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COTY HOGUE: Today is March 5, 2007. I am with Rob Lopresti and Terri Weiner at their house in Bellingham, Washington. Just for the sake of the recording, do I have your permission to record this interview?

ROBERT LOPRESTI: You bet.

TERRI WEINER: Yes.

HOGUE: First off, maybe for both of you, to get an idea of how music has been part of your lives starting back early and talking a little bit about what your memories are growing up as a child where music [inaudible].

LOPRESTI: Well, as I said before, my first memory of folk music was when I was six or seven years old and my uncle's house – I thought it was my cousin, but he swears it wasn't – so it was somebody college age, which was my cousin's age, played *Little Boxes* by Malvina Reynolds and *Twenty-five Minutes To Go* by Shel Silverstein and *I'm Being Eaten by a Boa Constrictor*, also by Shel Silverstein, which were very subversive songs to play for a seven-year-old. That was my first exposure to folk music. I also know that my only memory I have of my grandfather, the only memory I have of him, was him holding a guitar, which he played. He also played the Jew's harp. I don't remember him playing or singing or anything; I just have the memory of him holding it. That's it.

WEINER: We're talking specifically folk music here?

HOGUE: You can do any musical memory from childhood.

WEINER: My parents listened to a lot of music, but they did not play music. Music came out of, you know, the radio or off a record. They had a lot of folk music; they had Weavers records and some Irish folk music, but they also had lots of Gilbert and Sullivan and operas in other language and a lot of classical music. So there was everything. I would have liked classical music; I did like Gilbert and Sullivan, but we also grew up listening to rock music. It was the Sixties, and a lot of that was folk rock. I think the first record that I ever bought with my own babysitting money was an Irish Rovers album with the unicorn on it, you know, that old traditional Shel Silverstein again. [laughs]

LOPRESTI: My sister, who is four years older than me, played the guitar for a while, and she of course had the Joan Baez song book – didn't everyone?

WEINER: It was required by law.

LOPRESTI: [laughs] I remember one day sitting around with my parents and my sister and my other sister and her husband, and I guess their baby who is now in his thirties, singing songs out of the Joan Baez song book and recording them onto a reel-to-reel tape recorder – only did that once. I can still tell you most of the songs we did. It was an enlightening experience.

HOGUE: You have these musical memories, but was music something that you were drawn to or was that later? From your childhood, do you have specific memory of that?

LOPRESTI: Well, we liked it.

WEINER: Everyone is drawn to music of one kind or another.

LOPRESTI: I mean, I wanted to be a drummer, and I was terrible at it. You took fiddle lessons for a while [inaudible].

WEINER: No, in the fourth grade they let me have a fiddle for about two weeks and then they took it away.

HOGUE: Why was that?

WEINER: It had to do with not getting along with my brothers. [laughs]

HOGUE: Did either of you play music as a child, or singing? When was the first time that you tried playing or singing or any kind of musical participation?

LOPRESTI: When I was in high school, I used to write parodies, which I asked other people to sing. When I was in college, I wrote song lyrics, which occasionally I got a room mate to sing, to write music for. Then when I was married, my wife bought me a mountain dulcimer, which was the first musical instrument I ever had, and I used to play that as best I could and write songs on that. I was always interested in writing songs, mostly lyrics.

HOGUE: Was there a reason that you didn't want to sing them?

LOPRESTI: My ideal would be to write songs and have other people perform them. I'd much rather have someone who is better at it than me do it. As a musician, I'm a pretty good song writer.

HOGUE: Terri?

WEINER: I was in my twenties the first time I tried to play guitar, and then the kid came along, and got put on hold. It was something I was kind of playing around with for a few

months when I found out I was pregnant and too tired after work to put much effort into it. And then I got a guitar later; I guess I was –

LOPRESTI: When you moved to Bellingham.

WEINER: When I moved to Bellingham, I was trying it again. I was in my thirties. So as for playing instruments, no, but as for singing, well, everyone sings. I mean, performance is another thing, but everyone sings.

LOPRESTI: We should also say that I think when we were in late high school, we discovered folk music. I remember you trying to figure out who did this song *The Last Thing on My Mind*. I think I was a freshman in college and you asked me that. We were then [inaudible] of course, but at that point we started going to folk festivals over the summer, the Middletown New Jersey Folk Festival and then the June Day Folk Festival. And so the next ten years, we went to those folk festivals every year –

WEINER: And saw more and more people that we found interesting and then followed them around to their concerts. As you know, once you find a concert series like the Homemade Music Society, you're going to expand your horizons. In New Jersey, there's a wide gulf between performer and audience, where we came from. I don't know if it's still true, but it was certainly true when we were there that you were either on the stage or you were listening. In this town and in this area, folk music really is homemade music and everybody tries it. As you have that kind of welcoming environment, people are more likely to pick up that guitar again and learn those three chords and then maybe a fourth.

LOPRESTI: It's very common for me to be up there introducing a performer and saying, "And our next show next week is going to be by So-and-so," and there he is sitting in the audience. And the one after that is by So-and-so, and there she is sitting over there, because the performers and the audience are not quite interchangeable but closely related, which was not true in New Jersey.

WEINER: Don't try this at home, kids.

LOPRESTI: That's right, we're professionals.

HOGUE: I guess that brings me to something I forgot to do at the beginning. If you could both just state your names and where you were born – I'm assuming if you were around New Jersey – and, if you feel comfortable, the year.

WEINER: The year – well, there's not much to be done about it, is there? Terri Weiner, and I was born in New York City, in Flushing, Queens, in 1956.

LOPRESTI: Bob Lopresti, born Robert Lopresti, in Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1954.

HOGUE: And when did you two meet?

[Both laugh.]

LOPRESTI: 1837. I went to Governor Livingston Regional High School in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey, and so did Terri's brother, Ken. And so I would occasionally go to his house and I met his younger sister, who was going to a different high school, largely because Ken was going to Governor Livingston, and she had the chance to choose high schools, and she chose the one her brother wasn't going to. But it didn't help; she met me anyway. So that would have been around –

WEINER: We met in the basement and kind of knew each other, but the first time we really got to know each other was after I'd begged and pleaded and cajoled and persuaded my older brother, couldn't he please, please, please take us to see Jean Shepherd, me and my friend, Lorraine Weinbach, and we'll be very quiet and we won't make any trouble. We'll both sit in the back seat.

LOPRESTI: Do you know who Jean Shepherd is? Not a folkie.

WEINER: He's the humorist who wrote the story that became *A Christmas Story*.

LOPRESTI: *The Boy and the BB Gun*?

WEINER: Yeah, *The Boy and the BB Gun*, and a lot of other books too – a very funny guy. He was on the radio every night when I was a kid. I mean, he was an absolute idol. He told us the truth.

LOPRESTI: He talked for forty-five minutes, no music, no guests.

WEINER: Just talked. An amazing guy. So I desperately wanted to see Jean Shepherd, and my brother said no, he wouldn't take us. Then a week later, he said, "Okay, a friend of mine wants to go see Jean Shepherd. If you will be quiet and not make me crazy, you can sit in the back seat." And that's the friend that Ken said I shouldn't make crazy, but it's too late now. [laughs]

LOPRESTI: Yeah, that's for sure. That was in late 1971 or early 1972.

HOGUE: I wonder if you will talk a little bit more about that difference you experienced living in New Jersey and coming around to this area and the difference in the music.

LOPRESTI: We belong to two folk music organizations in New Jersey, the Folk Music Society of Northern New Jersey, FMSNNJ, which was based in Mendham; it moved around a bit.

WEINER: That was in East Orange; the Folk Project was in Mendham.

LOPRESTI: And the other was the Folk Project, which was based in Mendham. They all moved around when it became convenient to find a different place to, you know, [inaudible] [laughs].

WEINER: When one park building threw you out, you went and found another free place to meet.

LOPRESTI: Both of them were concert series, and both of them were, by our standards, rather stodgy. The guy who ran the Folk Project one, which is the one that is still around – it was called the Minstrel Show in those days, now it's called the Minstrel Coffee House – his rule was, he would not have a performer on the stage unless he had seen the person perform live. Nothing from a concert recording, nothing from anyone else's good opinion; he was stiff-necked.

WEINER: He was in charge. [laughs]

LOPRESTI: He was in charge. We will discuss how that differs from the way we do things at the Roeder Home, right? And there was, to my mind, a real firm difference between the people who performed and the people who were in the audience, and you didn't move from one to the other. What else?

WEINER: There was one weekend a year that the Folk Project did that was kind of a [rainy?] camp sort of weekend.

LOPRESTI: They just hired a couple of performers.

WEINER: [laughs] Yes, they did, but there were opportunities for people to bring their guitar and play along, jam. But that wasn't the purpose of the organization. It wasn't for individuals to make music; it was for individuals to hear music.

HOGUE: You mentioned being part of these two music societies, and we talked about how you heard the records, but I guess I didn't ask you, what drew you to this kind of music.

LOPRESTI: It was simple, it had some political bite to it, I was never terribly attracted to rock music. I don't know what else to say.

WEINER: Politics has a lot to do with it, and wit. Yes, folk music – it's okay to be funny.

LOPRESTI: And it's about story-telling. We should also say, by the way, another thing that was a big effect on us in New Jersey was WFDU. Fairleigh Dickinson University – was it the Rutherford campus, I think? – had its own radio station, and in the early Seventies or mid Seventies, every morning they played what they called Music America, which is sort of like what is now called the Americana format. So it might be an hour of blues, and it might be an hour of folk music, and it might be an hour of gospel. All

weekends, that's what they did. And so you got to hear a whole lot of folk music there. And of course this was the early Eighties; it was the time of the first wave of 'folk revival'. In the Seventies, it was pretty dead for folk music. Then in the early Eighties, there was what was called the Coop, or Co-op, which was a group of folk musicians that essentially ran their own coffee house or bar in New York City, and out of that movement more or less came Christine [Lava?], Suzanne Vega, Jack Hardy, Frank Christian, David Massengill, Lucy Kaplinsky, those people either all very much part of it or on the edges of it. So a lot of those people would fall over into New Jersey and into WFDU. Is that accurate?

WEINER: Yeah. We were introduced to a lot of people there.

LOPRESTI: Right. So we first heard Eric Vogel and Dave Gordon and Stan – Rogers? I don't think so...

WEINER: Yes.

LOPRESTI: Yeah, Stan Rogers? That's right.

WEINER: Saw him at the Folk Project.

LOPRESTI: Saw him on WFDU, and we saw most of those people at the Folk Project.

WEINER: We also had access to New York. [inaudible – talking at the same time]

LOPRESTI: [inaudible – talking at the same time] Saw Tom Paxton four times there.

WEINER: Steve Goodman.

LOPRESTI: Josh White, Junior, Bob Gibson.

WEINER: We got to go into the – you don't call it New York, it's The City.

LOPRESTI: [inaudible] like Greenwich Village.

HOGUE: Something to think about – what attracted you to the music? I mean, what was it about music, and folk music maybe, but music in general, rather than going and doing something else, why did you center things around this?

WEINER: I have no idea.

LOPRESTI: No idea.

WEINER: I'm much more interested – I'm not a theatre goer; I don't enjoy sitting through movies; I've never been a movie goer or a big theatre goer, although we occasionally took in a play. That too was available, but even when we went to

Broadway, we mostly went to see musicals. We went to see *Evita*, we went in to see Gilbert and Sullivan opera at Light Opera of Manhattan.

LOPRESTI: But it was very much the words. I mean, nowadays, in the last ten years, we're much more into music that's about the music than we ever were before. Old time music is not about the words, God knows.

WEINER: No! [laughs]

LOPRESTI: "Opossum up the tree stump," you know: heavily profound. But you know, in those days, music carried the words. It was the words that were the important stuff. You know, *Alice's Restaurant* is not about the music. If a person could actually write a memorable tune, that was a bonus.

WEINER: It helps; it helps you remember the words, but ... yeah. And we've both always been verbal people. Rob's a librarian, and I read a lot, and I used to make my living as a writer. A million years ago I was a newspaper reporter. Yeah, I've got to use words when I talk to you.

LOPRESTI: T. S. Eliot.

WEINER: But some time in this last ten years, we've moved toward music for music, as opposed to songs, and that has a lot to do with my taking up the fiddle.

LOPRESTI: Right.

WEINER: I mean, I always played guitar, or played guitar for a lot of years, twenty years, but the fiddle makes you follow the melody in a way that the guitar doesn't if you're just playing chords.

HOGUE: Can you talk a little bit about that idea?

WEINER: About the fiddle?

HOGUE: I mean about that following the melody ...

WEINER: Only that it takes a change of mindset. If you've never tried to play music, you have to retune your brain to think about it in a different way. If you've only listened, it's a different experience than looking for it in your hands and in your own brain. It's not an instantaneous thing, but eventually it takes off and your fingers and your brain and the instrument and the bow find the tune, and voila, there it is. It's been waiting all along.

LOPRESTI: Slightly off topic but related to what you're saying, one of the things that I've noticed in the last ten years as I've been playing more music is that I enjoy listening to music more than I ever have because I get more out of it. I mean, I hear things. Oh,

there's a harmonic there, you know; there he's transposing to a different key. I recognize what's going on because, you know, on the autoharp to some degree I'm doing those things, you know. And so I appreciate the music I'm hearing more, which is way cool.

HOGUE: Going back to the linear timeline, you were from New Jersey, but how did you get out here to the West Coast?

WEINER: On a plane.

HOGUE: [laughs] Well, yes perhaps, but what brought you out here?

LOPRESTI: In 1983, we had a kid, Susan Weiner, and by the time she was four years old, we didn't want to be raising her in New Jersey. So we looked around. Terri is much more employable than I am, being an accountant, and I'm a librarian, so we went looking for a place that was willing to hire me because Terri can get work anywhere, is what I'm trying to say. So [inaudible] part of the country we thought we'd like, and Bellingham, Western Washington University, was the place that hired me, and Terri, bless her heart, came out without ever having seen the place, agreed sight unseen to move here, and that was September, 1987.

WEINER: You weren't going to leave me with that kid alone!

LOPRESTI: That's true. That was September, 1987. This house.

HOGUE: And when you came here, was getting involved in a music organization one of your priorities?

WEINER: Yes.

LOPRESTI: We moved here in September, 1987, and I don't think it was until you had moved – you came a week after me.

WEINER: Three weeks.

LOPRESTI: Three weeks? Really?

WEINER: It was three weeks.

LOPRESTI: Okay. [Both laugh]

WEINER: I know, I was home with the kid. [laughs]

LOPRESTI: Okay. I think it just felt that long, but ... Anyway, at some point, either before Terri or after, I saw in the paper that there was a concert at the Roeder Home. It was either Jeff Morgan or Mike Marker, both of whom are local guys. They were the first two concerts, I don't remember which was which, but I went there and I got totally



lost trying to find it. I had the same experience a lot of people had: I looked at the wrong end of Sunset and eventually found the place. Richard Scholtz was announcing that this was the first concert of the season and there was going to be other concerts and so on and so forth, and that a new person was taking over Music Circle, and that person would be running it for the first time the next week. That person was Flip Breskin. “Stand up, Flip,” and I looked for a man, of course, and Flip Breskin, not a man, stood up. So the next week I went to the Music Circle, and that was Flip’s first week at running Music Circle and it was my first week going there.

HOGUE: Were you at this concert?

WEINER: No, I was a couple of weeks behind.

HOGUE: Oh, that’s right.

WEINER: I was packing for a week and then two weeks at my parents’, and then flew out with the kid. Rob had to start for the semester and we needed to close up the house.

LOPRESTI: So I was living here with no furniture. I always remember making myself a nice dinner one night, you know, because there wasn’t much to do. I made myself a nice dinner, looked around, and there was no place to sit. I sat on the floor.

WEINER: So yeah, it was high on the list of things to do, was find music, and the other thing was to find a synagogue.

LOPRESTI: But we weren’t playing instruments yet. No, actually I had a dulcimer.

WEINER: You had the dulcimer ...

LOPRESTI: It was years before I brought the dulcimer out, and then you would hear me play.

HOGUE: What made you want to go to that Song Circle after going to that concert?

LOPRESTI: Because I liked folk music. I wanted to hear people sing songs. Yeah.

HOGUE: What was your experience going there?

LOPRESTI: It was cool. We didn’t have rise-up singing yet, but they had the notebooks, and I immediately started learning some songs, great songs by people I’d never heard of. One of the first ones was *Zen Gospel Singing* by Mark Graham, whom I had never heard of. His name was not known on the East Coast at that point. I learned a whole lot of songs that I had not known before. *Family Woman and Man*.

WEINER: Lots of new songs, lots of new performers because folk music doesn’t pay very well. They may have mentioned that to you. So a lot of performers that we see are

local, regional people. By and large, it doesn't make for a star system, you know. Some people do travel the country and manage to eke out a living, but more people go to day jobs and do it at night, and so that's going to be, by definition, local people, so in any different area of the country you're going to see people you hadn't seen before. That's always fun because there had been ten to fifteen years of seeing a certain group of people in New Jersey, and here is a whole new opportunity. It's always been a really active folk scene here.

LOPRESTI: And have people been talking to you about Mama Sunday's? Yeah? Back twenty years ago, there were a whole lot of folks – there was a performer every Friday at Mama Sunday's, and it was very often a folksy, so we saw Fred Small and Ani diFranco and was Bob Franke there? Probably.

WEINER: Yeah, definitely.

LOPRESTI: And the Austin Lounge Lizards.

WEINER: And the Cookie Café was going then. That was a great place.

HOGUE: What was ... ?

LOPRESTI: The Cookie Café was downtown on Cornwall, the opposite side of the street from Kendrick's Billiard Parlor and a little closer to the bay. It is a clothing store now. It was a coffee shop, and they had music there a couple of nights a week.

WEINER: [R. B.?] ... what's [R. B.'s?] last name?

LOPRESTI: He's the one of the local Democrat leaders, [R. B.?] Porter. But he wasn't the guy who ran it. It was Chris and –

WEINER: And Terry.

LOPRESTI: Chris and Terry ran it. I have no idea –

WEINER: And then Audrey bought it later.

LOPRESTI: Flip could tell you their last names. Chris was a woman and Terry was a man?

WEINER: Yes. They were married.

LOPRESTI: They used to do wonderful stuff there. They didn't perform.

WEINER: Terry occasionally brought out a guitar.

LOPRESTI: That's true. I can't remember who we saw there, Flip and Richard and people like that. One of my all-time favorite experiences there – Susie was probably seven or eight – Richard Scholtz was performing, and Susie walked up to him, you know, after a set and looked at his autoharp, because she could see my autoharp, and she saw that the letters with the names of the chords had worn off. She says, “Well, how do you know which chords they are?” And you could see the light bulb coming out of Richard's head, and he said, “Well, when they wore off, they went into my fingers.” [laughs] Which is essentially what happened, isn't it? So those were the main three places, I think.

HOGUE: Talk a little bit about going to concerts at these places and all these things, meeting people and maybe a group of people. Talk a little bit about the community around this kind of music in the Whatcom County Homemade Music Society.

WEINER: Oh, we're all wonderful people, right? Every one.

LOPRESTI: Tell the story of how you got a guitar here. It's one of the best stories about Bellingham music community I can think of.

WEINER: Well, it was on Liberty Street that they'd do – and still do every year – a street-wide garage sale. Rob and I were walking up and down Liberty Street on this Saturday morning, probably in June, and there was a guitar. And I thought, well, the kid was a couple of years older now; I mean, she was like seven maybe, and maybe, maybe I could try again. I had been just way too busy, and everyone wants guitar, you know, [inaudible] thing that it is. So I'm looking at this inexpensive Yamaha guitar, wondering whether it would be serviceable. And who should be walking up the street, also looking at all the garage sales, but Mike Marker. “Mike, Mike, come over here!” He didn't know us; we'd seen him in concert, but we didn't know him yet. And he said, “Hello?” “Is this a playable guitar?” He played it a couple of minutes, and he said, “It's an adequate, inexpensive – you know, it's a Yamaha. It's as good as it needs to be but not much better, but it's definitely an adequate, playable guitar.” I said, “Okay, thank you.” And I bought it. Now I'd got a guitar, and I was quite enthusiastic about it, and we went home with that guitar, picked up the phone and called Flip. “Flip, Flip, Flip, I've got a guitar!” And she said, “Well, come on over!” And I went right over there the same morning, it was still Saturday morning, and she taught me three chords, didn't waste any time.

LOPRESTI: And that's Bellingham. And that would have never happened in New Jersey. I mean, we wouldn't have seen a nationally known musician walking up the street at the garage sale and then immediately have gotten a lesson, you know. That's the way things work in Bellingham. We know – I mean, the first year we saw Richard Scholtz, Flip Breskin, Mike Marker, Jeff Morgan, Murray Eaton, Janet Peterson, Laura Smith. We saw these people perform; we're friends with all these people now, partly just because we hang around.

WEINER: But because it's accessible, because the musicians here are not up on some pedestal. They're just people, which is interesting. It's a change.

HOGUE: And when you went to concerts at the Roeder Home or concerts at the other places in Song Circle, what was the feeling of acceptance or being able to – you know, being comfortable?

LOPRESTI: Immediate. Everybody got along real well. I think I came up with the joking motto of the Music Circle, which is “Talent is optional.” But that’s really the way it is, you know; no one has been kicked out for inability to perform, and we’ve had some –

WEINER: We’ve seen some eye rolling, but hopefully not when the player could see it.

LOPRESTI: And some people moved on, and some people got considerably better over the years, you know. So there’s great tolerance, and things work out well, generally.

HOGUE: What’s your own personal experiences with that idea? Being able to try new things or ...?

LOPRESTI: Okay. When I moved here, I was already playing the dulcimer a little, and I was probably coming to Music Circle for two or three years before anyone knew I owned a dulcimer. That’s not an unusual thing that people pull an instrument out of the closet after they’re convinced that no one’s going to laugh. Then I started playing the autoharp because Terri bought me an autoharp, same as she got me a dulcimer.

WEINER: Not a bit of sense.

LOPRESTI: Yeah, you didn’t know what was cooking behind. Then I started writing tunes, writing songs some more, and I would write a song and I would bring it to Music Circle and judge it based on the reaction there. I always remember that I did a song that I thought was not a terribly significant song, and when I finished it, Flip Breskin said, “Play it again.” And I did. And she said, “I want to learn it.” [Inaudible] And she also suggested a change to the structure of it, which has become part of the structure of the song. And then a few years after that, Laura Smith and Larry Hanks performed it on the radio on [inaudible] Potluck, which was the first time one of my songs was ever on the radio. And that’s all because, you know, they’re willing to listen to rank amateurs.

HOGUE: How about for you?

WEINER: I generally felt comfortable making a fool of myself. I’m a mediocre fiddler, you know, and a mediocre guitarist, and it’s okay. [Inaudible] is worried about losing his place there, [laughs] but it’s nice to be able to play with other people because you learn skills that you – I feel safer playing in the living room by myself, but if you’re going to get better, you really do need to play with other people.

LOPRESTI: That’s right.

WEINER: And so we try to overcome the fear and get out there and, you know, duck the tomatoes when they're thrown. But no, nobody does throw anything, and that's why it's okay. I don't see myself as a performer; I have absolutely no desire to ever play in front of anybody – with, but not in front of.

HOGUE: I know, Rob, that you have done a concert at the Roeder Home. Tell me a little bit about that.

LOPRESTI: Yeah, the concert I did at the Roeder Home was specifically called “Songs of Rob Lopresti.” It was performed by twelve people including Rob Lopresti and a bunch of other people. Like I said, my ideal would have been if I'd sat down and watched other people do them all. As it was, I did about half. That all started because Janet Stecher of Rebel Voices was performing – actually, she wasn't performing. She was a guest at a concert Flip was doing, and she said, “You know, you ought to do a concert. If you want to do a concert, because you have all these songs you've written, you ought to do a concert. If you don't want to do it yourself, we could get other people to do your songs. So I pay you for [inaudible] if you're not dead.” [Inaudible] And Janet and Susan, Rebel Voices, very kindly agreed to come up and perform. They were the ones that came the farthest. So we recorded a cassette off the songs there. It was a terrifying experience. A couple of the songs didn't make it on the recording because I blew the performance of them so badly, but it was great fun for me. I had something I was going to say, and it's gone. It will come back maybe.

HOGUE: Tell me about performance and songs. Maybe you two could talk a little bit about what you know of the history of how the organization has morphed into what it is today, and how it's different and the same as when you started going.

LOPRESTI: The big difference? Okay. Richard started it. That's the received knowledge, that's the main thing that I know. But the big difference was that about three or four years after we started at it, there was no one who was willing the concert series. I know you've heard this story before, but I'll say it for the recorder. There was no one willing to run the concert series. It's about fifteen or sixteen concerts, and it's a lot of work. So nobody wanted to take it on that year. So instead of letting it die – this is where a concert series as run by one egotistical person dies because there's no one else that knows how to do it. But what happened in this case was Richard called all the regulars, the people who had come the most to the concerts, and said, “Okay, your night is going to be October 7. Tell me who is going to be there, and if you need help, let me know.” And so each concert is run by someone who decided they wanted to host a concert. We don't call it producing; we call it hosting.

WEINER: Yeah, producers get paid.

LOPRESTI: Yeah, right, or at least have bigger egos than hosts. So basically all Richard has been doing for the last fifteen years – I shouldn't say ‘all’ – what Richard has been doing for the last fifteen, sixteen years is keeping the calendar and being the liaison with the Roeder Home. And so if someone comes up and says, “I've got somebody who

wants to come to town in November. Are there any open dates?" He checks and says no. That means that every concert is hosted by somebody who, one, thinks it's the best concert of the year, and two, promotes it that way, and three, there's a wide variety of taste; four, there's no ego problem about it; five, if you burn out and you're not interested, that's fine. Somebody else will do it. Last year, there were no concerts in February because nobody wanted to host a concert, nobody wanted to come to town in February. And that was the first time in the life of the series that that's happened, except for occasionally where something dropped out, you know, by accident. And as Richard said –

WEINER: On the other hand, you'll want six people who want the same date.

LOPRESTI: I guess. On the other hand, Richard's comment was in some ways that's a good thing because what it meant was there are a bunch of other places where the music was being performed, and so they didn't need the Roeder Home.

WEINER: And of course the Roeder Home is available to us on Wednesday, and frequently someone will want to do a concert, somebody will be coming to town, they will want Saturday night, they'll want Thursday night, and we don't have the Roeder Home. So they'll set it up at the Fire House or they'll set it up at Nancy's farm on Sunday. The fact that there are other venues means that maybe Wednesday wasn't the best night for that person.

LOPRESTI: One of the advantages of Wednesday night being the night, of course, is that a lot of times somebody will set up a gig for Friday night in Seattle and Saturday night in Vancouver, and they're looking for something to fill out those other days, and they say, "Well, we can do Wednesday night at the Roeder Home," you know. You're not going to get Bob Franke on Friday night in Bellingham; he's going to be in Seattle or Portland or Vancouver on Friday night. But you can make a couple hundred buck on Wednesday night, and that's a good thing.

WEINER: What I understand is that this is a good town for selling your CDs and stuff. While you may not get the turn out that you can get in Seattle, you may not get as many people, you may sell just as many CDs in Bellingham as you do in Seattle, which is interesting to us, that people often say, "Oh, I do just fine when I come to Bellingham." So good! Glad to hear it!

LOPRESTI: Do you remember the first concert we hosted? That's a stumper, isn't it? [Inaudible] and Zeke.

WEINER: Could have been ...

LOPRESTI: Zeke was certainly one of the first [inaudible] the town at the time.

WEINER: Could have been ... Clinton [Dell?] was an early one, but I don't think it was one of the first ones.

LOPRESTI: Michael Smith was early too. He wasn't at the Roeder Home. And the Berrymans.

WEINER: Yeah. Big time producers.

HOGUE: Can you tell any more that you've done in years past?

LOPRESTI: Not always at the Roeder Home, but [inaudible]. Melissa Schneckenberger?

WEINER: Melissa Schneckenberger. Phil and Vivian Williams.

LOPRESTI: Joe Hickerson. Rebel Voices. David [Trenti?]

WEINER: Ruthie Foster.

LOPRESTI: Ruthie Foster: you hosted that one.

WEINER: That was a big success, but she hasn't been back.

LOPRESTI: James Gordon.

WEINER: That was not a big success.

LOPRESTI: A Canadian songwriter in town was the same night as David Suzuki was in town.

WEINER: It's really embarrassing when people don't come.

LOPRESTI: Not a good thing.

HOGUE: Can you talk a little bit about hosting in general and the idea of hosting and what it does for people?

WEINER: For which people?

HOGUE: Could be both. Maybe just talk about hosting in general.

WEINER: It's about ninety percent panic.

LOPRESTI: The worst experience I ever had was when I realized I had told the performers the wrong date and they had bought tickets, and I had to go to the person who was hosting the concert on the other date, you know, practically on hand and knee and begging him to change dates with me, which he and the performer were willing to do.

WEINER: Fortunately, that other performer was local, so there was no traveling involved.

LOPRESTI: Yeah, because these people were coming from three thousand miles away.

WEINER: It involves making sure stuff gets to the papers and printing up posters and plastering the town with them, pulling a lot of sleeves begging people to come to the concert. Lately, I think Flip's email does more for us, for everybody, than all of those notices to the papers.

LOPRESTI: Yeah.

WEINER: So some of the pressure is off because everybody who is interested in folk music gets an email and hears about it. I mean, everybody gets Flip's email.

LOPRESTI: I don't know if you remember, but years ago, Flip's Picks consisted of a little piece of green paper, which she would hand out. That was before we discovered email.

WEINER: Right. And then you had to get them to people. But yeah, chasing people down and making sure that if you've got a fiddle concert, you want to call everybody you know who fiddles and make sure that they've heard about it. And it takes a lot of energy and it can be very stressing if it doesn't pan out, if people don't show up.

LOPRESTI: If you look at our website, the phrasing is this, essentially from Richard, in the paragraph that says, "Is this an organization? Well, it's really a group of people who believe in homemade music." And one of the things we say there is – Richard put it rather beautifully, I think – he said, "We don't pick performers. The organization does not pick performers; the organization picks hosts, and the hosts pick the performers," which means generally a few times a year I will get an email from somebody saying, "I saw your organization. I'd love to perform there. Can I send you a CD?" And I say, "You are welcome to send me a CD, but I usually host two concerts a year, and they're probably going to be people I already know and love. But if you want to send me a CD and I'm not interested, I will pass it on to the other hosts, and maybe one of them will be interested." But basically, the rule is if there's nobody in the town that likes you enough to host your concert, then you probably don't want to perform here because you are not going to get anyone to come to the audience anyway.

WEINER: Yeah, there's a lot of begging and pleading that goes into it, you know, and reminding people. Wednesday night, it's after work, people can get tired, so to some extent you're counting on good will. You know, people who know you and trust your judgment and say, "Oh, okay, you think this person is good? I'll come hear them." And you can't do that for people you don't like.

LOPRESTI: Right. One of the little tricks, by the way, which a lot of people don't learn, is that if you are hosting the concert, you had better come to the concert before, so that



when the announcements are made, you can get up and say, “This person is fantastic!” because people will notice if you didn’t bother to come to the concert before.

WEINER: Yes, and if you don’t go to the concerts that your friends host [laughs] ... this is a socialist economy.

[END OF TAPE 1]

[TAPE 2]

HOGUE: Why do you keep hosting?

WEINER: I’m a masochist. [laughs]

LOPRESTI: We only host people whom we would want to see. The great thing about Bellingham as far as I’m concerned, and this is true about folk music but it’s true about a lot of stuff, is that Bellingham is large enough that you can get almost anybody to come here. And it’s small enough that if you want them to come here, you’re going to have to do it yourself. You can’t wait around for some organization to set the thing up; if you want something to happen, you’re going to have to do it. Bellingham is large enough that you can probably get what you want to happen but small enough that you’re the one who is going to have to do it, and I think that’s perfect.

WEINER: Some of why I host concerts – I mean, I think Robert’s a little better at the organizational stuff than I am – some of why I do it is because it needs to happen. You know, this musician deserves to be heard, so somebody’s got to make it happen. We may have once or twice, but generally – you know, the other reason we don’t host concerts for people we don’t know is because I don’t want to go through all that work – I mean, you could always buy a CD to hear somebody’s music – if I’m doing all the work of hosting a concert, it’s because I not only like the music but I like the individual. I will almost never host a concert for somebody that I wouldn’t invite to dinner. It’s just not going to happen.

LOPRESTI: And there are people who we wouldn’t hold a second concert for once we met the people.

WEINER: Yeah, because the people who are really good at making a living in this way know that they have to rely on good will of organizers, and if they start treating you like staff, that’s it.

LOPRESTI: It’s worth pointing out for the record here, the host ain’t getting any money.

WEINER: And it costs you money to do it. You print posters, you make long distance phone calls.

LOPRESTI: And you may have them for dinner. You might have them at your house for the night, you know. So you are out of pocket for sure, and you're doing it because you love the music or you really like the performer. You know, I have standing offers to a couple of performers that I would love to have come to town and they've never bitten. Oh, man, something went right out of my head again.

WEINER: About being nice to the host?

LOPRESTI: Yeah, there are definitely performers who are never going to get invited back to town.

WEINER: Yeah, and not just to us, but there have been people who have come to town and, you know, done the red M and M routine. No thanks.

LOPRESTI: You know the red M and M routine? There are certain rock bands typically, if you go to Smoking Gun and type in performance contracts, you know, you'll find out that this rock band, they have to have forty-seven kinds of wine and M and Ms, but no red M and Ms – you know, all this crap. You know, you try to pull that where the hosts are volunteers and you ain't going to be invited back.

WEINER: You can't treat volunteers like that. This is something that this organization has in common with the synagogue and all the political organizations I belong to: everybody is a volunteer. You have to be nice to each other.

LOPRESTI: Take for example Peter and Lou Berryman or Bob Franke. They are extremely talented performers, but they also know exactly how to handle – and I'm not meaning that in a bad way – the people who are doing the work for them. They are extremely gracious. They're very professional about it, so they get invited back.

HOGUE: There is all this hosting, but I mean, what do you think is the reason that this organization has been able to continue for the period of time that it has?

WEINER: There's not much else to do in town? [Robert laughs] Small town life?

LOPRESTI: There is also the fact that Richard Scholtz had the genius idea of having different hosts do it, so now there are fifteen or twenty people in town who know how to host a concert and aren't afraid to do it. That was just brilliant. I mean, I know a lot of concert series in bigger cities than this that died, partly because there was no one who could do it. And now we don't need someone to do it; we only need someone to run the calendar, which Richard has done for thirty years and he just passed on to Janet Peterson. And so that's a good thing.

HOGUE: What are some of your memories that you have of the organization?

LOPRESTI: One of my all-time favorite memories, and I could pull out the paperwork, was the first time that Lou and Peter Berryman came to town. We had never seen them

before; we had certainly heard their music. It, just by a wild coincidence, happened that the editor at the Bellingham Herald had just gotten very excited about this new thing called the Worldwide Web. Margaret Pickman, who was and still is one of the people who does entertainment stuff for the Bellingham Herald, was able to sell him a story based on the fact that the Berrymans were coming to town because I had been exchanging email with him. Actually, this was before the web, when email was exciting. So, you know, that was great, and they got the main story on the front page of the Lifestyle section the day before their concert – with color photograph. And the Roeder Home was packed: we had about a hundred people. People were sitting down on the floor because we ran out of seats. We had never had that good of a turnout for the Berrymans before that. I just felt like the best thing since sliced bread that I had been able to arrange that. It was really great. So that was one of the highlights for me. Another one was certainly of my concert. And another time was when the Three Wise Guys performed, one of the few concerts by the Three Wise Guys, meaning Scott and Zeke and I.

WEINER: Was that the Roeder Home or was that the Cookie?

LOPRESTI: We did that once at the Cookie and once at the Roeder Home. And, let me think, when Zeke Hoskin and Linda [Chobotuk?] performed at the Roeder Home, that was pretty darn cool. Ever hear of Linda [Chobotuk?]? She's a librarian and Communist – I mean, she's the secretary of the Communist party in British Columbia – and she writes wonderful songs, mostly about work. She and Zeke performed together, not that they performed together, but they split an evening. That was pretty cool. Other highlights of the Roeder Home ...

WEINER: Bruce Molsky – I'd go anywhere for him.

LOPRESTI: And not at the Roeder Home, but one of the coolest things we ever did was when Terri hosted Ruthie Foster. The only time I ever saw anyone get a standing ovation in the middle of a song. [laughs] And people came up to Terri afterwards and said, "How in the world did you get her to come to Bellingham?" And Terri said –

WEINER: I asked. Whoa!

LOPRESTI: Amazing what you can get people to do if you ask them! [laughs] I haven't been able to get her to come back.

WEINER: And she did really well. She made a lot of money that night.

LOPRESTI: Yeah. You might want to try to email her, because just saw her at the Vancouver Folk Festival.

WEINER: You know what it is? I think her agent doesn't like me. [laughs]

LOPRESTI: One of the interesting things with hosting concerts – I don't know if you've experienced this – is dealing with agents.

WEINER: Oh!

LOPRESTI: The agent is an animal who, pretty much by definition, expects to deal with bigger places than this. And in order to earn their living, they want to argue to get more of this or more of that. And we say, "Hey, you're getting one hundred percent. We can't give you any more. We can't guarantee you anything because what it is is what it is."

WEINER: But it's one hundred percent; nobody takes a cut of anything.

LOPRESTI: Right. So occasionally they will send this usual, average contract, which we will either sign the part we can or ignore the whole thing. I think some of the agents are reasonable, and some of the agents are crazy. But they're trying to make their living by [inaudible].

WEINER: Well, there are performers who are not very good at scheduling and organizing and clerical work, and so for some of these people it's not a matter of the agent trying to make them famous or whatever, but just somebody else to do the paperwork. And it's a perfectly reasonable way to make a living, but agents don't like the Roeder Home because we won't make promises.

HOGUE: On sort of a different note –

LOPRESTI: You never know when David Suzuki will show up.

HOGUE: You were talking about homemade music and what it is. Maybe talk about the idea of homemade music.

LOPRESTI: You can get a really long, boring argument over trying to define folk music, right, and we're not even going to go there. But someone, I don't know who, came up with the term 'homemade music.' It certainly wasn't here.

WEINER: No, Bob Gibson has it in one of his songs.

LOPRESTI: Right, Bob Gibson has an album called *Homemade Music*. The idea is that if folk music means anything, it is music that gets passed around to people without, as I would say, a millionaire's permission. It doesn't go through the commercial channels, whatever the commercial channels are in a particular time period.

WEINER: Another term is 'front porch music.'

LOPRESTI: Right. And it's music where performing it is at least as important as listening to it. There's a famous line from an old timey musician who said, "I would

travel ten miles over barbed wire to play this music, and I wouldn't cross the street to listen to it" – which I think is particularly true of old timey music.

WEINER: [laughs] Yep.

LOPRESTI: But the idea is that it is music that is meant to be sung along on. I'm sure you've heard many performers say one of the things that makes Bellingham an outstanding place to perform is people sing. You can't shut them up.

WEINER: It is participatory.

LOPRESTI: It's participatory music. And it doesn't come through the corporations generally.

HOGUE: Why do you guys continue to play music?

LOPRESTI: We have all those instruments.

WEINER: Have you seen our music room? Yeah. We've got to do something with all those fiddles. It's fun. It's all about having fun.

LOPRESTI: For me, it's mostly about writing songs. I play music so that I'm not singing a cappella. I don't know why I write songs except that I enjoy doing it and occasionally somebody likes one, and that always feels really good.

HOGUE: What do you think the future of this organization is?

LOPRESTI: I think it will die out in ten years.

HOGUE: Whatever your opinion is.

WEINER: I hope not. There are college students that show up.

LOPRESTI: Mmm, not enough.

WEINER: But the question is – see, and the problem with the college students – college students are wonderful people – our daughter is one – but they move. So the fear is there are all these people in their fifties and sixties and there's college students. What we need are people in their thirties who are settled here, and we don't get a lot of them.

LOPRESTI: I thought that was really interesting about the thirtieth anniversary. We had the old codgers like us, and we had some college students, and there were precious few thirty- and forty-year-olds on the ground. You know.

WEINER: When we came here, I had just turned thirty that month. I came and turned thirty here. And you need people of just that age group to keep something moving because the younger people leave town, and we get old.

LOPRESTI: It was challenging when we first moved here because Susie was [inaudible]. And Susie used to love Music Circle, and I used to bring her. Then I turned to Terri and I said, “This isn’t working because I need to leave at nine o’clock to get Susie home at a reasonable hour, and I really resent that.” So we arranged it differently so usually you would pick Susie up at nine o’clock and I would stay until ten, or you would come and leave at nine o’clock, and I would get a ride home from someone because I was really resenting losing that hour every two weeks, you know. But in those days, it was quite common to see parents with young kids, you know, five to ten years old – Jessie and the rest of that –

WEINER: There was a whole troupe of little kids.

LOPRESTI: Yeah, there was a whole troupe, two families that used to bring their kids, and now they’re all adults. Amazing how that happens. But you see that very little, which is why I think it’s going to die out because there’s no – where are the young parents with their kids? They’re not coming. I wanted to tell you, one of the things that made me happiest at the Roeder Home, talking about great experiences at the Roeder Home, was I went to a concert last year by two guitarists whom I didn’t know, and the place was full, fifty or sixty people, and there was nobody there I knew, not a single person in the audience I knew, an entirely different group of people than the people I expected to see there, and that just thrilled me because we’re attracting people that aren’t the usual suspects, and that was great. I’d love to see more of that. A couple of years ago, Richard tried to get a bunch of college students to plan a couple of concerts, you know, and that kind of died out, but I’d love to see more of that. We need to get the younger people in or it’s just going to die when us old codgers shuffle off to the Willows.

HOGUE: Finishing up and wrapping it up, one final question: how has the community affected you?

LOPRESTI: Would you be playing music if it wasn’t for what goes on at the Roeder Home?

WEINER: Not as well as we do.

LOPRESTI: That’s for sure.

WEINER: There’s a wealth of fine teaching and performing talent in town that enables beginners to really take off. And while I might have made my way to the fiddle because I’ve always loved it, and I might have found my way to the guitar because it was in the back of my mind – it’s not like anybody pushed it on me – having these great people to learn from makes it possible for that tradition to continue. As I said, I feel a lot of college students come and go, but I hope that some of them stay and grow up with us here.

HOGUE: Any other final thoughts from either of you?

LOPRESTI: It's fun.

WEINER: It's entertainment. That's what it's about.

HOGUE: Great. Well, thank you for doing this.

LOPRESTI: Thank you for doing this.

HOGUE: For sitting and talking for over an hour.