



**August 1, 2013**  
**Wayne Bledsoe**

When Lisa McCarter joined forces with singer-songwriters Mark Elliott and Gary Culley three years ago to form Runaway Home, it was a coalition of musical veterans.

Elliott and Culley were both established Nashville songwriters with lesser-known solo careers and McCarter had had Top 10 country hits as part of The McCarters — a Sevier County-born sister trio that seemed destined to stardom in the late 1980s.

In a call from her home in Nashville, McCarter says she hadn't expected to make a musical connection when she and her husband went to see Elliott and Culley perform at the Filling Station near where she and her husband live in Kingston Springs, Tenn.

"They have great hamburgers, so I just said, 'Honey, we'll get us a hamburger and if they're not good, we'll hurry up and eat and then we're leavin'!"

McCarter says the duo started singing songs by John Denver, Jim Croce, John Prine and other artists that she'd grown up listening to.

"My husband would say, 'Well, you know that song!' ... and I would be singing along with them."

McCarter and her husband arrived at 7:30 p.m. and didn't leave until 11:30 p.m.

The duo returned for another show three months later, and McCarter went up and introduced herself.

“I just said, ‘I’d love to sing harmony on a couple of songs one night when you’re here,’” she says.

One of the two was familiar with The McCarters and had liked their music. Not long afterward the trio sat around Lisa’s kitchen table.

“We sat there and sung all night!” says McCarter. “What had been just two songs to sing harmony on turned into 45 songs within two weeks! It was just like magic to me. When you sit down and the harmonies and everything automatically fits absolutely great. And it’s been great ever since then.”

McCarter and her sisters Teresa (Lisa’s twin) and Jennifer were in their 20s when they were signed to Warner Bros. in 1987. Lisa calls it her “big hair days.”

“It was so easy for us,” says Lisa.

Older sister and lead vocalist Jennifer McCarter kept calling the office of producer Kyle Lehning, who produced Randy Travis and other rising stars, and refused to be put off until Lehning agreed to listen to the McCarters.

He relented and asked when the trio could come down and sing.

“Jennifer said, ‘We’ll be there tomorrow!’ and there we went!”

The group’s debut album, “The Gift,” earned the trio excellent reviews and two Top 10 country hits, “Timeless and True Love” and “The Gift.” The group’s follow-up, however, “Better Be Home Soon,” did not fare as well.

McCarter says the label didn’t seem happy with what they were recording and kept pushing them to be more like a country version of then-popular pop hit makers Wilson Phillips.

“We’re from Sevier County! We couldn’t be Wilson Phillips. You know what’s in your hearts and we couldn’t be someone we weren’t.”

The McCarters asked out of their contract with Warner Bros. in 1992 and continued on as a trio until 1996.

“Then I developed callouses on my vocal cords and the doctor said I couldn’t sing for two years,” says McCarter. “I didn’t know what to do. I cried my eyes out.”

She still performs with her sisters on occasion. Jennifer has been a solo artist since 1996. Lisa and Teresa sometimes sing together in the Emmy-lators, an Emmylou Harris tribute act; the sisters sing together in church; and Lisa and Teresa have operated a cleaning business together since the 1990s.

She says in some ways things are just the same. She misses the mountains and occasionally gets back to Sevier County to visit family.

One thing, though, definitely has changed.

“I don’t have the big hair. Well, it’s kinda big, I guess, but not as big.”

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### **Runaway Home**

What: WDVX Blue Plate Special

When: noon, Saturday

Where: Knoxville Visitor’s Center, 301 S. Gay St.

Admission: free, the show will also be broadcast live at 89.9, 102.9 and 93.9 FM and simulcast at [www.wdvx.com](http://www.wdvx.com)