

**A Conversation with Sarah Harmer**  
**by Frank Goodman (4/2006, Puremusic.com)**

We're very happy to bring you an interview with Sarah Harmer this month. She's an artist I've been enjoying and actually pursuing for some time. While she's not exactly a household name yet in the States, she enjoys a wide popularity in her native Canada. There she won a Juno in 2005, in the Best Adult Alternative CD category, for her superb work *All Of Our Names*. She first came to light nationally with a group that sometimes included her sister Mary on bass, called Weeping Tile. Sarah grew up on a farm on what's called the Niagara Escarpment in Southern Ontario, which has everything to do with this record.

Although it is a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, the escarpment is lethally threatened by the interests of the aggregate industry (sand, gravel, and shale). Sarah and her cohorts set off in June of 2005 on an "I Love The Escarpment" Tour. They hiked, climbed, and caved their way through the land, and played all the communities along the way. The group donated all the proceeds from the shows to a volunteer research and advocacy organization that the artist helped to form, PERL, Protecting Escarpment Rural Land. At the end of that tour, they went into the studio and recorded *I'm a Mountain*.

Solo and with Weeping Tile (for which she was the principal writer and lead vocalist), Sarah's music has included folk and jazz, country, alternative rock and pop. The JUNO record, *All of Our Names*, was a masterful folk pop record that rang with greatness from first exposure. *I'm a Mountain* is impressive in a different domain. It is decidedly more folk, country, and bluegrass inflected. She's equally convincing electric or acoustic in a way that is reserved for the few. It is, coincidentally, musically timely and should widen the inroads she has steadily been making throughout the States and abroad.

As I mentioned, I have been pursuing the artist for quite a while. But, understandably, her high-powered NYC publicity firm wasn't turning any cartwheels in our direction. Truth be told, I'd never received any response whatsoever from numerous requests for an interview. Undaunted, I went to see Sarah play recently in Nashville. I'd dropped by the club to purchase tickets in advance, in case they sold out, but the box office wasn't open. I was too early for a dinner date, so I sat in the car listening to a song. Just then I looked out the window and Sarah was walking by with a band mate. I hopped out and introduced myself, and told my story, such as it was. She was very nice, and took a card, said she'd check it out and drop me a line. Luckily, I was to see the band soon again, at SXSW in Austin. She and I said hello sidestage while she was tuning up, and I shot better video that night than in Nashville, which I hope I can share with you here (if I can find it in the SXSW footage).

The happy ending is that Sarah did get in touch later, and we had a conversation right before this issue went up. Check out the audio clips when you're done, she is a class act. And after you buy *I'm a Mountain*, we recommend circling back for *All of Our Names*.

**Puremusic:** Hey, Sarah. How are you?

**Sarah Harmer:** I'm good, thanks. Just finally got through Customs and made it into your fine country.

**PM:** Ah. So you've been home for some days?

**SH:** Yeah, we had about a week off.

**PM:** Is it hard to get back out?

**SH:** Not really. We're on the same bus, and we just were out for three weeks, so it's nice-- I have such a great band, and everybody is on such good terms, and it's great to see everybody again. And we're back in the saddle. This is really the first touring that I've done in a bus. It's just because it's a six piece, and we want to--I just toured for so long in a van and a trailer.

**PM:** Yeah, I remember crossing Canada in a bus one time. I was guitar tech-ing for a buddy of mine [Kenny Vaughan, now with Marty Stuart] who was playing with the Sweethearts of the Rodeo, and that was a beautiful six weeks. Canada is so amazing in a tour bus.

**SH:** There are longer and more stretches in between cities than in the States, that's for sure. Fewer billboards, I guess, up there.

**PM:** [laughs] Where are you tonight?

**SH:** We're playing Ann Arbor tonight.

**PM:** So you've been in a band with your sister, Mary, and you sing with your dad on this new record. I think being close to one's family is such a blessing. Would you tell us something about yours, and growing up on the farm where some of them still live?

**SH:** Yeah, my mom and dad still live on the farm. I'm the youngest of six, so I felt pretty lucky as a kid, just because I had so many older sisters and an older brother who were kind of looking out for me. And being the youngest, after they all went off and did stuff, I did get to spend a lot of time on my own, even though we have a big family. I spent a lot of time outside. I had some chickens, lots of cats, it was a beautiful place to grow up.

**PM:** Wow. How many boys were in the six?

**SH:** One.

**PM:** Oh, wow.

**SH:** [laughs] I don't think he's too scarred by it. I think he's okay. All the girls are kind of tomboys. My brother is the second oldest, and he's ten years older than me, so he went to school--he didn't live at home for some time as well. But it's great, because now everybody lives pretty much in Toronto. It's crazy, my family used to be a lot more dispersed, west coast, and my sisters used to live in England. But now everyone pretty much has come back and lives in and around Toronto. So we see each other all the time. My parents' farm is still weekend headquarters. And yeah, I mean, lots of music. We were made to go to church every Sunday, and we had the Harmer pew, pretty much.

**PM:** Oh, really?

**SH:** Yeah, well, just the one you always go to. We would take up a lot of space. And so, lots of singing. And my sisters--not everybody likes to sing, but probably half of us do, Mary and Barb, and my brother likes to sing. And he plays guitar, too.

**PM:** What about your dad? Was he a musician, or I see him singing with you here. Is he a player as well?

**SH:** No, he's not. His dad, my grandfather, played violin in a string quartet. But my dad is a farmer, and only sang kind of in the last--he doesn't go to church anymore, but he sang in the church choir. But no, typically, he was just a fan of music, and has a beautiful voice, loves to sing, but is also quite shy, so he never really did anything too much. Occasionally he would do something in church, a solo or something, like very rarely he would do a part, because there was only about two men in the church choir.

[laughter]

**SH:** It was a small church. But no, he sings on this album, and he also sings on a duet where you can actually really hear his voice, because I kind of mixed him, I think, a bit low in the two songs on the album. But he's on--we covered "Spanish Eyes."

**PM:** Ah, yeah. It's lovely, too.

**SH:** Oh, good. You've heard it.

**PM:** Yes.

**SH:** I'm glad. Yeah, good. Because that's where you can hear him sing.

**PM:** It's really very good. So it had to be kind of a kick for him, I mean, getting into the studio with his famous daughter and all that, right?

**SH:** Yeah. It was a kick. We poured him a nice bracer, because he was a little bit nervous. But he had a great time.

**PM:** Wow. What kind of a girl were you in school?

**SH:** I was probably one that thought it was a handicap to be a girl.

**PM:** Ah.

**SH:** I've since come to my senses and realized kind of--

**PM:** Good for you.

**SH:** Yeah. I think I wasn't quite as tough as a couple of my older sisters. They were kind of the toughies. But I don't know, I think I liked--I was doing school musicals, and I did like to--I was in the choir for a while. I was athletic until I started to smoke, it would be grade ten, and then that all went out the window.

By the time I was sixteen, my older sister Mary took me to see the Tragically Hip. And they were just--I mean, they were still playing to five people in tiny little cottage towns around southern Ontario, and putting on sweat-soaked amazing shows. They were just writing their own songs, but they were also covering Van Morrison and, like, Chuck Berry, and songs I didn't know. They really were my introduction to rock 'n' roll up close. And so that had a big influence on me one summer, going to see them play in all these little dives, because Mary was friends with them. That was kind of a turning point where I started to, as you do when you're a teenager, you kind of start to be a bit more of an individual and a bit more of a renegade, or whatever.

**PM:** Hopefully.

**SH:** Yeah, hopefully. I started to play guitar, and really get into music more, live music, and stuff like that.

**PM:** How early in your story did playing music for other people begin?

**SH:** You mean singing in bands?

**PM:** Yeah, or playing your guitar for your friends, or whatever.

**SH:** When I was seventeen I joined a band called The Saddle Tramps. And they were already--all these guys had met in college, but I was just friends with one of the guys. So I sang, didn't play guitar, just sang. I was just starting to play guitar on my own then.

**PM:** Was it as country as the name sounds?

**SH:** Yeah, it was kind of country rock. We did a Rank and File tune, and we covered--it was mostly originals, but it was definitely country, country rock, and loud guitars, loud like Telecasters through Vox amps. That's the way I learned to lose my voice all the time. And then I guess just right near the last year or so of the band, I had written a handful of

tunes that we were playing live. Then I quit the band and was full time in Kingston, moved to Kingston, which was about three hours away from Toronto. And I was going to the university there, so I started my own band about a year and a half after I'd left the Saddle Tramps, or so.

**PM:** And was that Weeping Tile?

**SH:** That was Weeping Tile.

**PM:** So both solo and with Weeping Tile, your songs now have spanned quite a number of styles. Can you tell us about the period where you wrote the original songs, at least, for this new record, *I'm a Mountain*?

**SH:** They were written over the last five years, I'd say, really, because I kind of was just stockpiling them. The song "I'm a Mountain" was written in 1998, I think. So it's old for me, and I just never recorded it. My friend's band played it all the time, Luther Wright and the Wrongs. And it was one of those songs that was just out there, but I never recorded it. And the most recent songs on the album, like "Escarpment Blues," and "How Deep in the Valley," and "The Phoenix," I wrote those all within the last year. But "I'm Aglow" and "The Ring"--just kind of really over the last I'd say five years, and put them in a little place on their own where I thought, okay, those kind of seem to be of the same sort of sentiment or genre.

**PM:** Yeah.

**SH:** Once I had enough of them, I decided that it was time to go into the studio. And I was working on them at my home studio a little bit here and there, over the last little while, too.

**PM:** At the home studio, what do you use there?

**SH:** I use Digital Performer. It's kind of dismantled now. I recorded *All of Our Names* there, but--

**PM:** Oh, that's a hellishly good record--

**SH:** Oh, well thank you.

**PM:** --to have done it at home. You did that in your home studio?

**SH:** Yeah, I did that in my bedroom.

**PM:** Holy jeez! That's a good sounding record.

**SH:** Thanks, man. Well, my friend Marty Kinack, he was the engineer and co-producer on it, so he knows a lot more about the technology of recording than I do.

**PM:** Did he bring in a lot of outboard stuff, or did he just use what you had, or--

**SH:** Well, we mixed it all there as well.

**PM:** Damn.

**SH:** But we had a bunch of nice compressors and preamps and nice mics, and we tried to get a really clean signal path. And I have a nice old kind of slanty shanty farmhouse that we were able to mic up and use different rooms. And we did some stuff where we had people--like three of us at least, playing at one time, with drums and bass and guitars. But most of it was multi-tracked, painfully, individually. *I'm a Mountain* is quite the opposite approach, where all but two songs were recorded live. Even the background harmonies were recorded pretty much at the same time.

**PM:** Really? I mean, you cut the lead vocal and the backgrounds all live?

**SH:** Yep.

**PM:** I see. You know on that title song, you say, "I'm a mountain, like you said to be," did someone actually say to be, and what did they mean?

**SH:** Well, it was my friend Holly, who was giving me a Tarot card reading over the phone.

[laughter]

**SH:** She's just a wing nut. And we were just talking. She said, "Oh, I've got these Tarot cards here. I'm going to draw you a card." And so she said, "Oh, I've drawn the mountain." And I said, "All right. I'm a mountain." And it was just kind of a joke. And I was sitting watching TV, playing guitar, and I got off the phone and wrote the beginning of that song.

**PM:** And in the context of the joking around, did she say, "Well, you be a mountain," or something like that.

**SH:** Yes, because that song was written kind of when a lot of songs for *You Were Here* were being written, and I was going through this large relationship breakup, and stuff was tough. And I think I do remember her--it being in the context of, like, just kind of be brave.

**PM:** That's cool how Holly jumped onto the record that way.

**SH:** She'll do that.

**PM:** How did the great Dolly Parton song, "Will He Be Waiting For Me?" happen to jump into the set for the record?

**SH:** Well, I can't remember how I got *The Grass Is Blue*, but just somehow I got a copy of that a few years ago, and loved it, as a record. And then when I decided to do the I Love the Escarpment Tour, which took place last June, and I was getting the players together, I was burning some discs for everybody, with some of my own songs and with some covers. And I just threw that one on--I threw, actually, another Dolly Parton song on there from that record. I can't remember which one it was, off the top of my head now. But Jay Euringer, who plays bass, he said, "Oh, I like that song, but what about that 'Will He Be Waiting For Me?'" And I thought, "Oh, yeah, I love that one, too." So we just learned it so that we could add it to the show, because it's always good to learn new songs.

**PM:** Sure.

**SH:** We had mandolin, and it seemed kind of appropriate instrumentally. And then, once we did it live, it was one of our favorites of the set to play, because there's lots of tight harmony singing, and it just cooks along, it seemed to really work well. So we just thought we'd record it. And then we liked it, so there it was.

**PM:** Have you ever done any gigs with her?

**SH:** No.

**PM:** She's remarkable. I've never gigged with her, but I've stood next to her on stage, side stage, a couple of times. And she's tiny, in a way. And yet, the power that's coming off her body is just unbelievable. She's one of those incredibly magnetic people that just seems like they're from another planet. Like I hear that Bill Clinton is, they say, like, "Yeah, well, he's just kind of a guy until you're right next to him, and then his personal power is so intense that you really can't believe it."

**SH:** Whoa.

**PM:** But she's like that.

**SH:** It's not surprising, just by the songs that she's written and the player that she is. And as far as the musicianship goes, I saw her play this past summer, and it was great to see her jump around from banjo to electric guitar to autoharp to tin whistle. And just the fact that she actually sent me a fax--did you--

**PM:** Oh, that's a beautiful story. Let's tell that in the interview, yeah.

**SH:** Yeah. Well, there's a Canadian awards called the Junos. And on the day that the Juno nominations were announced, my manager, Patrick, called me. And he's a really easygoing guy, but he was not happy. And he was saying, "I can't frickin' believe it. You

didn't get nominated," or whatever. And I'm saying, "Oh, that's okay." And then he says, "But there's a little silver lining."

[laughter]

**SH:** "You got a fax today from someone very special." And I was like, "Really?" And so, yeah, she sent this really nice fax from her office in Nashville. And it just said--we have the same publicist--

**PM:** Who?

**SH:** Mark Satlof, at Shore Fire. I mean, he's the main guy, I think, there. But she said, "Mark Satlof gave me a copy of your CD. And I always like it, and am honored, when people cover one of my songs. I thought your version of 'Will He Be Waiting For Me?' was just beautiful. It blew me away. Love, Dolly."

**PM:** Too cool.

**SH:** Yeah, it was so nice! And I saw Mark in New York, and I told him. And he said it was so funny, she faxed him at the same time to say, "I just faxed Sarah Harmer." So she's crossing all her Ts. I just think she must love it. It seems very genuine, and just for her to take time to do that is pretty classy.

**PM:** I always think that artists are uniquely revealed when they're speaking about their cohorts. So maybe we could touch briefly upon the members of your current touring band.

**SH:** Absolutely. I have such a great band. Spencer Evans and Julie Fader and Jay Euringer, and myself, the four of us, we've known each other for over fifteen years, probably. Spencer and Jay are Kingston musicians. When I moved to Kingston to go to the university I would see them playing every Monday night in their jam like wacky band called--well, Free Association Blues Band, and then, Joy, which was another band. And Julie I've known since then, too, because we have some mutual friends. And so it's really great. It just feels right to be out playing with them. And Joey Wright is also a newer friend, but I've known Joey for a number of years.

**PM:** He's no relation to Luther, I take it?

**SH:** No, he's not. They say that they're half cousin brothers or something, but no, they're not actually related. But Joey and I are actually kind of related, because his wife, Jenny Whiteley who is a Juno Award winning roots songwriter and performer, she is first cousins with my sister Mary's husband.

**PM:** Wow.

**SH:** Canada is a small place.

**PM:** [laughs]

**SH:** So Joey and I, we say that we're related by marriage. And I've been a fan, he's just such a great player, and a great guy. And Chris Bartos, who mostly plays fiddle and some other instruments, piano and harmonica occasionally, we met a number of years ago at a wedding, but we really just started to play together since this album came out in the fall, in Canada. It's a wonderful band, and a great crew. I have an awesome touring scenario. It's really refined, but it has a really nice refined kind of underbelly to it. Everybody is so keen to be on the road and happy, and there's no one saying, "Oh, I've been to this town 25 times."

**PM:** [laughs]

**SH:** I just hate that. I love it when everybody is genuinely psyched. And so, yeah, we have a great time.

**PM:** When you consider the professions possible in the world, it's such a special thing to be doing, when people remember that.

**SH:** It is. I think we all feel pretty lucky. We all feel lucky. And no one has really toured in a bus before, either, so it's that kind of camping party quality that's good.

**PM:** Oh, yeah, they're so expensive, but they're so much fun, buses.

**SH:** Exactly.

[laughter]

**PM:** Yeah, but oh, the expense. I can't imagine what the gas is costing now.

**SH:** Well, what just happened, Frank, we get across the border into Detroit, and we're playing--we're doing a radio thing, a college radio or community radio thing here. And I'm in the back, so I don't see this happen, but I hear it happen, the bus driver turns into a parking lot and hits the front end of a car, just like ten minutes ago.

**PM:** Yikes.

**SH:** Yeah. And he's a great driver. I can't believe it. It was stationary. I can't believe he just--everybody is shocked, because he's just driven us for the first three weeks--

**PM:** Whoa.

**SH:** --effortlessly through New York City and all this--like Manhattan. And boom, he hits--so I'm glad it's not going to--

**PM:** Oh, the poor guy must be mortified.

**SH:** I know. I'm sure he is. It's an Acura, too, that he hit.

**PM:** Never fails.

**SH:** Ouch. So I haven't gone to the front of the bus to commiserate. I'm just going to happily kind of stand in the back here, yeah.

**PM:** Oh, sorry about him.

**SH:** Yeah.

**PM:** And so since he's a former band member and an old friend with a song on this CD, we should say something about Luther Wright.

**SH:** Yeah. Well, Luther Wright and I were--we were a couple for about almost seven years.

**PM:** I thought I picked that up from a photo.

**SH:** We were an item. And now we're just great, great friends. And yeah, Luther and I have been--we've been there when each other were--I mean, he wrote that song before I met him, so it's probably the oldest of the batch.

**PM:** Right.

**SH:** But he is a driven man. He just tours and writes, and loves to put on events and organize. He's a real make-it-happen guy. That song seems like a real timeless song to me. And I've sung it live with Luther Wright and the Wrongs, and on my own for years. So it just seemed to be part of the family as well.

**PM:** We're going to have to drop him a line and get him into Puremusic, for sure.

**SH:** Yeah, absolutely.

**PM:** We just love covering Canadian music. I'm forever astounded by the great music we've found up there.

**SH:** Cool, thanks.

**PM:** I never expected it when we started to do this ezine, some five years ago. And act by act, you just crawl into this scene, and find a lot of gold up there.

**SH:** There is. I could be completely happy by just really listening and exposed to Canadian music. And I know I've missed a whole lot, too. And the thing with Canadian

music is it's--I mean, it's diverse, but a lot of people have been influenced by a lot of the same people that American songwriters have been. American music has really shown the way, or really been very influential and inspiring to people, of course. I mean, just think of Lyle Lovett and John Hiatt and all these great songwriters that play Toronto, and that have their records in stores up there that people know about, find out about. So the influence, I'm sure, is crossing over a lot. But now it seems in the last fifteen years there's so much bulk up, like there's so much now of our own, there's so much music being created, and so much really good music being made.

**PM:** Yeah, I think it's fantastic. We're huge fans of people like Steven Fearing and Ron Sexsmith, Fred Eaglesmith and Blackie and the Rodeo Kings, to name just a few. And The Sadies, for sure.

**SH:** The Sadies? They're awesome! I just saw them play about a month ago.

**PM:** Oh, I'm crazy about them.

**SH:** And they're so fun, they're so good, yeah.

**PM:** I just saw some picture of you at a Regina Festival with Dallas Good. [One of the two brothers in The Sadies--see our interview with them.]

**SH:** That's right, yeah, we did a workshop together. Well, Julie Fader, who plays keyboards with me, she's also--she plays guitar, that's her main instrument.

**PM:** Oh, really?

**SH:** Yeah. And she writes songs. And so Bartos, who plays fiddle, he plays bass with her and I play drums, we're her band.

**PM:** Oh, yeah, I forgot you got up on the drums in Nashville and kicked the shit out of the drum kit!

**SH:** Oh, yeah.

**PM:** I was so shocked!

[laughter]

**SH:** That's the funnest part. Then I just want to stay on stage and like, "Oh, okay, now let's do another set." But yeah, we opened for the Sadies, Julie's band. It's Julie Fader and--we don't actually have a name. Our joke name is the Rhythm Method.

**PM:** [laughs]

**SH:** Anyway, so we opened for the Sadies in Kingston, just before we went on this tour.

**PM:** Oh, that's cool. So you play drums the whole set?

**SH:** I played Mike Belitsky's drums, yeah. He let me use his drums.

**PM:** [laughs] Ah, fantastic.

In the setup to this interview, I'll definitely explain a little bit, such as I know, about the Niagara Escarpment and the I Love the Escarpment Tour. But can you talk a little bit about what it was like doing that tour, both traversing the land as a band and playing the venues along the way?

**SH:** It was really exciting because we were making it up. We didn't have any big agents or--we didn't even hire a publicist or anything to do it.

**PM:** Crazy.

**SH:** I had the idea, and I hired my friend Brian to help me pull it together. And it was so fun to see something that was just a late night idea kind of manifest into this actual routing. And then we also hired another friend of Jay Euringer's, who's a trail guide, and he came along. He would set up events for us. Like we rock climbed one place, and we kayaked. And it was neat to see it all. We had this idea, and that idea had come to life. And the Escarpment is beautiful. And it was neat to me because I grew up on it. But until you're really in the middle of it, you're not seeing it. From a car, for instance.

**PM:** Right.

**SH:** You miss it. And when you're on the ground, and when you're in these ancient ecosystems and forests with really mossy rocks, and big, deep crevices and caves and beautiful cedars, hundreds and hundreds of years old, that are clinging to the rock face, it's just so refreshing. Sometimes we'd do a show, and then we would stay up really late, and then we'd have this thing scheduled, we'd be on the trail at 9:30, and be like, "Oh, my God." But an hour of walking, and you'd feel great.

**PM:** All that oxygen, yeah.

**SH:** All of that oxygen. And we set up some press along the way so that a few people would drive up and meet us at certain points. And we only hiked in small sections. We had a couple days off in between, so we'd do longer hikes. But it wasn't like we had our instruments on our back and we were physically carrying our stuff.

**PM:** Right. You didn't have to carry the PA on your backs.

**SH:** [laughs] No, we had a diesel van. We actually had biodiesel, we had a company give us a big bucket of biodiesel that we filled up.

**PM:** All right.

**SH:** And a couple hybrid cars, because we really wanted see what was possible as far as low impact travel.

**PM:** Unbelievable that you guys did that. [Find out more about protecting the Escarpment by visiting the P.E.R.L. site, <http://www.perlofburlington.org>.]

So when I saw you play in Nashville and Austin recently, you sounded very happy to be playing the States. Are the Americans any different as people, or as audiences, and in general?

**SH:** I would say more the same than different. But Nashville is especially good. Canada is reserved, that's a difference. People don't talk to each other as much. Like you're in a line, you're not saying, "Hey, how you doing," as you do in the States. There's less of a, "Oh, get out of my private space" kind of feeling.

**PM:** Right.

**SH:** In Canada, it's--maybe because of the cool climate, maybe because of the British, the Commonwealth kind of connection, I don't know. Americans definitely seem to be looser.

**PM:** Right. They'll jump out of their car and run down the street and introduce themselves, like I did.

[laughter]

**SH:** Exactly. And at shows, like it was so nice in Nashville, like I remember someone yelling, "You guys are great!" Maybe that was you.

[laughter]

**PM:** Very possible. I do hoot and holler at shows.

**SH:** I love that. And people would cheer after a solo or something. I love that kind of give and take, because then the show can go anywhere. It's not like, "Oh, we're doing our thing and we're going to continue doing it." It's nice when people throw stuff in there to spin it in different directions, and fuel it. And I think maybe that happens more in the States. There's more liveliness.

**PM:** And yet, on the other hand, you get the strongest impression that you're so excited and supportive of Canadian acts, and I love that, too. Like the way you supported Joel Plaskett, who opened for you in Nashville, and just the way you talk about other Canadian musicians is really great.

**SH:** It's a wonderful community. And I've been in it for long enough now that I've met so many people. And there's so much camaraderie, there really is. It's a big country, but I mean, I've played every big city, and I've been able to spend some time in Halifax, and get to know Joel. And Toronto has just got a great music community. We're a pretty young country. I think there's been a cultural insecurity there for a long time.

**PM:** Really?

**SH:** Because we're next to a very large cultural entity. I felt it, anyway, growing up. You'd read about bands in Boston, or whatever, through magazines, and it was like you were reading about a movie. It was like another world. And then your own scene starts to grow up, and you realize, "This is as rich as anything." And so you have a pride for it.

**PM:** Right.

**SH:** And I'm not the underdog, because there's no real underdog feeling, but it's nice to root for your hometown, to have a sense of place. And you mentioned about Joel--I was having a hard time finding someone who could do that, open that stretch of the tour, I think it was about a week and a half of mostly southern dates. And I'd asked a few different people, and it was like a hundred buck gig.

**PM:** Yeah, right.

**SH:** It's not easy to do. Some people wanted to do it, they just couldn't do it. And my manager was saying, "Why don't you just get local openers. Let's just get local openers. We got to get this done." And I was like, "Ooh, yeah, but I just want to bring somebody who doesn't get a chance to go down there." And so I was really happy when Joel was able to do it.

**PM:** And he had a great time, right?

**SH:** He had a great time.

**PM:** So maybe he lost a couple bucks. Who cares? He just played the States.

**SH:** I know. But I think he sold lots of records, so I think it was okay for him.

**PM:** Ah, so he did fine, good. Are there places, exotic or familiar, that you like to go to get away?

**SH:** Yeah. There's a nice deer trail across the road from my house.

[laughter]

**SH:** Oh, there's so much space. I live north of Kingston, and it's a city just kind of halfway between Toronto and Montreal. And there are lakes, tons of lakes north of the

city. And there's just great wild land. That's my favorite place to go. And there's my parents' place, too, even though it's hemmed in a lot more by development. But there are still some great forests and places I like to go. I don't know, I don't really have the travel bug so much. I feel like I'm getting a lot of that on the road.

**PM:** Yeah, you're getting that anyway.

**SH:** Yeah.

**PM:** Do you consider yourself a spiritual person?

**SH:** Yes.

**PM:** I mean, I knew the answer I think. But in any particular way, or any particular path?

**SH:** I don't know that much about a lot of religions. I know some basics about Buddhism, so my education isn't really there.

**PM:** That's good, maybe.

**SH:** But just my spiritual connections to everything, sure. I feel like there's so much magic in the world, and I think the natural world is so awesome. And yeah, I have a real connection, definitely, to place and to spirits. I just read this wonderful book set in basically memoirs of a white guy, a guy actually named Tom Harmer of all people. But he lives up with these Salish natives up in Washington State, where there's so much animism and spirit of place, and old stories and old history. I think that there is so much power that we often don't really acknowledge in our western, regular kind of lives that is there, that really connects us to all of the other elements, and all of the other species, really. And I think I get a lot of that from my mom. My mom talks to the trees at the farm.

[laughter]

**PM:** Beautiful.

**SH:** She's deep. It's her own thing. I think she's witnessed a lot of power and a lot of presence, and I think that I'm kind of that way, as well. But I think it's also one of those things that once you start to receive it, or you start to believe it, or kind of go, "Oh, what an interesting coincidence that all that happened, and this happened," then it can reveal itself to you more. But it's also what you choose to believe, as well.

**PM:** Yeah, I think once you're open to believe, that a lot more becomes available, absolutely.

**SH:** Yeah, yeah.

**PM:** On or off the record, do you mind if I ask what you meant by your mother witnessing power and presence? I'm very interested, that's why I ask.

**SH:** I'm not sure, exactly. I don't know if I ever said that before. I just know that she was going to be a United Church minister before she decided to get married to a farmer and have six kids. She was going to go out to Newfoundland and do--well, not missionary work, but really remote work. So she kind of grew up in the community of the United Church, and kind of Christianity. And then she graduated from the university in her fifties, and then went on to do her masters in theology, and really about feminism. She's just learned a lot. She's been open to everything and she's a very curious person. She's seventy-four, and she continues to be youthful and very wide-eyed. And I think that her accumulation of understanding and knowledge, and just life experience, and just spending a lot of time outside, she really has a connection. For instance, we've been dealing with this whole quarry application right behind our farm.

**PM:** Yeah.

**SH:** And my mom says "I will chain myself to a tree."

[laughter]

**SH:** She's very feisty, too. And I think she feels that the trees have rights, and that the rock even has rights. She really has a belief that humans are part of nature, and we have a real kinship to everything else.

**PM:** Yeah, we're just out of control because of our brains, otherwise we'd be more in tune with everything.

**SH:** Yeah. So I guess that's why. I mean, I think just from having children and witnessing the miracle of that, and just the wonder of all that stuff, I think she's probably accumulated a lot of experiences with power and presence.

**PM:** Well, I would gladly go on for hours, but you've been very kind with your time. And I know you've got a busy day ahead of you. So I'm going to let you go. And you need to talk to the bus driver who hit that car.

**SH:** I do.

[laughter]

**SH:** Thanks, Frank. Nice talking to you, too.

**PM:** Absolutely. I pursued this interview in vain for quite a long time, so it's very nice, after seeing you twice recently, to have this conversation, and be able to share it with all the readers.