

# Laurie Morvan

It could have been a disastrous beginning. Laurie's womanizing, alcoholic father walked out on her mother and her when she was five years old. They were living in a little white house on Bittersweet Lane in New Lenox, Illinois. While it was a great struggle, and money was always in short supply, Laurie's mother was a hard worker and they managed to live a simple life in a series of too-hot-in-the-summer and too-cold-in-the-winter upstairs apartments in nondescript brick buildings in Joliet, Illinois. Her mom eventually remarried and they soon managed to buy property in a small town called Plainfield upon which the family built a house with their own hands.

Laurie grew up surrounded by all kinds of music. Her step-father, who Laurie considers her "Dad", was a hard core country fan. Her mom listened to the lighter side of rock and pop, and Laurie was a typical Midwest teenager who listened to all kinds of rock, pop, country, R&B, even disco. She absorbed it all...although she does remember her Dad actually banning her Kiss albums from the house! The one thing that was missing from that period is the blues. Even though Chicago was less than an hour away, in their tiny little microcosm of small town Illinois, Laurie was completely in the dark about the musical form that would soon shape her very existence.

In the high school band, Laurie played the flute during concert season and drums during marching season. Her best friend Brendan, who she met working a part-time job at the local lumber store, had an acoustic guitar, and so one day she gave it a try. It was amazing! In fact, she thought the guitar was "the greatest thing ever" and Laurie wrote her first song after learning only three chords. A busy kid during those teenaged years, Laurie was Salutatorian of her Plainfield High School graduating class, won the John Philip Sousa band award, earned a total of 12 varsity letters during her four years there, and was eventually inducted into the school's Athletic Hall of Fame.

At 18, she went off to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to get a degree in Electrical Engineering. She also attended the U of I's Institute of Aviation, earning private, commercial, instrument and multi-engine pilot's licenses. Her sophomore year, she was running out of money fast and missing playing sports. She tried out for the Illini Women's Volleyball team and won a full-ride volleyball scholarship. She now had a way to pay for her education and loved being on the team, where she made life-long friends with several teammates. She would always bring her acoustic guitar along on the team's road trips and it was quite common for her to get the whole team singing while they

were waiting for delayed flights to and from their games. Named MVP her senior year, Laurie won the A.R. Buck Knight Award and the George Huff Award for her excellence in academics and athletics.

Laurie eventually bought herself an electric guitar, a beautiful, white Les Paul Custom with gold hardware and an ebony fretboard, which she says, "took everything I had and then some to buy." Years later, it was sold for rent money back home while she was out on the road somewhere. Laurie laments that she still misses that guitar.

After graduating from college she took a job in aerospace and moved to Los Angeles, joining a rock & roll cover band as a rhythm guitarist and vocalist. It didn't take very long before she wanted to play lead guitar. Once she started, she progressed quickly due to her willingness to practice for long, long hours and never get bored. "The guitar is so fascinating to me," says Laurie, "an unending source of inspiration and wonder, something no mere human could ever master." It was then that she got her first Stratocaster: "It was red and shiny and sexy, and I was home, baby!" She quit her engineering job, never to return, and joined a road band doing Top 40 covers as its lead guitarist and vocalist. They traveled around California and Nevada playing 5 nights a week in clubs, casinos, hotels, and every dive bar that would have them. Laurie would play guitar 4 to 5 hours every night at the shows and practice 3 to 4 hours every day in her hotel room. She was ravenous about that guitar.

In the very early stages of developing her guitar style, Laurie learned from the world's greatest rock & roll players, nourished by the musical smorgasbord of their recordings. She couldn't get enough! All that intricate, detailed studying paid off, giving her the dexterity and vocabulary which allowed her style to develop organically its own unique voice. To Laurie, playing lead guitar is "a lot like doing a life-long dance of seduction with your true love. It's just as important to know when to shut up and listen as it is to hoot and holler, when to tease and when to please, when to be tough and when to be tender."

Her musical performances were rooted in guitar-driven rock as she was playing lead guitar and singing in a power trio. When she was introduced to the music of Stevie Ray Vaughan her whole life changed. She fell head-over-heels in love with Stevie's powerful, electric blues! He was the gateway through

"Stunning  
California axe  
slinger...  
exhilarating electric  
blues guitar style"  
*Modern Guitars*

"Morvan sings  
the strings"  
*Guitar Player*

which Laurie was introduced to a world of blues history she'd never been exposed to before. She says, "It was like being turned loose in an infinite, beautiful new universe!"

Once she started creating her own brand of red hot blues rock, she realized quickly that this was what she was born to do. Her guitar playing style sprang forth as an evolutionary leap into life from that primordial soup of electric blues, rock, and country she was listening to. She says, "Nothing had ever felt so real, so visceral, so expressive, so passionate, so sexual, so nurturing, so spiritual, so painful, so healing, so thrilling, so demanding, so all-encompassing and so perfectly suited to me. I genuinely feel most complete with my guitar in my hands and I don't expect that will ever change."

The next step was to begin recording her own music. Recording was expensive so that meant raising funds which in turn meant having to work at something besides music while still pursuing music. A terrible and painful sacrifice, but there was no way to get around it. Laurie got a Master's Degree in Applied Mathematics and taught college math classes to raise recording money.

Her first album was *Out Of The Woods* in 1997, and the band was called Backroad Shack in those days. Laurie wrote all 10 songs. Second in 2004, came *Find My Way Home*, where Laurie wrote 8 of the 11 songs and there was a name change to the Laurie Morvan Band. Her third CD, *Cures What Ails Ya*, was released in 2007, and came close to capturing the raw power, dynamics, versatility and passion of a Laurie Morvan Band live performance. Laurie wrote all 12 tracks on this one.

The release of that third CD was a turning point for the band, and a real highlight for Laurie was when *Guitar Player* magazine interviewed her for a two page feature article in their October 2007 issue. Next came an interview with *Vintage Guitar* magazine, a feature spot on Dan Aykroyd's *House of Blues Radio Hour* with *Kickin' Down Doors* chosen as the Blues Breaker Song of the Week, and a flood of great reviews and articles in *DownBeat*, *Blues Revue*, *Modern Guitars*, and others.

In February of 2008, the band advanced to the finals of the International Blues Challenge held in Memphis, TN. Their CD *Cures What Ails Ya* also made it into the finals (top 5) of the Blues Foundation's Best Self-Produced CD competition. Out of 160 acts that fought their way through their own regional competitions and made it to Memphis, the Laurie Morvan Band was the only one to advance to the finals of both the live band and CD competitions. Through the exposure of the IBC they were able to make connections for touring in the Midwest, something they do regularly now.

For her fourth CD, Laurie made the decision to work with an outside producer for the first time, co-producing with Steve Savage (Elvin Bishop, Robert Cray). In 2009, *Fire It Up!* was released, a classy, blues statement which showcased Laurie's continued growth as a songwriter, producer and guitarist. Laurie

wrote all 12 songs on *Fire It Up!* and on January 23, 2010, it won the Blues Foundation Award for Best Self-Produced CD at the International Blues Challenge. Once again the band was honored by the House of Blues Radio Hour when *You Don't Know About Me* was selected as the Blues Breaker Song of the Week.

A prolific writer with a seemingly unending source of inspired material, Laurie penned 11 new songs for her fifth CD, *Breathe Deep*, released in June of 2011. Once again, Laurie took the reins of co-producer, this time with bandmate and record label partner, Lisa Morvan. Another praise-worthy recording, this CD made it to the semi-finals of the Blues Foundation's Best Self-Produced CD competition in 2012.

The band continued to tour, playing festival and club dates all over the USA. They did their first short European Tour, and ventured into Canada to perform for 6000 people at the Thunder Bay Blues Fest, as well as a few club dates sprinkled in their touring. In October of 2014, just as preparations were underway to record her next CD, Laurie missed the top step on the stairs heading out from her kitchen and fell, fracturing her right wrist. Ultimately, two surgeries were required, and while Laurie was able to return to touring pretty quickly, she wanted to wait until her wrist was fully healed and the time was right before recording her next CD. Everything fell into place in 2017, as Laurie recorded her first solo CD, working with drummer extraordinaire and producer Tony Braunagel, along with a crew of blues industry veterans: Mike Finnigan, Bob Glaub, Jim Pugh, and Barry Goldberg. The result is Laurie's most compelling and exciting recording to date, *GRAVITY*, whose release date is February 9, 2018.

Deeply committed to connecting with her audiences, Laurie is a powerful, inviting and charismatic performer. At live shows, her personal, in-between song banter alternates between inspirational and flat out hilarious. Accessible and affable, Laurie spends hours meeting with fans after shows. She often speaks onstage about her belief that "music is the most healing force in the universe and that we, as musicians, have a sacred calling to get out there and share that love and healing with the good folks in this world."

#### **Laurie Morvan, Discography** (Screaming Lizard Records)

*GRAVITY*, 2018, Laurie Morvan  
*Breathe Deep*, 2011, Laurie Morvan Band  
*Fire It Up!*, 2009, Laurie Morvan Band  
*Cures What Ails Ya*, 2007, Laurie Morvan Band  
*Find My Way Home*, 2004, Laurie Morvan Band  
*Out Of The Woods*, 1997, Backroad Shack

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"Morvan  
has all the  
soulfulness of  
Bonnie Raitt and  
the swaggering,  
muscular guitar tone of  
Stevie Ray Vaughan ...  
blistering, high-  
energy"

(Ellnora Guitar Festival  
review) *News-Gazette*,  
Champaign, IL

