

Transcript

I Couldn't Throw It Out – Podcast Episode 2 – My Joni Mitchell Tapes – Part 1 of 2

THEME SONG EXCERPT: I Couldn't Throw It Out

I couldn't throw it out
I have to scream and shout
Before I turn to dust
I've got to throw it out
Before I turn to dust
I've got to throw it out

END OF THEME SONG EXCERPT

MICHAEL: Hello Sally Libby!

SALLY: Hello Michael Small.

MICHAEL: Here we are. It's the second episode of our podcast – which goes by the name I Couldn't Throw It Out. So I'm gonna tell you a story or two about some very important objects. And you're supposed to inspire me to throw them out. Which brings us to our first spoiler.

SALLY: I thought your mother was the first spoiler.

MICHAEL: That's good. The puns are flowing early today. Maybe you'll get them out of your system. The actual spoiler is this: There is NO way I will ever ever throw out the objects I'm sharing with you today. I'm taking them with me right into the cremation fire. Because these treasures are a perfect record of one of the very best days of my life -- when one of my craziest wishes came true. To give you a hint, I want to start by reading to you.

SALLY: Hold on. Let me get settled in my crib.

MICHAEL: I doubt you'll find this settling. Here goes...

*In the land of mass frustration
The judges are sleeping
Counting wooly little lawyers
And grinding their teeth
Outside my sleepless window
The Hollywood sirens are shrieking
While down a searchlit alley
Runs some lost belief*

SALLY: Wow. That's some image. A belief getting cornered in an alley like a criminal!

MICHAEL: Yes, and what about the judges who are counting wooly little lawyers instead of counting sheep? And the fact that the window is sleepless, not the person looking out of it.

SALLY: Don't tell me YOU wrote this.

MICHAEL: Are you kidding? No way! It's an excerpt from "[The Windfall](#)," a song on a 1991 album called [Night Ride Home](#). It has a highly unusual melody and equally unexpected tuning. It's Written and performed by Joni Mitchell.

SALLY: Really? It sounds so different from the Joni I remember.

MICHAEL: But it isn't. It actually fits her pattern from the very start. And this explains why I REALLY want to tell you about these treasures that I extracted from one of my storage boxes a few weeks ago. -Here they are. Stacked on my desk. Four 90-minute cassette tapes in clear plastic cases which contain my full PEOPLE Magazine Interview in 1985 with Joni Mitchell. Plus, a thick typed transcript in a folder. And It's marked with one word in big orange letters. It says: Joni.

SALLY: That's quite a haul. Why do I have a feeling that there's a tale behind it?

MICHAEL: Oh There always is. And This one began on February 28, 1972, the winter of our discontented 9th grade.

SALLY: You remember the exact date???

MICHAEL: Of course not, I found a hint on the Interwebs. On that fateful day... I was lucky enough to walk down our high school hallway and see Dean Folsom.

SALLY: He was so cool! It was like he was in 9th grade going on grad school in philosophy.

MICHAEL: Well, Dean had an even older cooler sister who had an extra ticket to a concert at the Music Hall in Boston. So Dean offered it to me. He told me that the concert was by Joni Mitchell and Jackson Browne. Now, on the scale of 9th graders in Topsfield Massachusetts, I saw myself as very sophisticated. Except that I didn't know the difference between Jackson Browne and James Brown. I thought I was going to a soul concert.

SALLY: Nerd!

MICHAEL: Luckily, I was the youngest child. So my parents had totally given up on discipline. They said, "You're 15 and you want to drive to a concert in the city with two teenagers we've never met? Go! Enjoy!" Next thing I know, I'm in the back seat, putting up Route 1. With all the neon lights in the darkness around us. We were stardust! We were golden! But, man, when that concert started, was I ever surprised by the amount of soul displayed by Jackson Browne.

SALLY: I guess Papa didn't have a brand new bag.

MICHAEL: He was good. But the soul meter did not flicker. On the other hand, when Joni Mitchell came out, I was blown away. I never imagined that someone like this could exist. Her voice was like a birdsong, it echoed from our velvet seats to the gold leaf on the ceiling. And she looked like nobody else. She was wearing a floral-printed pantsuit -- she told us she made it herself. What a cool thing to do! To make special clothes for us! As she strummed the dulcimer -- an instrument I'd never even heard of -- her straight blond hair hung down over her face. She was so intense and so cheerful at the same time. Right away, I loved her music more than anything. Anything. I wanted to hear that sound for the rest of my life. Which is how we get to my Aunt Evelyn.

SALLY: She was the follow-up act?

MICHAEL: Well she followed up. With a birthday present. The one I most wanted: Joni's [Blue](#) album. I played that record every day and drove my family crazy. They hated Joni's voice. They found it piercing, strange, unpleasant.

SALLY: Yea, same thing with my dad. When my sister Susan played Joni endlessly, he couldn't take it. Normally he was composed. But he'd lash out with "turn off that noise!"

MICHAEL: What was wrong with these people? Clearly, we had to educate the masses. So I bought all Joni's earlier albums and played them just as often, really loud.

SALLY: I gotta ask. You were a high school boy. Everyone else is listening to Grand Funk Railroad and Led Zeppelin...

MICHAEL: I listened to Led Zeppelin too! I had their second album. (singing) Gotta Whole Lotta Love. Bzzzzz...

SALLY: You were a regular metal head. I was too, with my braces.

MICHAEL: O.K. That's pun #2. You've got one left for today. By the way, I interviewed Jimmy Page and Robert Plant many years later. They're into Joni Mitchell too. So there.

SALLY: They couldn't love her as much as you did. What was it about her that got you so obsessed?

MICHAEL: So many things. We're used to the sound now. But back then, it was shocking. All those strange tunings and close harmonies. The melodies were so complicated. They went places you never expected. But mostly it was the words. When you repeat a Joni Mitchell lyric, it fills your mouth up – just the way great poetry does. It feels so good to say the words. You can almost chew on them. Listen to this one...

*If I'd only seen through the silky veils of ardor
What a killing crime this love can be
I would have locked up my heart in a golden sheath of armor
And kept its crazy beating under strictest secrecy
High security.*

Now just humor me for a minute and say these words: [The Silky Veils Of Ardor](#)

SALLY: [The Silky Veils Of Ardor](#)

MICHAEL: Could you feel it when you said it, the way your mouth wraps around it?

SALLY: You're right. You can chew on it.

MICHAEL: And Joni kept it up right until "[Shine](#)," which was her last album of new songs. It came out in 2007 – 15 years ago. It included her prophesy about climate change... This is what she wrote.

*We live in these electric scabs
These lesions once were lakes
No one knows how to shoulder the blame
Or learn from past mistakes
And who will come to save the day?
Mighty Mouse?
Superman?
Bad dreams are good in the great plan.*

See what she did at the end? Twists it. It sounds like a bit of ancient wisdom. And it's followed by this churning phrase on the piano, the sound of time rolling on, things continuing, repeating. And healing themselves.

SALLY: So it must have been like a national holiday for you when a new Joni Mitchell album came out.

MICHAEL: No! It was torture!

SALLY: What? That makes no sense.

MICHAEL: After Joni had a big hit with the **Court And Spark** album, she started experimenting. So I'd get all excited about buying the new album and then... I couldn't make heads or tails of it. Sometimes I had to sit with the new one for years. Then suddenly, it would open up to me.

SALLY: So you're a slow learner!

MICHAEL: Well, speaking of slow learning... you know I'm reading Proust now, and I love to quote him.

SALLY: Don't feel obligated. You can skip it.

MICHAEL: Come on! I have to inflict all my obsessions on you. I just read a section that is totally relevant. Proust was writing about a piece of music, really powerful music that people couldn't absorb it the first time they heard it. Listen to this. He wrote...

The reason a work of genius is not easily admired at first is that the person who created it is extraordinary, unlike anyone else.

SALLY: So you're telling me he predicted Joni.

MICHAEL: I'm telling you that she was so far ahead of me that I couldn't catch up. And I wasn't alone. Which didn't always work well for her career. Think about it. What's the latest Joni Mitchell song that you remember?

SALLY: (singing) Help me, I think I'm falling... into a bottomless pit...

MICHAEL: Those are not the correct lyrics Sally. But you made my point. That song was released in 1974. And she recorded more than a dozen albums of new music since then.

SALLY: Now I get why you wanted to meet her. But how did you pull it off? I can't see Joni wanting to be in PEOPLE Magazine.

MICHAEL: It wasn't the most natural fit. But at the time – in 1984 – Joni liked to go dancing at parties. And I covered parties for PEOPLE magazine. What a coincidence. It was kind of a racket. All the nightclubs had VIP rooms with food and alcohol and other illicit pleasures for celebrities. So I'd show up and write an item about who was there, which made regular people want to pay big bucks to get inside. So each night, the publicists would send me a guest list in advance. When I saw that Joni was gonna be at a nightclub called Kamikaze, that was my in.

SALLY: Oh, so you stalked her.

MICHAEL: Sally! I didn't stalk Joni. I stalked everybody. That was my job. So I get to the club and there she is. As usual, she was wearing a really nice dress and she looked beautiful. A little bit of odd trivia: She was there with a friend who is the sister of the very beautiful model Lauren Hutton. So I went up and asked Joni to dance. Remember those moves you saw me do in the high school cafeteria?

SALLY: I wish I could forget.

MICHAEL: Well, I used 'em. And somehow it made an impression. I know this because of an interview Joni did 11 years later with a Canadian radio show. They reprinted part of it on jonimitchell.com. I just sent it for you to peruse it...

SALLY: Now I'll do the reading. Let me see. Here it is...

Joni talked of meeting a writer named Michael Small. Small told her he would like to do an in-depth interview with her for PEOPLE magazine. "Isn't that a contradiction in terms?" Joni countered. Small said that the magazine "owed him one." The only trouble, he confessed to Joni: "I'm not a very good writer yet."

MICHAEL: Yes, I said that.

SALLY: So you took the humble route. I'll have to try that the next time I want an interview with Ryan Reynolds.

MICHAEL: I wasn't humble. I was honest. And unfortunately I felt I had to drive the point home. Which means that this is the time to jump ahead and give you a sample of my stupidity during the interview.

SALLY: Couldn't we start with Joni's brilliance?

MICHAEL: That comes later. The comparison between us makes her seem even more amazing. So here's some context: I had already been working for PEOPLE for five years. I should have known what I was doing. But a genetic flaw got in the way: I'm a fool. Or at least I was then. Around hour four, I was trying to tell Joni that I felt guilty for taking so much of her time, without actually getting a story. But you'll see the pattern. Gibberish came out of my mouth, not English.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

MICHAEL: The other thing I'm a little worried about is like, Am I... I mean, you haven't said anything but, like, am I keeping you two... I mean, I...

JONI MITCHELL: *This is your day. I'm gonna give you like, we just decided to, you know... I think we could really do a good article.*

MICHAEL: Oh, I would... I mean... The other thing you should know... I mean, you're not talking to, you know, Norman Mailer here... I'm a writer who's still learning. I don't think I'm bad. I think I'm good. But, you know, I don't think with journalism that I always string together sentences brilliantly. I'm just telling you that up front because I want you to KNOW that I'm going to do my best...

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: Oof. That's embarrassing.

MICHAEL: There are so many reasons why I cringe when I hear that. But, for some reason, Joni signed up for this. After our fateful dance, she said I could interview her when she released a new album. I thought that would be soon. But unfortunately after a year, nothing. Then she changed managers. Her new manager was Peter Asher. Does that name ring a bell with you?

SALLY: I'm hearing more of a gong than a bell.

MICHAEL: He was in a group called Peter and Gordon. And they had a hit called "A World Without Love." Remember that? (singing) "I don't care what they say..."

SALLY & MICHAEL (singing) "I won't stay in a world without love."

SALLY: Wow. That's an oldie.

MICHAEL: I had a single of that song when I was 7. And I played it endlessly on my portable record player. Do you detect a pattern here? So I was excited to meet him. But, unfortunately, his office did not seem equally excited about Joni in PEOPLE Magazine. They gave me the feeling that it would never happen. Can you imagine my dejection and disappointment?

SALLY: Yup.

MICHAEL: But one key detail turned things around: Joni had not forgotten me. I'd even argue that I had a subliminal effect on one of the songs on the album she recorded after meeting me. One of the songs starts like this....

*I'm reading People rags in the checkout lane
Look here's a hunk, here's a honey
Celebrated people and their claims to fame*

SALLY: Wow. That song is YOUR claim to fame. You'll live forever!

MICHAEL: Joni must have told Peter Asher that the interview had to happen. So, finally in 1985, I met her at his office.

SALLY: Nice work!

MICHAEL: When I listen to the interview now, it's a time capsule. Suddenly, I'm 28 again and Joni is 42.

SALLY: A lot of water over the bridge since then for both of you.

MICHAEL: For sure. Both of us have evolved in many ways. In fact, one example may be how we started the interview. This is one of our first exchanges:

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

MICHAEL: Is there someone's music that you listen to and get that sort of feeling? You know, listening to the words and really thinking about them and... and...

JONI MITCHELL: *Dylan. **Blood On The Tracks** I guess was the last one that I really enjoyed. And some of the outtakes from the album before this that I heard. For instance, this friend of mine had some of the outtakes from it. And there was one image, man, that I thought was incredible. It was never released. I mean, sooner or later, it'll show up on one of these collection albums I hope. But it was... the image was... (imitating Dylan) You think I'm sleeping. But I'm lying here like a rattlesnake, watching you trample on the flowers. (laughs) You know, that's probably a paraphrase. 'Cause I only heard it once but the image of it I thought was fantastic. So that's one of the last things of his that really, like, stuck in my Quotation Department.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: So cool. Joni does Dylan! Do you think she changed her mind about that?

MICHAEL: Good question. There was a little controversy in 2010 when Joni seemed to be critical of Dylan in a Q&A with the LA Times. She later said that she was misunderstood. All I can say is, in my two days with Joni, she praised Dylan about four times.

SALLY: So you got off to a positive start.

MICHAEL: With one big challenge. Peter Asher seemed to think that a PEOPLE Magazine interview could be done in, like, 30 minutes tops. But I was such an unfocused interviewer and Joni was such a good talker that when Peter came in to tell us it was quitting time, about all I had were a few random stories. I panicked. My boss had flown me to LA. And I had nothing! Joni could see the look on my face. So, when he left the room for a minute, she wrote the address of her house in Malibu on a piece of paper and slipped it to me. Then she told me to come by the next day just after lunch.

SALLY: Now I love her too.

MICHAEL: You'll love her even more when you hear that she was as worried about my interview as I was. The next day, we were talking with Larry Klein, he was her husband at the time, and he's an amazing bass player who's on many of her records. She said this:

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *I was saying to Larry after the first leg of this, "I don't know what he's going to do with this." Because I'm answering these sometimes two and three times. You know what I mean? The first time I'll say it and, you know, almost the same way you hone it down on paper, I hear it come out and I say, "No, no, that's too loose. And then I come back around. Maybe.. maybe the third time you got something that's...*

MICHAEL: Yeah, exactly.

JONI MITCHELL: *...that's fairly precise.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: She was so nice to my friend.

MICHAEL: Unfortunately, I made a big mistake. Before meeting Joni, I thought it was a good idea to have brunch in Santa Monica with my college roommate Charlie. I don't know if you'll remember this, but Charlie is a very optimistic person; he always feels that any situation can turn out fine. All during brunch, I was nervous about being late for my interview. Charlie kept saying, "Don't worry. Piece of cake. She's right up the road. Good times!" Then, at one point, he looked up and said, "Uh oh. You'd better go fast. You're gonna miss it." I raced out of there, and zoomed up the Pacific Coast Highway. I got there about 20 minutes late. And guess what I see? Joni's out in the driveway waiting for me.

SALLY: I can't believe you made her wait for you.

MICHAEL: I guess I'm lucky that Joni was more patient with me than you are. Let me tell you about her house.

SALLY: Beautiful, right?

MICHAEL: Her main place is up in the Hollywood Hills. I didn't see that. This was her beach house. And, man, what a location. A few houses away from Larry Hagman – who was super-famous from starring in Dallas. But Joni's house was not at all Hollywood. Simple. Airy. Not too big. With glass facing the ocean. Her paintings on the walls. The kind of place where you walk in and feel so comfortable, totally at home. I set up my tape recorder on the coffee table. And she sat across from me.

SALLY: I hope you finally had your questions in order. What did you ask her?

MICHAEL: I knew I should start with her new album, **Dog Eat Dog**. Listening to it now, I see why she and Larry put at least five months into recording it. Joni was experimenting for the first time with synthesizers.

The result is extremely intricate. Little snippets of sounds woven in surprising ways into tightly-stitched backing tracks. The only problem: Most people just don't listen carefully enough – or they don't have the right equipment – to catch all that detail. In my case, I listened on a noisy plane to an advance cassette that Joni had dubbed for me. Of course, I didn't understand what she was doing. Which led to a question I'd had for a long time: Why did she keep changing styles, making it so hard for me to keep up?

Later, when we took a break and went to a local diner for dinner, she started to answer. She described her musical evolution to me:

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *When you've been around long enough, people only remember certain facets of you. You know, I see Joni Mitchell – that folksinger from the '60s -- if that's who was writing the article got off. He remembers me as a '60s act. The other day, I saw, you know, the confessional writing style of the '70s. So different people associate me with different decades, right? I'm just living here. Unfortunately, I'm carrying this tale of history around behind me. But I'm as much in the '80s as I was in the... I was there in all of them. You know what I mean? I was in the '50s as a dancer. I was a punk when that was an insulting word, before it was revitalized and it became glamorous... We never called ourselves punks. We were called punks by the authorities. So I've seen the '50s come back. And now the '60s are coming back. But I'm not... I'm in the '80s.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: So she kept changing with the times and you couldn't.

MICHAEL: When I got a little more relaxed, I finally got to the point. Why did she leave so many of us behind with what seemed like a huge change in her style? It all started in 1975 with an album that didn't seem to fit into any genre at all. It was called **The Hissing Of Summer Lawns**:

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

MICHAEL: You know, I was pretty much of a fan. And when that album came out, I was like, really pissed off. And I really did not like it. And now it's my favorite. Of all of them.

JONI MITCHELL: *So take it back. (laughs)*

MICHAEL: You know, I can't really....

JONI MITCHELL: *It was so hated. That really hurt my feelings. After that I thought, "Well, I'll finish up this contract, then I'll quit. It's too personal."*

MICHAEL: Well, why do YOU think people hated it?

JONI MITCHELL: *Because they liked the one before it so much. That's one possibility. I've seen that happen a lot. That it has to do with... when you really love something a lot, it sets up an expectation. You want to get that same feeling out of it. And your imagination is always better than reality. So when the next thing comes out, it's disappointing. But with **Hissing**, you might tell me why you hated it so much.*

MICHAEL: Well, first of all, at that point, I really didn't like jazz. And...

JONI MITCHELL: *That really wasn't jazz, though. If you listen to it now.*

MICHAEL: It sounded to me like it was then.

JONI MITCHELL: *Everybody said it was. You sure you weren't influenced because you were told it was jazz?*

MICHAEL: Yes. I didn't read that much.

JONI MITCHELL: *Mm – Hm...*

MICHAEL: I was like, I didn't like the instrumentation that much. I wanted to hear more just piano and acoustic guitar and stuff like that.

JONI MITCHELL: *That's been one of my problems is that people who like that, they won't let me do anything else.*

MICHAEL: I guess you know, the later albums really are more experimental in general. I mean, you just started experimenting.

JONI MITCHELL: *What would you do if you got killed off? If you were loved, then hated, what would you do after that? Would you go back and kiss ass? Or would you, like, pander to them? Or would you just say, "Be true to yourself, y'know?"*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: It must feel so terrible. You put in so much work and you think you've done a great job and people hate it.

MICHAEL: Especially when the music sounds so personal. On her early albums, she put very private emotions out there – in a way that few people did before her if any. At the time, that was very unusual. I asked her why she took that risk...

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

MICHAEL: Like, that kind of stuff you don't share it with people usually, unless you're Joni Mitchell. And do you have sort of mixed feelings about I'm sending out my... I'm really sending out something deep upon the world?

JONI MITCHELL: *Yeah. You do have mixed emotions. I'll tell ya, the reason for doing it is, you know, you're always hearing actresses – like, women especially -- complaining that there are no good roles for women. So here I have the luxury to create good roles. And to create deep meaning. However, the pressure of being both the writer and so-to-speak the actress for the material is double-fold. On that level you're vulnerable. But if you're gonna do it, you gotta do it all the way.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

MICHAEL: But here's the interesting thing. When I asked Joni for the story behind some of her later songs, her response was: "Pure fiction." Storytelling. In fact, her lyrics from the very start present a cast of characters who are not Joni Mitchell: a gambling dry cleaner, a stifled suburban wife, the jilted lover [Marcie](#), the abused little girl [Cherokee Louise](#).

SALLY: I read that many of her songs are about her love affairs. Are you saying it isn't true?

MICHAEL: I'm questioning your question. A few years ago, I read a biography of Joni that infuriated me because it kept trying to tie her songs back to her romances with famous people. That totally misses the point. No matter who inspired the songs, they're about big things that apply to everyone. Now, with male singers – like Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, Elvis Costello – I don't hear constant questions about the women who inspired their songs. So why do we ask Joni?

SALLY: You're right. It's sexist. I apologize.

MICHAEL: Well, you don't have to get too contrite. Because of course I asked about it. I wanted to know too. She had nothing but nice things to say about two of her most important partners: Graham Nash and the drummer John Guerin, who died in 2004. But she also told me why she hates being asked about this...

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *You know, it was something that happened to me – it was in the middle of all this supposed free love generation. I was made... Rolling Stone sort of made a scapegoat out of me. What they did is that they drew a heart in Rolling Stone with a lot of.... they made a kind of Mata Hari out of me. You know, they drew all these lines. "Old Lady of the Year" I think they called me. All of these lines of broken hearts. They tried to portray me like this was this kind of heartbreaker creature. And it made me very sensitive to it -- and in a way kind of responsible regarding things like that. Think about it. Heartbreaker. It's a very romantic image. They say that about Madonna now. It gives her a certain distinction and color, you know? But think about it another way. A heartbreaker. A heart is something people need. You know what I mean?*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: That kind of breaks MY heart. I ... like it's so public. Did you see that slideshow in the New York Times for the 50th anniversary of the **BLUE** album?

MICHAEL: I think about 20 people sent it to me.

SALLY: That's the first time I learned that the song **River** was about Graham Nash. Now I wish I didn't know. It's so easy to identify with that song. We all can imagine it's about us.

MICHAEL: And that's just what I was saying earlier. But for some reason, writers always want to connect Joni to other famous people. I made her go through a list of female vocalists and tell me what she thought of them. (Side note: She said Bonnie Raitt was a good old gal and Linda Ronstadt was a sweetheart.) Morrissey, when he interviewed Joni did the exact same thing in 1997 for an interview in Rolling Stone. He pushed her to give an opinion about Melanie – and Joni sidestepped it. But the question is why do we do this?

SALLY: You tell me. YOU worked at PEOPLE Magazine.

MICHAEL: I should have figured it out. In a mere 16 years. But the truth is... I never did. I just kept asking celebrities all those questions.

SALLY: I'm curious about famous people because it seems like they live in a special world. I want to hear about it from the inside. It gives me something to imagine, like more exciting than daily life.

MICHAEL: Actually, when I listen again to the questions I asked Joni, it seems like I was looking for the flip side of that. I wanted to find an overlap between Joni's life and our less exciting lives. A kind of validation. So I had lots of questions about what she was like in high school.

SALLY: Class poet.

MICHAEL: Maybe secretly. But that's one of the big surprises. Joni claims to be anti-academic. With all her genius for lyrics, she told me several times that she hated studying poetry in school.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *You know, I always hated poetry. In the school system. You know, Ode To A Daffodil. There was one poem I could remember in the school system that I liked by EJ Pratt. I can't really quote it but I remember that the imagery struck me as great. It was called The Dying Eagle and it was about this eagle on his perch – you know, the mighty bird – seeing a plane go by and contesting it and then coming back like all kind of hunched over himself onto the perch, that he was no longer king of the skies.*

MICHAEL: You've been writing that one ever since.

JONI MITCHELL: *Yeah. That's the only poem... That struck me as really profound. But most of it didn't have anything to do with our lives. And Chuck Berry was the closest thing to a living poet. And then Dylan, of course, sprang up.*

END AUDIO CLIP

MICHAEL: Well, Joni definitely gives hope to everyone who didn't make the honor roll in high school.

AUDIO CLIP START

MICHAEL: You flunked out senior year?

JONI MITCHELL: *I failed three subjects.*

MICHAEL: Do you remember what three subjects they were?

JONI MITCHELL: *Mathematics, physics, I forget what the other one was. Biology, I think.*

MICHAEL: Were you doing a lot of drugs then or something? Or you just weren't interested? Or you weren't going? Or what?

JONI MITCHELL *(laughs) No. I used to fall asleep in school in the morning. I've always been nocturnal and I used to lay up at night, at about 11 o'clock, the radio stations locally would sort of shut down and the Hit Parade would come drifting up from Texas on these bands. So I'd lie with the radio under the covers and I'd say, "Just one more to myself, just one more." And it would be 3 or 4 in the morning and I'd still be listening to the radio.*

LARRY KLEIN: It's almost over.

JONI MITCHELL: *And I couldn't get up in the morning. And I'd drag myself to school but it was just incredibly dull to me. I'd just fall asleep. Couldn't focus on it. Couldn't see what it had to do with my adult life. I was just anxious to be out and traveling and seeing things first-hand.*

AUDIO CLIP END

SALLY: I relate to that too. Math was nearly my undoing. But the Latin prize was mine.

MICHAEL: You did have your studious side. But so did Joni. She was very busy in high school.

AUDIO CLIP START

JONI MITCHELL: *So when I got to high school, I did the backdrops for the school plays. I illustrated for the yearbook and the school newspaper. I ran a little column called "Fads and Fashions." You know like so I was...*

MICHAEL: The People Magazine of....

JONI MITCHELL: *The People Magazine of Old Saskatoon. You could get an eye for the trends, and you know...*

MICHAEL: That was in the high school newspaper?

JONI MITCHELL: *Mm Hmmm.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: That does NOT sound like me. It sounds like you. So many activities.

MICHAEL: Turns out that her favorite activity was dancing. Which may help to explain how I met her – and how I got the interview.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

MICHAEL: You were fairly rebellious then, I guess. Were your parents upset? Did they...

JONI MITCHELL: *My teens were not easy on them. I loved to dance. And there were two dances a week in town. Well, sort of public. The YMCA – of course, I guess that was the same in this country too -- was the weekend dance. There was a YW one on Friday and a YMCA on Saturday. And there were other dances in the town. But they were kind of in forbidden territories. They would be the equivalent of the Mudd Club in New York. Like, the Club 400. They were dark and forbidden places and they were pretty wild but I used to go to them when I was about 13. And there was no real danger. But there was a lot to look at. Knife fights breaking out. You know, I guess you could see why your parents wouldn't want you there. But somehow nothing ever happened. People protect a green kid. 17-year-olds would look out for you. People look out for you when you're really young and on the street. I remember just living for dancing. We finally instigated a Wednesday night dance, which was a street dance in front of the YW. Just 'cause we couldn't make it till the weekend. The week was just too long, ya know?*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

MICHAEL: You remember how we were into comedy in high school?

SALLY: Yes! In the Senior Frolics, we wrote that parody of The Exorcist! It was a laugh riot. To us, anyway.

MICHAEL: Well, this is where I found an unexpected connection to Joni. When she was in high school, she was into parody too.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *When I was in high school, I didn't have a lot of records, like albums. I had Oscar Brown Jr., Signifyin', I had Lambert Hendricks and Ross. "The Hottest New Sound in Jazz" – which was my Beatles.(singing) "I was blue and I was always wearing a frown." (talking) I knew all the lyrics and everything on that. I just wore that record out. And Miles...*

MICHAEL: Were you pre-Beatles?

JONI MITCHELL: *Yeah, beatnik. The Bohemian thing in New York coincided with my high school days. There as a little enclave of us that could, you know...*

MICHAEL:wore black...

JONI MITCHELL: *...leotards. Mostly in a satirical kind of way. I don't think we really took... I don't remember taking myself that serious with it. For instance, in high school, they had talent night and I recited some kind of, like, abstract poem in a three-legged bathtub with a long black stocking and a beret. You know, like, with a bongo player. And it was an attempt to send up the abstraction.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: That's a great image. But I'm beginning to understand why our siblings say that you and I are stuck in high school. Did you ask her about anything beyond those years?

MICHAEL: I forced myself. Here's what I found out: She graduated somehow and got a job modeling in a department store.

SALLY: Of course she did. Those cheekbones!

MICHAEL: This is how she earned the money to go to the College of Art in Calgary, Alberta.

SALLY: Wait. Your sister Debbie lives in Calgary. She never let on that it was such a hip place.

MICHAEL: Joni was there 20 years earlier, in 1963. And I think she might have traveled in slightly different circles than Debbie does. After doing so poorly in high school, suddenly Joni was the star of her art classes. It looked as if she'd have a career as an artist. She hadn't thought of going into music until one day, she got an instrument that she no longer plays. At least not on her albums.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

MICHAEL: Was it a used ukulele, or was it new when you...

JONI MITCHELL: *No, it was new. As a matter of fact, the day that I got it, I had just had my wisdom teeth pulled and with a mouth full of bleeding sutures, this friend of mine and I went over to... It cost \$36 or something. I didn't have enough money to get a... It was all I could afford. It was as close to a real guitar as I could afford. So...*

MICHAEL: But you were already performing after playing for one year with no training or anything.

JONI MITCHELL: *Mm.. huh.*

MICHAEL: And after one year you were performing. I can't believe it. And you were still doing Judy Collins songs and a couple of your own songs at this point?

JONI MITCHELL: *No, I didn't have any. I had been writing poetry ever since I was a child. But it was like, that was a private business. And I hadn't put together that... I had all these latent things. At 7 and 8, I was composing on the piano. But I had been discouraged by locals. That was considered playing by ear. I had been writing poetry but I didn't like poetry particularly. And I didn't really know what it was. So it wasn't until **Blonde On Blonde** and **Highway 61 Revisited** that I realized, "Oh, here I can put all this business together."*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

MICHAEL: She got so good that she started writing her own songs and went to Toronto to be a performer. That's when she caught the eye of a singer and actor named Chuck Mitchell. Within a few days, they decided to get married. Then they moved to the Detroit area, which was his home turf. They performed together, sometimes playing her songs. But something didn't go right with the marriage. And it may go back to the topic that interested me so much.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *And when I came to this country, I married into a hotbed of teachers. And my husband was frustrated with my lack of literacy. And at one point I said to Leonard Cohen, "I have to read, you know. It's time." And he said, "Oh, you don't need to read yet." 'Cause I was already writing. I had written most of the material that was to be the first two or three albums. People couldn't put together that if you hadn't read, you could write.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

MICHAEL: In any case, Joni went to New York alone.

SALLY: She woke up and it was a [Chelsea Morning](#)?

MICHAEL: Yes that's true, and she told me about her first apartment there, on West 16 Street.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *I was very young. The first thing I did as an act of independence when I moved into my apartment in New York was to paper the bedroom entirely with Elmer's Glue applied to the walls and rolls of aluminum cooking foil. I hung an American flag in the window and I decorated it all in red white and blue as an act of independence. (laughs) That was like my Independence Day celebration, right?*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

MICHAEL: Then in 1968, she recorded her first album with David Crosby as the producer.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *What it did was... You see, I came in on the tail end of a movement. Even though I was a singer/songwriter, the term had not been coined yet. So I looked to the unobservant like another Baez or another Judy Collins. And that era was already over when I came into it. So record companies were not – because of the fad-istic nature of the business – too keen on hiring something. Folk rock was coming along. They were signing up bands that were plugged in. That's what the "[Urge for Going](#)" is about. Originally, it was "It's like running for a train that left the station hours ago/I've got the urge for going/but there's no place left to go." In other words, you know, what I did had become archaic. Before I even started, practically.*

MICHAEL: Except you proved that wrong because, you know, you got a tremendous following as soon as you started recording.

JONI MITCHELL: *Well that was part of Crosby's power and insight. Because David at that time was in The Byrds and The Byrds were, you know, the hottest folk-rock, they were the hottest "new wave of that time" act. And he was afraid that the company in order to try to dress me up and make me look like what was new, were gonna, like, stick a band all over that music and ruin it. So he said, "I'm gonna produce you. But what I'm going to... I'm gonna tell them that I'm going to produce you. But I'm not going to produce you. I'm going to*

take you into the studio. That way, we'll keep the company off our back. And they're gonna think I'm gonna make a folk rock album. But in fact I'm gonna just let you do what you do." Because he believed in it. "And anything we add," he said, "will be just like you're sitting in a sidewalk café and you see a girl go by in blue jeans and after she goes by, you say 'Didn't that girl have a little bit of lace down the seam of her blue jeans?' That's how little we're gonna add," he said.

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: So, when did she start to see life from [Both Sides Now](#)?

MICHAEL: I did ask her about that song. She reminded me that Judy Collins recorded it in 1967, a year before Joni released her first album. That helped to boost both of their careers. But her reaction to it surprised me.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

MICHAEL: How do you feel about that song now? Is that one of the things you're most proud of that you've ever done? Or is it like 'Eh. Why did they make such a big deal out of it?' Or...

[JONI MITCHELL:](#) *Um... It's young work. It's not one of... you know, it's not one of the things that I'm the most pleased with. There are things I've written that are much more satisfying. And most of them are more obscure.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: How many times do you think that song has been recorded?

MICHAEL: It seems crazy but, [JoniMitchell.com](#) lists thousands of recordings.

SALLY: Thousands!

MICHAEL: And quite a range of people. Chet Atkins, the opera singer Kiri Ti Kanawa, Idina Menzel, Leonard Nimoy, Frank Sinatra, Jim Nabors, Neil Diamond.

SALLY: That song touches a nerve with a lot of people. There's something profound in it.

MICHAEL: Joni thought so too when she wrote it. But then – just as you'd expect from her – she changed:

AUDIO CLIP BEGINS

[JONI MITCHELL:](#) *I think that's a thing that happens with youth anyway... is that things strike you more frequently as profound in your '20s. You know, like, "Oooo." I was always, like, "Oh, I gotta write that down" in my '20s. In my '30s, I got a little lax-er. And I used to consider it "muse food." When I get the impulse to go write it down and I didn't, you know, I would justify it by "Well, you gotta feed something to the muse." The sacrifice, right? In my '40s, you begin to think epically. If you say "tomato," I can think of 10 tomato stories. You know, like one-word symbols will trigger off any number of vignettes. This is where you become in danger of becoming a long-winded son-of-a-gun, just taking up air space in some bar. 'Cause your files are like...*

LARRY KLEIN: Extensive.

[JONI MITCHELL:](#) *Extensive, yeah.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

MICHAEL: Another thing I've noticed: From the very start, the melodies of Joni's songs seem to mimic the way our voices go up and down when we talk and then it gets exaggerated it into a melody. I thought Joni would find this to be the most brilliant observation she ever heard, which she didn't. But she did confirm that I was right about the care she puts into her lyrics.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *I tend to think of this... my job is to present a certain amount of something similar to literature. You can't really... you can't get too literary in the song form, although I do push vocabulary a little bit because I liked vocabulary. I like those words. They're magical to me. They mean specifically what they mean. Sometimes a metaphor of simple words will work better. But sometimes not. Sometimes a three-syllable word is exquisite there. You know, the French use three-syllable words as common language. Ours is getting abbreviated down and down and down to a grunt language. (laughs)*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

MICHAEL: You can particularly hear it in "[Furry Sings The Blues](#)," a song from the [Hejira](#) album in 1976. It's full of crisp sounds and images.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *Yeah, just a gift of sound. Ti-kk-sss-tt. See, that's what you're hearing I think. It's just the preciousness of the way these things come to you sometimes. Like I always think... one line, oh, I was in ecstasy when it came to me, it was on "[Furry Sings The Blues](#)" – like, trying to capture being a witness to an event and trying to capture in shorthand something that would be better done in another medium, for instance. With film, where you could get all the details in. And to condense it into language. It is a gift really when the words come. Like the part I really liked when I got it, when it was given to me basically, because that was the feeling. It was like, "Oh my God. That's got everything in it that you wanted." "Pawn shops glitter like gold tooth caps/In the grey decay, they chew the last few dollars off old Beal Street's carcass/carrion and mercy."*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: All these songs I've never heard of. I had no idea.

MICHAEL: So when you think of the biggest hit that Joni recorded, what song comes to mind?

SALLY: (singing) Paved paradise, put up a parking lot.

MICHAEL: Well, yes. From 1970. But I was hoping you'd say [Woodstock](#). The most famous recording of her song was by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. We all remember that. But what did you think of Joni's performance at [Woodstock](#)?

SALLY: I don't remember it exactly.

MICHAEL: Well, you just saved your credibility. Here's why...

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

MICHAEL: Did you... You didn't perform in Woodstock, did you?

JONI MITCHELL: No.

MICHAEL: But you definitely went.

JONI MITCHELL: *Well, no. I didn't go either. What happened was, the night before CSN and I played a gig in Chicago. It was either on Friday or Saturday night. And Sunday night, we were in New York and we were at the airport. It was CSN and Eliot Roberts and David Geffen and myself, all in the airport. And this was on Sunday, the last day of Woodstock. The following day I was supposed to do the Dick Cavett Show, which was then I think a morning show. And there was concern about getting people in and out of Woodstock. 'Cause it was already a mess by that day. And they felt they could get me in alright. But they didn't think they could get me out to fill this commitment the following day. So I stood at the airport with Geffen and we waved them all goodbye. And I was like The Kid That Couldn't Go, you know? We went back up to Geffen's apartment and I watched everything I could see about it on the news. And so the perspective of the song, it could never had been written had I gone. Because it was really written from the perspective of a fan that couldn't go.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

MICHAEL: Joni wrote plenty of sad songs. But she said that Woodstock is one of the only songs she ever wrote that made her cry when she performed it.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

MICHAEL: (laughing): You were crying because you weren't there.

JONI MITCHELL: *Well, no, I was just crying because I thought... I had maybe a naïve point of view but... I thought that Woodstock was in a way a kind of minor miracle. That people... Because it was a turning point. Up until that time, hippies really were second-class citizens and suddenly there was the beginning of a cooperation between the two generations in that town site ya know. There were a lot of things about it. In a way, it resembled a modern miracle to me in a way. The way people cooperated. And that day went by. Children were born. And there was a death and a birth. And people shared. You know, it was just kind of magnificent. And I used to get very emotional about it. I suppose the depravation colored the emotion too. But it was a turning point. It was a pinnacle. It was actually the height of the hippie thing. It kind of went downhill from there.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

MICHAEL: That same level of idealism is not as evident 16 years later on the **Dog Eat Dog** album. For the first time, the lyrics go pretty heavily into social issues. One song called "**Tax Free**" really skewers TV evangelists. Another song about Ethiopia describes the famine there in a very disturbing way. She said that was tricky for her.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *It's hard for me to take stances on anything. You know, there was a period where I thought, "Oh dear, I don't have any opinions. I need to have opinions." I felt like I kept saying to myself, "I don't know. I don't know. I don't know." And because culturally we consider it important to have opinions and to not know is to be stupid, I kinda panicked. In retrospect, I'd like to go back to that state. Knowing what I know about it now, that's something I'd like to obtain. But I didn't understand it at the time. Next thing I knew, I found myself to be very opinionated. Then I went through.... you know, with all that accompanies that... arguments. You know I still am to a certain degree opinionated. But my opinions do tend to change. You know, they change with more input. Ideas expand...*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

MICHAEL: Her ambivalence didn't disappear. Later, she wrote a song called "**Come In From The Cold**" where she clearly expresses regret about speaking out so bluntly.

SALLY: Maybe that's why she keeps painting. If anyone misunderstands it, they don't quote her.

MICHAEL: She still sees herself as a visual artist as much as a musician. She told one story about the time when she was living with Graham Nash – and how he had to adjust to all her creative projects.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *You know, I've always been visual. Went from line drawing... I guess it was in the early '70s, when Graham Nash and I lived together, because I'm so compulsively creative... at home, in the way I live at home... I'm always making things, right? So in order to live with me, you almost have to get into something right. So he did some stained glass. And he finally found a voice with his camera. He bought himself a camera. And he was an excellent photographer. He's just really... boy, he just sees things around him. He's quick that way. So he said, "Oh, you have to get a camera." This was after we split up. But he insisted. He bought me a really good camera.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: Their house was a very very very photographed house. With two cats in the yard.

MICHAEL: But it's the painting that lasted, not photography. Her paintings appear on nearly all her album covers. In fact, there's a big overlap between her visual art and her music. One of the things she told me is that she hears the instruments in her songs like colors. So if there's suddenly a wind instrument and it sounds unusual, that's Joni adding a color to her musical painting. When I met her, she had been obsessed with creating giant paintings of wolves – one of which became the cover of the **Dog Eat Dog** album.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *Well, the **Dog Eat Dog** painting was like an obsession. If I laid eyes on it, it would grab me and wouldn't let me, you know, wouldn't let me stop working on it to the point of exhaustion. And often during pockets of immense fatigue, the visionary aspect of it would become more intense, almost like tired to the point of hallucination, you know, it drove me like that.*

MICHAEL: So you would stay up all night working on it?

JONI MITCHELL: *We'd come home from the studio some nights at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and I'd see it out of the corner of my eye in passing and I'd still be at it at 5 o'clock the next afternoon, having not eaten, having not slept. (laughs) It wouldn't let me go. But that was probably... that piece more than any other was just... had me.*

MICHAEL: That's not the album cover?

JONI MITCHELL: *That was what was to be the album cover.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: I'm surprised she didn't get more famous as a painter. Is she in a fancy gallery?

MICHAEL: She's been in gallery shows. But she never reached the same level as she did with her music. Actually, she told me that this suited her fine.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *If it's too unique, they can't recognize it. And yet they're screaming for innovation. They need to put you in a nice little group so the cream can rise to the top and they have something which they can compare. Without comparison, they can't tell whether it's any good or not.*

MICHAEL: And you're not an "East Village Artist."

JONI MITCHELL: *Yeah, right. I don't come out of a school, I don't think. I mean, what I've been doing is looking at pictures. As I've been traveling as a musician in Europe, I've gone to the galleries to see what the museums deem to be masterpieces. I look at them. Sometimes they speak to me and something goes into my soul. It's just the same that you hear music and later... Anytime you admire something sooner or later, something like that is gonna come out in your work. I learn like that through osmosis. The act of admiration is a moment of inspiration. Simultaneously, the act of admiring... the true of appreciation of it means, "Aha!" A lightbulb goes off. A recognition of sorts. And sooner or later, tomorrow or two years down the road, whatever it was that you loved about that is gonna leak out into the work. That's where the tributaries come.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: When you listened to the interview tapes was there any other surprise that you discovered?

MICHAEL: I was more surprised by what I didn't discover. One strong memory was nowhere on the tapes. It must have been during my last set of questions after the tape recorder was off. I asked Joni about the song "Little Green" from the **BLUE** album. When I put together the pieces of the puzzle in the lyrics, it sure sounded like a song about giving a child up for adoption. So I asked her in my usual awkward way if she ever had children. She paused and said, "I was never a mother." Which was, in a way, true – because she didn't raise her daughter. Of course, I was such a lame reporter that I didn't press her to clarify. So I never learned that she got pregnant after a short college romance – and had put her daughter in a foster home before she met and married Chuck Mitchell. But, when she decided to talk with the press about reuniting with her daughter, who do you think she went to?

SALLY: You?

MICHAEL: Not quite. She gave the story to PEOPLE. I'd like to think I inspired her to trust them.

SALLY: Warning! Narcissism attack!

MICHAEL: You're right. Better move on. When I got back to New York after the interview, Pat Ryan – who was the head of PEOPLE – asked to see the transcript. This is someone who had read hundreds of interviews. She went through dozens of pages and scribbled little notes in the margins. She wrote: "Joni's descriptive powers are amazing." On another page, Joni described a lawyer, she said he spoke with "diamond syntax clarity but atrophied emotionally." Pat wrote in the margin: "She actually talks like this? Wow!" On the next page, when Pat noticed my lack of interview finesse, she wrote: "You jump around a bit, don't you?" Pat was a very generous person.

Anyway, Pat's response validated what I had witnessed with my own eyes and ears. Humans can reach a level of greatness that is beyond normal standards. I had so many expectations and Joni exceeded all of them. She was generous, patient, humble, funny, and what a mind.

Looking down at my arm now -- with bumpy veins and age spots – I keep thinking this arm, this arm right here has been in the presence of greatness. For me, it was the equivalent of spending a day with Beethoven in 1800 before they knew his music would live forever. Which is very different from Joni's own view of herself:

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *Probably the only thing that I think is extraordinary about me at all is my focus. You know, the thing that makes me different is that I do this work, that I have to do this work. Not everybody has that drive, okay? I'm subject to the same alterations of attention span. I know their attention span is altered because mine is. And I have to fight against it. To be a good listener. Since I sure do talk a lot, I have to fight this attention-span business. I assume that my desire for change and my discovery of "Oh I like this!" Therefore I will go pursue this because I'm interested, I'm drawn over here. Keeping interested in life is what it's all about. If I'm interested in that, there must be a long line behind me of people, or a line of some sort, who are similarly interested, you know, in that way. Because I assume I'm ordinary, I assume that what I'm interested in will be interesting to other people.*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: I'm happy to hear that my friend had such a good bonding experience.

MICHAEL: Well I did drive her a little crazy toward the end with my dumb questions. I was trying to get Larry to tell some good stories about being married to Joni. But I wasn't asking the question right.

AUDIO CLIP STARTS

JONI MITCHELL: *This is like... this is like that TV show...*

LARRY KLEIN: This Is Your Life?

JONI MITCHELL: *No, no, the ones with the husbands and wife on.*

MICHAEL: The Newlywed Game

JONI MITCHELL: *That horrible game, that's what this reminds me of. (laughs)*

LARRY KLEIN: One thing about her that is...

JONI MITCHELL: *Small, I'll get your ass for this. (laughs)*

AUDIO CLIP ENDS

SALLY: She doesn't sound mad to me.

MICHAEL: I still don't understand why. After the article was published, I wrote her a thank you note for giving me so much time.

SALLY: I wonder if Woodward and Bernstein did that when they interviewed Deep Throat.

MICHAEL: My investigative reporting was not quite so refined. Especially since I intentionally addressed the note to Mrs. Larry Klein. I thought that was hysterically funny. But, later on, I'd wake up in the middle of the night, thinking, "Oh my God! I insulted Joni Mitchell after she was so nice to me."

SALLY: It wasn't the smoothest move.

MICHAEL: It was our kind of humor, Sally. But guess I shouldn't assume that others share it.

SALLY: Never

MICHAEL: Actually, it ended up okay. Five years later, I got a gig reporting on the concert of Pink Floyd's The Wall In Berlin, right after the Berlin Wall fell. It was a big celebrity event. I arrived with my press credentials to walk across the Alexanderplatz – which was still a big open field, not yet built up the way it is now. Suddenly, I hear a voice calling to me: "Smaaaaaaaaaaallllllll!"

SALLY: It wasn't Joni Mitchell.

MICHAEL: It was. And how do you think that made me feel?

SALLY: I think you probably floated right over the Brandenburg Gate.

MICHAEL: Right into heaven.

SALLY: Did you ever see her again?

MICHAEL: I wish. But, despite the amateurishness I've shown you today, I was mature enough to know that I wasn't really her friend. I was trying to be a sort of journalist. And, in that role, I never had a good excuse to see her again. Ever since I read about her brain aneurysm in 2015 and the very difficult recovery, I've been worried about her – the way lots of people worry about her. But actually, I try not to read too much about her. If I ever met her again which is unlikely, but still I wouldn't want to walk in with all the baggage. So now I've got a question for you. After listening to all of this, what about you? Did I change your mind about anything?

SALLY: Oh Yes. To be honest, I thought she'd be haughty and kind of defensive in the interview. She was anything but. Joni is delightful. Who wouldn't want to meet someone like that?

MICHAEL: I know I'm supposed to diminish my worldly possessions – since no one wants them. But these four cassettes of my interview. And the transcript. Sorry Sally, I won't be tossing those.

SALLY: I support you. You're absolved this time.

MICHAEL: Of course, the best thing I have from Joni – and everyone else has it too -- is her art. There were so many times when it helped me get by, past the challenges and disappointments that happen when you hang out on this earth for a long time. On the shelf next to my desk, I keep my favorite books. One of them is called "Joni Mitchell: The Complete Poems and Lyrics." And on the inside of the book is an inscription from my mom, Doris Small. It's written two years after Cindy and I got married – before Doris's life started to go downhill from diabetes. It says: "Happy birthday, Michael. To read to Cindy – with love. I remember. Mom."

I have so many favorite lyrics. But one of them stands out. It's called [Ludwig's Tune](#) – speaking of Beethoven it's a song I tried to decode in my high school bedroom from the album [For The Roses](#) that you gave me, Sal. Fifty years later, it's still so powerful to me.

The lyrics describe the piano as a construction of wires and trees and ivory. But the piano doesn't help the musician. The piano hides the music instead of revealing it. Just the way Beethoven's deafness made it harder for him to create music. The way every artist struggles against challenges to create their work. It's been that way for me with my writing, for Cindy with her painting and – presumably – for Joni Mitchell too, during an important and productive career that one day included an interview with me. Sometimes you want to give up. You think you'll never get there. You think you'll never get what you're going for. But this is how I find hope, in these lyrics that Joni wrote:

*You've got to shake your fist at lightening now
You've got to roar like forest fire
You've got to spread your light-like blazes all across the sky
They're gonna aim the hoses on you
Show 'em you won't expire
Not till you burn up every passion
Not even when you die
Come on now
You've got to try
If you're feeling contempt, well then you tell it
If you're tired of the silent night
Jesus! Well then you yell it
Condemned to wires and hammers
Strike every chord that you feel
That broken trees and elephant ivories
Conceal
-----*

MICHAEL: And, that's it for today. Thank you everybody for listening. Sally and I hope you'll tune in for the third episode of our podcast – which is the second installment of our Joni Mitchell extravaganza. Looking forward to it Sally

Sally: Sure am.

MICHAEL: Yea, This time, we'll share her longer stories, with fewer interruptions from me – so you'll definitely feel that you've heard both sides now.

And, if any of you Joni fans have not yet discovered, jonimitchell.com, please click there right now. You'll find tons of info, including a gallery of Joni's paintings. I'm not invested in it I just think it's a great site. Plus, some genius is running Joni's Facebook and Twitter accounts -- they post so much interesting and rare info and videos that it's overwhelming, in the best sort of way.

If you're curious about the amazing Joni music that you might have missed in recent decades, we've made a list of her best songs since 1975. You'll find it on our website: throwitoutpodcast.com.

And if you happen to use Apple Music, you can just click a link to hear the whole list.
Hey Sally, what did I leave out?

SALLY: How 'bout this? If you like what you heard, please tell you friends and distant acquaintances about I Couldn't Throw It Out. You can hear every episode on our website – throwitoutpodcast.com – AND any place else you get your podcasts.

MICHAEL: Except we're not on Spotify, we're following the lead of Neil Young and Joni. And if you want to know why they're not on Spotify ask Mr. Google.

SALLY: If you get two seconds to rate us on Apple Podcasts, we will be your best friends forever.

MICHAEL: Whether you like it or not.

SALLY: And if you want to be the first to know about future episodes of I Couldn't Throw It Out, please be sure to follow us on Twitter and Instagram at [throwitoutpod](https://twitter.com/throwitoutpod). I think that's it, yes?

MICHAEL: Yes! So now we get to rock out to our theme song, performed by Boots Kamp, Jen Ayers, and Don Rauf, leader of our the world's best rock band Life In A Blender. More of their music can be found on our WebSite. Ready, Sal?

SALLY: Ready Mike!

MICHAEL: Here we go!

THEME SONG: I Couldn't Throw It Out

Performed by Don Rauf, Boots Kamp, and Jen Ayers

Music by Boots Kamp and Don Rauf

Lyrics by Don Rauf and Michael Small

Out here in Nancy's – her big garage
This isn't a mi- This isn't a mirage
Decades of stories, memories stacked
There is a redolence of some irrelevant facts.

But I couldn't throw it out
I have to scream and shout
It all seems so unjust
But still I know I must
Before I turn to dust
I've got to throw it out
Before I turn to dust
I've got to throw it out

Well, I couldn't throw it out
I couldn't throw it out
I'll sort through my possessions
In these painful sessions
I guess this is what it's about
The poems, cards and papers
The moldy musty vapors
I just gotta sort it out.

Well I couldn't throw it out
I couldn't throw it out
I couldn't throw it out
I couldn't throw it out

END OF EPISODE 2