured out that, as far as I know, Homemade Music Society runs different from any other music society anywhere, that instead of there being a committee or an individual who puts on the concerts, there isn't much that happens from outside. Richard talks to people who go regularly and says, "Who would you like to see there? Who would you like to see there enough that you're willing to go invite them and get people to come?" And [he] talks people into doing one concert a year and we mentor them. And some people do more than one concert a year, but it generates from inside, you know, who people are excited about rather than it generating from outside about who pushes hardest to get to have a concert or who's most famous or any of that. It's just, is there somebody who is so excited that they'll go do the work to get that to happen. And it gets us this really rich mix of music. Did that answer – ? I forgot what you asked.

HOGUE: Yeah, that's good. I can't remember what I asked either.

BRESKIN: [It's] just [that] there's more assistance these days, that people will put on concerts, and when there's somebody I would really love to have in concert, I'm not going to do it, and I know I'm not going to do it, then I'll put it out to the Flip's Picks list, which is about five hundred people, and fairly often, somebody will step forward and say, "I will host that at my house," and then I will hold their hand while they figure it out. I mean, Colleen and Mark around the corner did [Bad Humphreys?] this last time. They came to my house for the concert the year before; they loved it. They said, "Okay, we'll do it. We've got the big living room. And they did it, and I wasn't even in town. You know, I sent out a bunch of emails saying, "They're coming again – if you liked them last time, you'll like them this time!" But they came, they had a good-sized concert, they had a ball, and Colleen and Mark were glad they'd done it, so they'll do it again. So there are more people to do it, so it's not all up to me. And for me, the biggest picture is, if I'm really going to take responsibility, some of the responsibility is replicating myself so it isn't just me. If the job's actually worth doing, it shouldn't be left in one person's hands.

HOGUE: I'm going to switch to sort of more light-hearted little things. One of the questions [is], you talk about learning songs when you were younger when you were in the car, and I've noticed that you have a really vast knowledge of songs, and I'm wonder how did you build up such a repertoire. Did it just come naturally?

BRESKIN: One song at a time. One of the interesting questions is, “How about all those songs you find in your brain that you never actively invited in and you aren’t really particularly pleased that they are there?” I mean, songs are imprintable and then they’re there. The term ‘song catcher’ is an old term, and I was catching songs from birth. [I] used to use the term to describe myself when I was doing a concert and people wanted something to say about me, and then that movie came out and I can’t use it anymore because they think I’m referring to that. [laughs] I like the stuff that makes me laugh, I like the stuff that makes me cry. And if it doesn’t move me emotionally, mostly it doesn’t much go in.

HOGUE: Can you talk a little bit about your style that you developed? Was that influenced a lot by Elizabeth Cotten’s?

BRESKIN: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

HOGUE: It seems, when I heard you play, it was very unique for me before I heard those things, and so I can hear your style, and I think of it as a Flip style.

BRESKIN: Well, finger style, and I learned to play lots and lots and lots of instrumentals and didn’t sing because I was too mortified to sing. But I got the melody out of the guitar, and I got some kind of accompaniment going, and then I figured out alternating bass, so I had that. But I also got into bass runs and the Carter Family stuff, Mother Maybelle stuff. [Plays] That style crept in, and then there were bass lines that – there was that counterpoint stuff [plays] where there’s no chords. And then there was a point at which I discovered – and somebody didn’t show me, I discovered – I was trying to figure out how to sing harmony – and I figured out if I moved the melody line over a string but within the same scale, what I got was a harmony. That’s just totally cool, and that’s kind of started to creep in. [plays and sings:]

Love comes to the simple heart  
In the simplest of ways  
In the face of simple malice  
She will simply find a way  
She will find a way to love  
Though her way be locked and barred  
Uninvited in her wisdom  
Love comes to the simple heart

which is totally cool and very nearly effortless to just shift over a string and keep playing. Once you’ve played enough melodies, it’ll just kind of happen. So that got in there; there was a point at which I decided I needed to learn to accompany songs, and [I] sat there and I did my boom-chuck work until I could do it. And finger patterns: [plays]. And then you start mixing it all together. For me, when I did that CD, the most notable thing that came out of it for me took years before I noticed how many people had gifted me with that CD; I kind of knew it was happening, but I couldn’t quite face it. But in some ways, the most lasting gift was hearing my hands on the guitar because I’d only ever, you know, done it while I was doing it, right? So

hearing all the stuff my hands were doing while I was busy singing was really amazing to me. So that was cool.

HOGUE: When I interviewed Richard, he talked about one of the memories he had of you when he first got to know you, was that you did cartoon songs. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that because he wouldn't elaborate.

BRESKIN: TV theme songs. I got into TV theme songs: why I got into TV theme songs is beyond me, probably because I started with the Mickey Mouse Club theme song and kind of kept going. And then somebody gave me volume 1 and volume 2 of the TV theme songs sing-along song book. And somebody else gave me a Walt Disney song book because I was doing that kind of stuff, and I kind of poked around in those too and just got into it because they were funny, or it was funny to play them. And there were some great musicians, whose names I do not know, who were getting hired to do the TV theme songs, and boy, they were good! I've just been thinking lately, I've got to go back and learn *Leave It to Beaver* because it was really good. But I was thinking ... [plays]. It's been a while. And I'm guessing that you don't recognize it, but it's a pretty tune, right? It's the theme song to *Maverick*, which was this James Garner – yeah, they were great tunes. They were short enough and interesting enough that they just grabbed me. I have no good excuse [laughs] – I was raised on them.

HOGUE: Well, just to sort of finish up the interview as a whole, I guess some of the things is community and listening, and how has the importance of listening and the importance of everything come together for you and enriched your life? How has that happened?

BRESKIN: Well, it started with the music and I figured out I could do it. And in recent years, it shifted. We moved over to this neighborhood, and I had the Flip's Picks music list, which has grown over the years. But I got it that I could also do a neighborhood list. I treated guitar camp – after a long time, I got it that it could be a laboratory, that there were things that worked there in my life, and the question became, “How can I bring that stuff home and make my life more like guitar camp?” because I'd leave guitar camp every year broken-hearted, desolate – nothing until next year. It almost felt like I didn't really have a life. So I started looking to see what is it about music camp that works? One, it's getting to make music with people. But it's also having time to stop and talk and have the deep conversations. It's the fact that there are no cars there, that you walk at human speed, so when you're passing somebody, there's time to make eye contact, stop and yak for a minute. At minimum, you don't pass people without meeting their eyes and smiling at them. It's a very different way to be. It's so much less isolated: gathering, hanging out with people. I decided that I would be less terrified if I knew my immediate neighbors around me, so I went after that really hard in this neighborhood in the most organized way I could figure. [interruption] So when we bought this house, it closed on Thanksgiving, we got dressed up in our Halloween costumes and went door to door and knocked on every door that was open to give away candy and said, “We don't want candy; we want to introduce ourselves,” and got people to tell me who they were, and I had my little book, and by gum – I didn't feel comfortable writing in front of them, but as soon as we were out the door, I was making notes and where I could, I'd write down the address, who lived there, some description so that I could remember them later, phone number if they were willing to give it to me, emails where I could get them. And then everybody disappeared till spring. But since I worked at home and had my

office out on the front porch, I was watching out the window, and as soon as people came out and started gardening in the spring, if I possibly could I'd stop what I was doing and go out and hunker down next to them and start pulling weeds. They thought I was weird, but that was no surprise to me. But people don't turn you down if you're sitting there pulling weeds with them; they just don't. So I started getting to know people. And then Susan Gardner showed up from around the corner trying to gather people to do a neighborhood association because the Greenways trail down in the ravine by the house – there was a bid to take it over and use it as a utilities corridor and run these huge power lines down it. So she wanted to organize against that, and I said sure. So I followed in her tracks, came to the meetings, got involved, got organized. And everybody I met, I asked them if they had email and would be willing to let me email them and build a neighborhood email list. So we had a neighborhood email list, and it is running. It's over five hundred houses now. And I sit in the middle of that web. I've got a buddy that runs the City of Seattle website, or Seattle City Light website, I'm not sure how it works, but he said that part of his job is providing web space for neighborhood organizations there, and he said that they are the most volatile organizations of any he knows of because the people trying to work together have nothing in common except proximity. They'll have very different religious and political beliefs, pictures of what community is supposed to look like, the whole bit. So it's very challenging and tends to be explosive, and when they blow up, they blow sky high. So fool that I am, I sit in the middle of it, and if people want to send something to the whole neighborhood, they have to send it to me, and I either send it or I don't, and I either edit it or I don't before I send it out. I clean out victim-y stuff, and I clean out attacks, and I clean out contempt, and I clean out the stuff that will cause it to blow up. And for me, as a Jew, it's a completely insane thing for me to do because I'm putting myself in a high-profile position where people can get upset at me, and sometimes do, and when people get upset at me, I'm terrified and I get paralyzed, and I'm putting off doing everything, and I can't get out of bed in the morning, and blah-blah-blah. But the tradeoff is I sure know a lot of people now, and I know everybody on the block; they all know me. With Elliot going missing, everybody I see is saying, "Did you find your cat yet?" I'm getting offers of help. People are being very generous with me. So it's cool that I've actually got my community. I love it.

HOGUE: Well, I wanted to thank you for doing this very, very much. I don't know if Cattywompus will allow you to do one more song...?

BRESKIN: Oh, sure. Yeah, we can work that. So is it *One Heart at a Time* or is it something else?

HOGUE: Whatever you want to do. That would probably be a nice little ending.

BRESKIN: It's either that or *I Believe in Music*. I think it's that because I'm more likely to be able to get to it. [plays and sings]

This time we're going to change the world  
One heart at a time  
Man and woman, boy and girl  
One heart at a time  
Heart to heart, our lives entwined

Heart to heart, our hopes combine  
It starts with your heart hearing mine  
One heart at a time

One heart at a time  
One heart at a time  
Listening, laughing, crying  
One heart at a time

Lessons that the lost heart learns  
One heart at a time  
It works out if we just take turns  
One heart at a time  
Brothers, sisters, can't you see  
It's as simple as can be  
I hear you and you hear me  
One heart at a time

One heart at a time  
One heart at a time  
Listening, laughing, crying  
One heart at a time

Look at what contempt has cost  
One heart at a time  
Every chance for closeness lost  
One heart at a time  
Find the courage that we need  
To face each other's rage and greed  
Listening is the future's seed  
One heart at a time

One heart at a time  
One heart at a time  
Listening, laughing, crying  
One heart at a time

People of all different kinds  
One heart at a time  
Linking lives and hands and minds  
One heart at a time  
Links of caring we create  
Can pull this world away from hate  
Listening like it's not too late  
One heart at a time

One heart at a time  
One heart at a time  
Listening, laughing, crying  
One heart at a time

One heart at a time  
One heart at a time  
Listening, laughing, crying  
One heart at a time

HOGUE: Thank you.

BRESKIN: You're welcome. What I didn't talk about at all was co-counseling, re-evaluation co-counseling, RC. I've been doing since 1978, and it's where I really learned to listen and to think about listening, and to see the music building and the community building I've done through that filter of listening and getting it that we don't have to be professionals with huge amounts of training to listen to one another when we're having painful emotions, that being listened to and listening is a healing thing to do. I've just learned tons about building community there.

HOGUE: Can you explain just a little, just a tiny bit about – ?

BRESKIN: Sure. It's that song; [it] was written to my co-counselors. It's just ... we make an exchange, and the exchange we make is listening to one another, loving, respectful attention. And what's usually thought of as psychotherapy has a built-in imbalance of power, where one person is seen as the expert to fix the other person, and this just dumps that whole thing. Money is not what's exchanged; you exchange listening to each other. I'll listen to you for half an hour, you'll listen to me for half an hour, or two hours, or whatever. Or five minutes on the phone or three minutes on the phone right when I'm in the crunch of 'can't deal with something,' I can pick up the phone, phone down the list until I find somebody who's home to swap a few minutes with. And it just makes so much difference clearing my mind. Some of it was noticing – the original inspiration was getting it that sometimes you think better after a good cry. You don't necessarily feel better, but by gum you think better. Our brains get all clogged, and sometimes tears are just – you know, if eyes are windows of the soul, sometimes you need tears to wash them clean so you can see again, both out and in. So we go there. Co-counseling has quietly been involved in a lot of big stuff; the concept 'support group' was originally a co-counseling idea. When there are big meetings, they go better if you start by doing mini-sessions where everybody turns to the person next to them [and] takes three minutes or five minutes apiece. Everybody takes a turn, and when it's over, everybody there has been listened to, has had the experience of being listened to. There's more and more of that creeping out into the world and happening. One of the other early pieces that the people who discovered it, Harvey Jackins, was a union organizer for the machinists at Boeing during World War II, and he came at as an old Commie, as a socialist, as a world changer, wanting to set things right. He started noticing that people were sinking faster than you could listen them through it, and often it had to do with effects of sexism or racism or classism, that people were just getting slammed so hard that they couldn't cry hard enough and fast enough to dump all of the confusion that was coming in. And

he figured out that you have to also change the world; there's no way that any one woman can recover from sexism all by herself; we have to actually change things. But the way we get slammed as women tends to divide us from other women, that we tend to be contemptuous or scared or, you know, we've all been mistreated by other girls, the bullying that goes on that's verbal instead of getting beat up leaves us confused and scared to get close and trust other women, so we have to work through the ways we treat each other badly as women and permit ourselves to be disrespected as women, that even if every man and every institution changed overnight, we'd still have the work to do to heal our own lives because those institutionalized hurts come in as individual heartbreaks one at a time into our own hearts. And we have to clean that stuff up too in order to think flexibly and joyfully go out and set things right, because of course we want them right. So that is co-counseling's place in it, and it's been a – [pause in the tape]. We're there? You know how much confidence I have in the power of music to change the world. What you may not know is that I have as much confidence in co-counseling, and I put as much time and energy into co-counseling as I do in music.

HOGUE: Thank you so much for sharing everything.

BRESKIN: Sure.