

JACK "COWBOY" CLEMENT INTERVIEW (circa 1977)

Voice #1 - John Lomax

Voice #2 - Cowboy

Voice #3 - Bob Webster [enters conversation at p. 54]

#1 Well, let's start. First, one thing I haven't gone into at all is where did the music come from in your life - was your family involved in it and how did you first get interested in it?

#2 - I first remember hearing it, coming in from playing when I was 3 or 4 or so, and listening to the cowboys on the radio back in Memphis. The radio was about as big as that tape machine. I always liked to hear cowboys on the radio for some reason.

#1- Did your dad sing then - in the church?

#2 - Yes, he directed the choir.

#1- Your mother - did she have any music in her family?

#2 - She couldn't read music, but she could play the piano. She used to help him work out stuff - choir numbers and stuff. She would rehearse with him on the piano.

#1 - Nobody ever had any professional training other than using music in the church?

#2 - Not any brothers and sisters

#1 - Did you ever try to play any instruments before the Marine tour?

#2 - Oh yeah, I got into playing when I was 11 or 12, I guess. I started off with a borrowed guitar. Unlike a lot of my fellow picker-singer types out there, I didn't start with Montgomery Ward or Sears Roebuck guitar. I didn't know what it was, but we borrowed it. It turned out to be a Martin. I didn't know what a Martin was at the time but it always sounded pretty good. And then I got one for Christmas and we returned the Martin. The one I got for Christmas didn't sound like the Martin. It was something else, but it looked a lot better. But it was a Hawaiian one - the one I started with was a Hawaiian guitar.

#1 - A steel?

#2 - Yeah, it had a high nut on it. It wasn't one of those kind you take the nut out, you know, it was a nut, a part of the thing. It was designed to be a Hawaiian guitar, but it was a Martin. I mean you know how they sound. After that I got another guitar that had a regular Spanish nut on it - I got into playing it the other way. Then I would go through cycles, I would put on the nut and play it Hawaiian for a while and take it off and play it the other way for a while, several weeks maybe. I always went back and forth. I was always trying to get up a band and there wasn't anybody around where I lived that could play anything so I would sort of teach them. Herb down there, Herb Burnette, I taught him to play the guitar.

#1 - What songs were you playing - The Marsh Brothers? What you heard on the radio?

#2 - Deep Ellum Blues, yeah, whatever we heard, mostly the old kind, hillbilly tunes, and some kind of mandolin stuff.

#1 - This would have been about the time of the war, I presume, during the war years?

#2 - Yes. I was a little too young to go to the war.

#1 - Did you join the Marines just to get out of Memphis?

#2 - Yeah, I joined the Marines to see the world, like you're supposed to join the marines to do, but I didn't see a whole lot of it. I saw Parris Island, South Carolina and Camp Lejeune. I was detached from Camp Lejeune to Fort Belvoir, Maryland, which was an army base, for a course in electricity. Then I went back to Lejeune for a few months and then I was sent to Washington, D.C., where I spent the last twenty six months of my 4 year tenure, being on the drill team and stuff - flipping of the rifles in the air and stuff. But I had a band then and I had a wall locker with a PA set in it, 3 cars at one point - none of them were all that great. I had three cars parked outside the barracks.

#1 - What was your rank?

#2 - I achieved the rank of Corporal, which was no big deal one way or the other. Some people in the Marines stay PFC for 4 years. That's the way it was back then.

#1 - That seems to be your only real contact with the rigid bureaucratic structure.

#2 - Four years of that - enough of that is enough of that. I was in dress blues sometimes two or three times a day, when I was in Washington, in a stiff collar. I had the same set of dress blues for four years - the neck was always tight, I weighed 146 pounds when I got them and about 165 when I got out of the Marine Corps. They were tight when I got them and were still tight when I got out.

#1 After that, did Buzz and Jack start during that period or right after?

#2 - I met Buzz - I knew the Stonemans while I was in the Marine Corps. They used to live out in Maryland in a place called Carmody Hills, which was really kind of a far out place, just a couple of miles from Washington, D.C. city limits. They had outdoor toilets and kind of a primitive place to be so close to our nation's capitol. Anyway, they sat out in that little house they had and picked. I was heavy into banjo back then. I was really fascinated with Earl Scruggs and bluegrass. I never heard of that much bluegrass growing up in Memphis. I got to hearing that up in Washington, D.C.

#1- Was there any Blues? I imaging you couldn't avoid it in Memphis. Was it on the radio!

#2- Mostly spiritual stuff. I got into all of that. I did like black gospel music with a boogie woogie beat. All them black people seem like they got where boogie woogie is at. I guess really my music is closer to black gospel than anything else. It's them Baptist harmonies that makes the sound something else.

#1 - Were you ever formally trained in any way? Did you ever take piano, for instance?

#2 - No, I took several guitar lessons, but not enough to remember it. I never did learn to read music. I started to learn trombone in high school but lost interest in it in a few weeks. I just got back into it recently. Now I'm learning how to read music, because now I've found a reason to learn to read music - so I can write music. I can set it down in front of these horn players and say - "play that, you blank, blank, blank, play that mother, - note for note - see how it sounds. If it sounds good we'll leave it, If it sounds wrong we'll change it. If it don't sound wrong, it's music."

#1 - What was the high point of Buzz and Jack? Was it the Wheeling Jamboree?

#2 - I think the high point of Buzz and Jack was at a place called the Stable in Boston, which was a place we played several nights a week. When we weren't playing the Jamboree. We could play the Jamboree and still go down to the Stable on Friday night. They were a bunch of younger types there, college kids, a lot of Harvard kids. Me and Buzz and this guy named Ralph Jones, who played the dobro would get up and talk and pick and sing. They loved it. We had a regular little following there.

#1- How long did this go on with Buzz and Jack?

#2- Well, let's see - it was me and Buzz, Scott Stoneman and Jimmy Stoneman, that was the basic band. We travelled around some with that band trying to get on the Grand Ole Cory or Louisiana Hayride. Then one time I got tired of bluegrass. I was in Washington, D.C. about a year and a half after I got out of the Marine Corps. I stayed around there because I knew a lot of people there and I liked the town. The Stonemans were there and Buzz was there and Don Owens, the disc jockey was there. They played some good music on the radio. That's probably the reason I struck around town.

#1 - So eventually -

#2 - Eventually I got tired of bluegrass, but that was much later, I was still in Washington, D. C. and playing blue-grass. Me and Buzz and the bass player had been playing fast and bluegrass stuff for six nights a week for six months at this place called the Casa Blanca. It was a grind, you get up and do about 45 minutes on, with 15 minutes off, four times a night, six nights a week for six months you get sick of anything. So after that I went and

played with this other kind of drip, we played a lot of Hawaiian music and stuff, had a steel player, Bill Badgett who liked to play Hawaiian music, taught me to play "Sweet Georgia Brown" in F. I'm glad I did too, because I still like it in F. This band I've got is playing it in A flat. I think, but I am going to get it back to F. It doesn't make too much difference to a guitar player if you can play it in F you can play it in A flat. (musical instrument sound of "Take Me Out To the Ball Game".) Just slide everything down several frets. I think I am going to be a much better trombone player than I am sort of guitar picker.

#1 - Were you writing songs in that period?.

#2 - No, I got into writing songs while I was on guard duty in the Marine Corps. When I was sitting there 12 to 4 on the little gate there, nothing to do, I started writing lyrics first, but before I got into songs, I wrote poetry. I never tried to do it until I was 20, I guess, 19 Or 20, the last couple of years I was in the Marine Corps. I had met the Stonemans and some other people. Jimmy Dean played at the Dixie Pig, I would go out there and he would get me to sing a few songs, and you know what that gets you - free beer and stuff!

#1 - Were you already introduced to the women when you went on stage?

#2 - You meet some nice ladies. Then I met Roy Clark, after I got out, at Buzz's house. But anyway, I had the Saturday night gig down in Southern Maryland, about 40 miles. We drove down there in my 12 cylinder Lincoln - 1940 model - it used a lot of gas and oil, but it got us there. It sounded good. I finally junked that car. I had a 32 Chevrolet, one time I had that Lincoln, a '32 Chevrolet and a '37 Buick. I wrecked the buick, it was a good one, wish I

had that car now, it was beautiful. I was stationed in Washington, only about 7 or 8 blocks from the Capitol Building. It was in town sort of, and the whole base only covered one big city block. It was a barracks detachment, which is where I was with the drill team. There was the Marine Corps band, the original Marine band. They rehearsed there, they even lived there. All these guys lived off-base. To get in that band you had to be symphony, you had to be good enough to be in the symphony. Not just any symphony either. They started off with big four stripes, a lot of special privileges. Those particular guys in that band they weren't enlisted Marines or Marines that played in the bands on various bases. They were recruited. They had to double or play 2 or 3 instruments proficiently. They had to be good enough to play in the Boston Pops. They had a fantastic sounding band - not too big. They had recording equipment and all kinds of musical instruments. They recorded when they rehearsed and every Friday we had a Sunset Parade and the whole band would be there. We'd all march in dress blues and march around the parade grounds with the band playing the "Marine Corps Hymn", the "Stars and Stripes Forever" - it was wonderful! I got to march to a good band. I used to go out and see band concerts quite a bit. I was going with this girl who was going over to Baltimore to Peabody School of Music. Her little brother was my fiddle player. I had this dance in Southern Maryland on Saturday night and then just across the street from the base was this little Club. I played there two nights a week and I made three times as much money picking as I did from my Marine Corps pay. I had one wall locker with a P.A. set in it, one more with a couple of guitars and another one with all that stuff you laid out on the bunk. I could get

it all out in 5 minutes. Talk about spit and polish - see that was the Bible Belt of spit and polish, the Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C. and they also had the Drum and Bugle Corps there which was a part of that band. They had a lot of bugles and they had all different kinds of them and they could play anything if it was arranged right. And a guy named Stir-Joe, of the Bugle Corps owned a laundry and dry cleaning place right across the street. He was an operator. He taught me how to play "Leibestraum" on the mandolin. There was a wonderful character called Georgie Jones, who was in charge of the Bureau. He had five stripes and had only been in about a year. Some of the others never would get a good job like he did. Used to go down and give Judo lessons to the guys in FBI. And he'd go around in a moustache looking like Clark Gable - thought he was Clark Gable. I had a great time with Georgie Jones. I wrote songs, saddies, about the drill team and other things. And we'd sing them. When I left there I left copies of all that stuff and he had about 300 copies run off. He was unique. I got this cherry bomb in the barracks and Jones came in to help me. I was on restrictions, but then about two weeks later we were up there in New York. We travelled around - got to the Yankee Stadium, first time I ever saw a baseball game. I got to meet this famous baseball player, Satch, - Satchel Paige. It was a double header. He was with St. Louis then, they won both games, and they went straight home. I got to see all those famous people, Winston Churchill, we met him at the airport, he walked right in front of us - about 8 feet away. Looked just like he did in the movies, also Douglas MacArthur, we were there doing ceremonies and stuff, when he came back, when Harry Truman fired him. So I saw him ever day for a week or so. Queen

Elizabeth, she was Princess Elizabeth then, You see my picture with her on the Capitol steps, but Harry Truman, we would see him every couple of days at some little ceremony. He was always out doing something, making little speeches, and little deals you know, he was a hell of a man. He looked better every day.

While I was in the Marine Corps I bought that Gibson guitar there. It took every bit of money I could scrape up, \$341.00 that was in 1951 Then when I got out of the Marine Corps, Scott Stoneman and them were going and crash the Grand Ole Opry - that was my Grand Ole Opry guitar. One thing I don't like about that guitar it's got scratches on it and I didn't put them on it. If I had put them on it would be all right, but I didn't. I don't scratch up guitars. I never have - so if you see me playing a guitar that is all scratched up, I don't know. That's a very good guitar for playing out loud. It's a concert guitar, it will ring right out.

#1 - Do you go back to Memphis for a visit or were you...

#2 - I was playing this Hawaiian music in Washington at the College Inn, me and Bill Badgett and Jack Stoneman on the bass and I was playing rhythm guitar and singing, not bluegrass, that's after we played bluegrass for six months and I was just tired of it for a while, you know - all the catfish you can eat for a dollar and a half - so I was playing - we did a lot of Hawaiian music. Bill Badgett liked Hawaiian songs on steel so I had to learn a lot of them. But I dug it too, they were restful. I am glad I did that for awhile. And then this guy came through from York, Pennsylvania looking for Ralph Jones, who was a dobro player that me and Buzz played with in Boston later. And we couldn't find Ralph Jones. I went all over

town with him trying to find Ralph Jones. Ralph Jones, every once in a while, sort of disappeared. Ralph didn't have a big tolerance for booze so he would get off on four or five beers. He was kind of tall and straight. He would topple over straight into the P.S. Set. So Buzz and I we heard this smash. We were at the Stable, and they loved us down there. Me and Buzz would get up there and sing some songs. About the first thing, I heard this crash and he just went straight back, you know, still playing the dobro. He played the dobro on the original version of "Sparkling Brown Eyes", you remember that? Well, we couldn't find Ralph Jones and I was getting a little bit tired of playing Hawaiian music, so I said I used to play the dobro, that kind of guitar didn't have the resonator, same tuning and all. I can play it some but I don't have one, but I knew where there was one at and could get it for \$15.00. He said "Let's go get it", so we went and got it and two or three days later, after practicing on it - or anyway we played a little bit and he said you come on up and play the dobro with me on the radio, in Red Line Pennsylvania, right outside of York. He wanted a dobro. He liked the sound of the dobro. So it was me and him (I can't remember his name - Dave Young that is what it was). He was a pretty good singer and played a pretty good guitar and got to where we sounded pretty good and then I got Scott Stoneman up there. Scott is the sort who would get you started and leave you hanging. He did it to me a bunch of times. He would get dependent on certain people too much and then they would disappear and he wouldn't know what to do. He got to be, (He was so dynamic) naturally he became a big part of the show. He was a fiddling fool. He would get down on the floor and do that bit with his teeth and between his legs.

He was sort of a forerunner of Elvis Presley. When I saw Elvis doing all that stuff I'd seen Scott Stoneman do it back there in Washington.

So I went up to York Pennsylvania for two or three months and then that petered out. Scott disappeared and we sort of drifted, and I drifted back to Washington, D. C. and got Buzz and we went over and got on the Wheeling Jamboree as a comedy thing - sort of like Homer and Jethro, you know. I never had done any of that. We had to go and get some funny little suits, red vests and green ties, and learn some comedy material and make up some, because that's what they were looking for. They didn't want no Webb Pierce singers or anything. I was into singing Webb Pierce, you know and stuff like that. But all they wanted on the Wheeling Jamboree was a comedy team, sort of like Homer and Jethro or Lorenzo and Oscar, like the Grand Ole Opry had. So me and Buzz, we went over and auditioned, and they made us this offer. So we took it and went back to Washington, D.C. and got our comedy suits together. Went on then and did "Somewhere Over the Rainbow, ho, Ho." It got a little kinky in the straight bluegrass thing every once in a while and it was a pretty good little thing. And then Aubrey Mayhew as managing Hawkshaw Hawkins who was on the Wheeling Jamboree when we were there. He went off to Boston one weekend and made a deal with the people at WCOP, to put on the Hayloft Jamboree which had been going on in New England sort of Grand Ole Opry, so he got a deal where he was running it and he made me and Buzz an offer to come over there. He had a bunch of people up there that had never played much and they were sort of new at it and he needed a couple, or sort of "pros," which we sort of were. When we

would go on and do our "stick", whatever it was, they liked it. I wanted to sing solo, I didn't want a duet at that time, then I sort of had my fill of bluegrass for a while. And Buzz and Scott were the types they didn't want to learn anything except bluegrass. I never could understand why. I like bluegrass, but I want to have other stuff too, it gets tiring playing the same old thing. You need variety.

#1 - You went back to Memphis eventually?

#2 - After we played in Boston for about 6 months, we were on the Jamboree and had a daily radio show and were playing the Stable, and then we did personal appearances all over the New England area, which was booked out of the radio station. They had an Artist's Service Bureau, just like Nashville did. They booked all the acts that were on the Jamboree, school house booking agency sort of thing. So we played school houses and all kinds of functions around there. But I got tired of Boston - it was cold. It was hot when I got there - real hot and just a few months later - it was cold. I ain't never been that cold before. And I never was one to change the way I dressed to suit the climate, I'd rather change where I'm at, you know go South. (singing "Let Me Ride On the Southbound, back where I came from. Let me ride on the southbound, put me off somewhere in Birmingham.") So one morning I came out to get in my car and all I could find was the aerial. So I bundled up, put on a couple of sport coats and a couple of sweaters and wrapped a sweater around my neck and walked over to the station, which was 6 or 7 long, cold blocks. When I got over there Aubrey Mayhew wanted to borrow my car. I said if you dig it out of the snow you can borrow it. Well, he dug it out of the snow and the battery was dead. He was the one

that got it out of the snow. And so the Jamboree sort of folded.

I was getting colder and colder, so I decided I'd go back to Memphis for two or three weeks and rest up. I had kinda made a deal with my father that if I didn't sort of make it in music in about a year, I would come back to Memphis and go to college. Well, this had been a year and a half. So I went back to Memphis to sort of just rest. It was cold. I would gather up a few things and talk my old man into a littl more money maybe to go back to Washington, D.C. and get back with Buzz and Scott who were back there. But when I got back to Memphis, I don't know, I started to enjoy it, or something, I never did go back. I ran into an old friend of mine from grammar school and high school who was teaching dancing at Arthur Murray's. He was always a good dancer in high school. As far back as I can remember Neal Rape was a good dancer. So it was not unusual for him to be teaching at Arthur Murray's. I had never danced a lick in my life. I'd watch people dance and it didn't make any sense to me. I couldn't figure it out - had no rhythm to it. And most people were doing it wrong, on the wrong beat, you don't do a fox trot to a waltz and vice versa unless you're a one legged man in an ass-kicking contest or something. Anyway I saw this ad in the paper about Arthur Murray and his instructors, no experience necessary. I went and applied and told this lady, who turned out to be Zulla Elliott, that I never danced before but I could keep time. She said be here Monday and start training class for six weeks, a dance a week. I came in on the waltz and after that week it was a samba, another week the fox trot and swing, the jitterbug. Disco music, I'm going to have to

check into, I been hearing some thing it sounds they could be getting back on the right foot. Dancing is something designed for the human body. If music is going to be danceable it has got to be danced with the human body, the natural feet positions. Like the guitar's got six strings- if there's seven on it, it's not a guitar any more - it may be something better or equally as good maybe separate or an equal reality but it is not the same, it is not a guitar if it's got 7 strings. The guitar's got a certain tuning sequence, If you change it, you got to change everything. While the Disco music is on a mental beat rather than a physical beat, music is coming out all along the period, being mental rather than physical. Something you dance to mentally rather than pat your foot. Right now, all I want to do is make music that people pat their foot to. Right now, when I'm putting on my producer's hat, singers are just something to make the machine sound good. I can cut a record, I can hear a song a 100 times and never listen to the lyrics until I've got it completely mired and on the record. Since I don't listen to the lyrics, I don't make any decisions just on lyrics. Certain ones, you know, that stand out, like "When I Dream", that's lyric, lyric, lyric - it tells the story - it's a 3 minute movie. That's what I want to do, learn how to go three minutes to an hour and forty-five, well, I finished my album that's thirty minutes. You get caught up in a 3 minute continuity. As a record producer, as a 45 record producer, as a producer of 45 records, which is basically the way I have always been oriented, it has only been in the last couple of years that I have seriously thought about albums. Make an album and see if there is a single, or let somebody decide if there is a single - just like an album rather than a single. The

reason it took me a year and a half to make it, because I said something like it only takes 30 minutes to cut an album. Well, that's because it only takes 3 minutes to get a 45. Now you can cut 45's in 3 minutes, but albums takes 6 months. You've got to have a musical adventure - an album ought to be a musical adventure. You know, a singer in a band, or whatever a group of people do something for 6 months or a period of time developing something, invent something, set out with nothing but a blank tape, everybody ought to know the song. When they get ready to make records, they ought not to be learning songs in the studio. The best way is to go around learning songs all the time in case you ever want to sing one of them. I can sing "Moon River". (sings) I'm working out the chords on the guitar, getting some experts to help me. If you take one out, it changes the whole thing so you got to keep it cohesive.

#1 - Were you working in a band when you wandered over to Sam Phillips to get this record "Charlotte" put together?

#2 - Well, at that time I had been going to college. After I left Arthur Murray's, well I got my fill of dancing 8 hours a day, 6 days-5 days a week, whatever it was, four or five months, you know. I got my fill. of that. I didn't lose much in dancing - I still like to dance at night. Well, by this time I had really got into dancing. The funny thing about it all, them records I made at the time weren't particularly danceable. I wasn't trying to get dance music on the records back then, now I am. And I'm a lot better dancer than I was back then. This is 20 some odd years later. I don't go out and dance in public - I just dance around in the house.

#1 - So you went over to Sam Phillips to have the record mastered?

#2 - Yeah, I sort of decided I had had enough of college for a while - sort of thought I'd go back and take some more courses or something, but I never did. I had gone for 2 years, through summers and had just about taken everything I wanted to take I thought I might be interested in sometime; physics, trigonometry, electricity, music appreciation (starts singing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game"), economic, geography, European History, French, 1000 Island. On the other hand you have four fingers and a thumb. It's nice to learn that stuff while you're young, helps you in the process of learning, and if you ever need it go back and learn it again, real quick. If I ever want to take that bird apart. I go get me a screwdriver and go at it. I won't be planning on using it in a session anytime soon. It might take me 6 months to get it back together. Well, let's see, after 2 years of college, I decided I would like to be in the construction business, so I got a job at Clark and Fay. I was going to be a trainee to learn how to be an estimator. But they started me in the hardware department and I didn't like that at all - that wasn't what I came there to do. In the mean-time, I had been planning to supplement my income. I had been playing steel guitar and doing a little singing and stuff with Slim Wallace, who was a sort of rich truck driver friend of mine and we had built a little studio in his garage. He put up the money, and we bought this Magna recorder from Sleepy Eyed John the disc jockey for \$450. Slim was the financier in this operation. We would start a record company "Fernwood Records", and I'd build this little studio; onto his garage, he put up the money and I done the carpentry work.

But we didn't have it ready to make records there, we had it ready to rehearse- lay things down, so we rehearsed for weeks on this thing with Billy Lee Riley and then we booked WMPS and had Gordon Simmons, engineer for it and we made this master called "Trouble Hound" and "Rock with Me Baby" which to this day still has a Fernwood stamper number on it. Anyway Slim and I were going to manufacture it, put it out on Fernwood, we had the logo. Heck down here Penwheel was in Louisville and he drummed me up a logo there, free and sent it down, a beautiful little fable. The only problem was the logo dropped down over the hole. I think if it hadn't been for that I'd probably kept Fernwood Records. It was just a little large, but anyway, I was working at Clark and Fay and I had one day a week off and so on my day off I dropped by Sun and left one of my tapes for Sam to master, he was still doing that at that time even though he had already had Elvis Presley and had sold him to RCA and had "Blue Suede Shoes" and "I Walk The Line", and stuff you could still get Sam Phillips to cut you a disc for \$3.00 for one side \$4.00 for two if it was a master it is cut on the same machine. These are a little better quality disc than that and take a little more time - \$7.50 per side. So I hired Sam Phillips to do a \$15.00 job for Fernwood Records and anyway I left the tape and I was to pick it up next week on my day off. So I did, I went back and he was sitting up front there and said, "Hey, I want to talk to you, come on back to the control room." So we marched back there to where all the business was done. Nobody had an office at Sun, ever. It was all done in the control room. Sam didn't have an office, I didn't have a office, I had a drawer and a console desk, but we went back there and he told me he liked the sound of it. A lot of people brought

him rock 'n roll stuff and he didn't like 'em. But he liked this. He wanted to know what I was doing and if I would be interested in putting it out on Sun. He would pay me a penny a record. That was an offer you know, a penny a record. Anyway I went back and said, I will talk it over with Slim and then he asked me what I was doing and I said I was working for Clark and Fay but I don't like it and am going to quit. He said maybe you ought to come to work for me and I said maybe I should. The job pays \$60 a week to start - when can you start? I said I would have to give two weeks notice and he said "I'll see you in two weeks." I don't think I made a deal with him though at that time, about the record I think that dragged on until I actually went to work there. I think I went to Slim and said this guy has offered me a job and also he like to put this record out and pay us a penny a record. Slim said, "whatever you want to do," I said "well I'm going to be over there working for him and will be pretty busy and you can use the studio, he don't care." And Slim said, Whatever you want and I said I think we ought to give him the record, so we gave him the record which wasn't all that ridiculous at that time. Independent producers weren't that big, they hadn't taken over at that time. Independent producers got all out of hand, engineers need to get out and let people doing something else, poetry flows, music flows, a little more naturally. But I was all in the machines at that time and he had a bunch of machines and I was still counting on building buildings even then. I liked to build things, especially studios, so we just had a Magnacorder and a couple of mikes and this little old mixing board that really wasn't adequate. We didn't have the money to get stuff we needed. So here was a chance for

me to have Ampex and echo. Echo, that's what I was looking for. It was the first thing I wanted to know how to do the echo? Well, I first went to work for Sam only way we could get echo was to have two mics on the vocal - one of them ran on to a separate machine and then over to the other machine, tape machine. Anything with Echo you had to have two mikes. But then, shortly after I was there, I started wanting echo wherever I wanted it without two mikes. So I would start asking questions, asking Sam could we do that? He said, "Yeah, It's not that big of a deal, you just bridge off the blind control on the board and feed it to two places. Its no problem. So we had somebody build up a little, he had Doug that built things around there, Doug was the guy who kept the radio station. He was engineer at the radio station - Sam's all-girl radio station which he owned with Kimmons Wilson who is the founder of Holiday Inn. They were big buddies. I heard them talking on the phone a lot. Kimmons though, he never came around, not when I was around. They would talk on the phone a lot. Kimmons would call Sam and Dad Kouser was around to keep the machines. I never had to touch a machine as far as maintenance. I never had to learn how to do that. It was only about six months ago that I ever cleaned a set of heads for the first time.

#1- What is the first thing you worked on?

#2 - Sound! Oh it was Roy Orbison. He sort of turned Roy Orbison over to me. Roy was trying to do a lot of things that were impossible to do in that studio with the musicians and stuff we had. He was trying to do stuff like he did do later. That studio did not work for Roy Orbison as well as it did for some other people because he was trying to do some things, different stuff that just wasn't

fit. "Ooby Dooby" was cut there. That was his first hit. But the stuff I was trying to cut with Roy wasn't like "Ooby Dooby". But I worked with him a lot - we worked hard trying to cut hit records, I never did cut one. The closest thing we got was something called "Rockhouse" which had a lot of echo in it. I was fascinated with echo. I was into the machines, you know, but it was a good way to be. It's a good way to be when you're making records if you're not singing, pay attention to the machines. The singers are something to make the machines sound good. If the singer sounds good, it must be right. I tell people I don't listen to lyrics and I don't think they believe me. It's not that I don't want to, I just sort of learned how not to do it, because it's the best way to cut records for me anyway, to keep a fresh ear. Somebody to keep a fresh ear to the whole thing. It doesn't matter how good the lyrics are if you don't have the proper musical setting - they are not effective. But if the setting is effective I've found that most of the time when I like the song and when I do, sit and actually listen to the lyrics, they're usually good. That was one thing about Simon & Garfunkel, I loved the things from the first time I hear it, but it was several years later that I actually listened to the lyrics.

#1 The sound of songs? I don't remember which one it was, probably most of them.

#2 - I think words ought to be used, there is a difference between poetry and music. You use a word in a song without it being the right word musically. It's got to rhyme and it's got to have the right meaning, instead of, - it's got to have the right word, but it's got to have the right sound. I hear sounds more than songs. That's what I'm sort of trained to do. Just react to it - for people you hear on

the radio, don't listen to the lyrics necessarily, they just react to it. I'm talking about the first time. I'm talking about somebody going to hear a song once - they may catch the lyrics or they may not. They may hear it a bunch of times without ever catching the lyrics. I think those are the best kind, the kind where the lyrics don't grab you right off, the sound of it grabs you. Later on you have the pleasure of discovering a good song, good lyrics, good poem, a good tone poem. I ain't never read a Shakespeare play

all the way through, so I still got that to look forward to, reading Shakespeare. I've read a lot in my time. I read a lot in high school. I didn't read stuff they were teaching, but I read a lot of other books, out of the library.

#1 - I never listen to the words to rock n' roll. It's always just the beat and the melody.

#2 - Yeah

#1 - If you hear it enough, sooner or later then I'll pay attention to the lyrics. Country is different to me. Country and Folk are both so heavily oriented toward the words and toward lyrics. To me all other music is oriented around the melody.

#2 - I think basically it's orchestrated. As an orchestrator the voice ought to be an instrument and if you are saying the wrong words it would be like the saxophone player not phrasing it properly or whatever. The words have got to be musical dynamics as well as poetical meaning. But I do admire good lyrics. If I'm looking for material, I don't base my decision on the lyrics. I don't think it's necessary because I think the music ought to grab you

first. If the music is good enough, the lyrics don't have to be very good. But the lyrics make the melody better.

(Sings "A Pretty Girl (song) is Like A Melody".)

#1 - Well after Roy Orbison, what was the next project?

#2 - Well, during that time I was doing some more stuff for Billy Lee Riley because he had a record album then and it did fairly well. It wasn't a big hit but it did fairly well.

#1 - That was one of Fernwood?

#2 - That was the one that was going to be on Fernwood.

#1 - How many copies did that wind up selling?

#2 - About 25,000, mostly around that area. A lot of those records didn't get much exposure outside of the area at that time. If we had of put it out on Fernwood - we didn't have a big investment in it. I think the studio cost there at WMPS was \$40. I don't know, I don't know, I might still be with Fernwood and that logo might still lap over the hole, but I doubt it. Well, anyway, after I had left Slim with the little studio in his garage, all it needed was an Ampex, and I introduced him to Scotty Moore who was in town a lot. He travelled with Elvis, but he was in town a lot, with time on his hands, and he was into the machines. He wanted to learn how to work them. I loaned him this book I had, Principles of Recording and I introduced him to this lawyer named Bob Buckaleu. So they started Fernwood Records. And they rented Hi studios and cut this thing called "Tragedy" with Thomas Wayne who was Luther Perkin's brother. Luther was Johnny Cash's guitar player. It didn't have anything on it but a rented guitar and bass. Hi didn't have but one tape machine at that time so they couldn't put echo on, so Slim and Scotty brought the tape by Sun and I put some echo on it for them and they pressed it up and it

sold a million. Slim paid off his mortgage on his house and they bought an Ampex and put it in the garage there and cut records. But Slim never did quit his truck driving job, even after he built a three track studio down on Main Street. They took in about 300 grand off that thing.

#1- I remember that song well. It was probably one of the most doleful songs recorded ever.

#2 - Yeah, it was a hit record. Slim was still driving the truck. He was chairman of the board. They'd have to wait for Slim to come in off the run in the afternoon before they could give all the answers. Slim had that sort of country boy wisdom about him - it came in handy. They collected their money and everything, you know, they were Independent distributors.

#1- Was Rockhouse very successful?

#2 - No, Oh, it was fairly successful. It wasn't nearly as big as "Ooby Dooby". He wanted to be a little more serious than "Ooby Dooby" (singing). I was working with a bunch of people there and, before I knew it, we would come in every morning and people would show up and we'd make tapes. Then certain pickers I used to know would drop by and other people would drop by and pretty soon I had guys hanging around wanting to strike up the band, sort of, round up the boys over at Taylor's and make a record. Not make a track, you know, just make a record. Not Chat- we didn't over dub once in a while - mono to mono, mixing as we go, adding echo, etc.

#1 - Did you work with any of the orchestras - Sam recorded at one time or other?

#2 - No, I never did. They were all sort of gone when I got there. Now back then I was trying, I would talk about it, trying to find a colored guy with a band to sing country,

teach him how to sing country. So I looked for such a person and I had one guy that was close. I had him make some tapes (sang) sounded something like that. Well, Justis thought it was funny. There's a tape floating around there somewhere, it was sort of funny. I thought I would have to find such a person and sort of teach him how to sing country. Well, as it turned out, Charlie Pride came along and he already knew how to sing country. He grew up listening to the Grand Old Opry, like the rest of us hillbillies. He had a Montgomery Ward guitar, and everything. But he tuned it different. He learned to play the guitar in open tuning, kind of like I got started on a steel. He tuned it up to an E chord, he could hear that end with that tuning you can just strike the thing across the frets there and you get an A chord on the fifth fret, and the B chord on the seventh fret. Charlie Pride never was that much of a guitar picker. Now Johnny Cash has to be a pretty good guitar picker by now, but he don't play it on records much. He used to play it when he was bad - make hits.

#1 - Waylon Jennings was an exceptional player?

#2 - Yeah

#1 - The sessions that you and Johnny Cash and Waylon were working on never did develop. Some unbelievable stuff was put down.

#2 - I get that out and listen to it sometimes. I don't know for what purpose. I thought they were great.

#1 - Don't you think that with what they've got out now - they'd be great?

#2 - They're still on tape. I doubt if anybody erased them. If they're good enough, they'll find their way out

sometime. That thing that they have now. I don't like it. I don't like the songs, I don't like the singing.

#1 - Did you work with Charlie Rich or Jerry Lee first, or which one of them came along?

#2 - Jerry Lee came along first.

#1 - He just kind of popped out of nowhere didn't he?

#2 - Well, back during that time there was a lot of people coming in there from a lot of places, because the place was pretty famous by then, in Memphis, and it was the only place in Memphis. A lot of people came by there. Jerry Lee came there rather than going to Nashville. So there was always somebody wanting to be heard, coming by there, and I found that if they were local I could stall it for a period of time if I wanted to. But if they were just in town, I might as well go ahead and get it over with so they could go on and leave, or whatever, because I, you know, so anyway I was real busy. I was making records and stuff. But I was back in the control room doing something and Sally came by and said there's this guy out here says he plays the piano like Chet Atkins. Oh yeah, well that got my curiosity up at any rate so I said, "Well, send him on back." So he comes back there and I think we talked in the control room a little bit - no, I think he just walked in and sat down and started playing the piano like Chet Atkins, which he could do. "Wildwood Flower" and I enjoyed it. I thought it was real nice, but it wasn't what you would want to make a record out of, you know, when Rock and Roll was king. At that point Country Music, the bottom had kind of dropped out of country music. The only person I can recall, there are some others, but the main one I can recall that was sort of hot country right then, was George Jones. So Jerry Lee did that instrumental bit on the piano

and I asked him what else he did and he sang me some George Jones songs and I loved it, and I put it on tape. But I told him country music wasn't happening right then, Rock and Roll was happening, that's what we were cutting around there and I said, "do you know any Rock and Roll Songs," and he said "No". He said "I'll learn some". I said, "Why don't you do that". but in the meantime I'd put down four or five things on tape that I loved and he left and I had his name and address on the box and he drifted away and I got to listening to that tape and playing it for people and a lot of them around there were jubilant - it was a great tape, I think.

#1- All that stuff eventually got released.

#2 - He sang the shit out of "Seasons of My Heart".

#1 - And that's a hard song to sing.

#2 - He didn't sing it like George Jones sings it. It was a separate but equal reality, the way he did it. But Jerry Lee didn't know whether he was rock or country, he was just whatever - At the time he first came to Sun, he had a job playing somewhere, I think it was in Ferriday, Louisiana. He played the drums with his left hand and the piano with his right hand, and he had this bass player, I think his name was Whitehurst, something like that, just the two of them. So anyway, we made this tape and I got to playing it around there and I was loving it, but it was so country, it was basically country. He sang "Seasons of my Heart", and some other George Jones, sort of ballad. There was a couple of really good ones and I had him playing like Chet Atkins and stuff like that, four or five things on that tape. The main ones were the two George Jones things, that he sang. He played the shit out of the piano. Jerry Lee is one of the all-time great piano players. I love hearing him

play the piano. He loved to play, he used to entertain us all the time. The piano would be sitting there and Jerry Lee would be playing it. Jerry Lee could walk up, - the main thing about Jerry Lee, he could walk into a recording studio and it was just like any other room and he would just sit down and do his natural thing. He had nothing standing between him and sitting down and just doing it. So he just went in and did it. He could do it for an audience of two as well as he could do it for an audience of 10,000. If he was, you know, into it - but you didn't see him much unless he was into it. But he didn't do any boozing and stuff around there then - that was rare. It was a straight sort of trip. It was an energy thing. We'd get going, you know, it started at a reasonable hour in the morning - usually early, we'd be there talking about it. We'd start at 1 or 2 o'clock or noon - it didn't matter because we had Taylor's Restaurant next door. Anytime anybody got hungry they could go over there and get it or we would send over there, you know, it was great. You need an eating facility with a recording studio and a bathroom right off the control room. It was a little bathroom - naturally I tried it for an echo chamber. Naturally, it didn't work because it was too small and the walls weren't hard enough, but it was right next to the control room, it was in the control room, there was a box which you had to walk down a little bit. Private enough once you got in there.

#1 you got into tinkering with the room any in terms of carpeting, baffles?

#2 - We never did any, no we never tinkered with it. Sam thought it was right. It was, it was live. You could put a mic at one end of the room, the drums at the other and it was all you could do to keep the drums from drowning out

the voice. But they didn't have the kind of microphones back then that they have now. They had shitty microphones back then. But we didn't use any baffles or anything, I mean the sound sold the records. If I was there now, knowing then what I know now, I could have made a couple of very small changes in the place. And it would have been a lot easier to work with, it would have probably changed the way it sounded though. It was a successful sound. I think the main thing I did as far as my involvement with the sound thing was probably to get some more equipment. I came in there looking for some extra echo and stuff, and it wasn't long before we had it where we could have echo on all five mics, varying the amount with a separate little red five mic pots over here rotary style, and a corresponding five over here. Now if you wanted echo you've got to ride 'em both at the same time. You bring up to main volume you got to bring up the volume on the echo accordingly. So, it was a two handed job when I was mixing as you had to do everything at once. What we didn't have on the board was equalization. If we'd had that, we'd never have got anything cut. We didn't need equalization - still don't. I don't use it yet. Except when we go to the laquer channel, we used it then, still do. But everything was flat coming out of the microphone, run on the tone flat and we put on the echo in it and that's all. It would make greater sound if you depend on what the rules are, you know. It's a fine sound. I think the main thing that made it work was the substance there more than the quality of the sound. It was something about the room that let people get loose, perform, sounded good to them and the spirit of it got on the tape, the spirit of it, the feeling, is what sold it. Because, technically, it wasn't all that great a studio,

technically it was a pretty good studio for various commercials and stuff like that. What we could have done if we'd put a little carpet around - well actually, the walls were pretty live, they were plaster walls, the side walls. The ceiling and one of the end walls were V-shaped. That part of it was fine. All we really needed was some stuff on the walls to absorb and tone it down a little bit, the side walls. If we'd had some pressed fiberglass or something - it was just a little too live, that's all. Otherwise it was a good studio, but if we had toned it down a little bit we'd have been able to do more things - it wasn't as versatile as I was looking for, like in the case of Roy Orbison. It was almost impossible to do the kind of stuff in there at that time that he was trying to do. He was ahead of himself at that point.

#1 - Jerry Lee came back then with some Rock and Roll?

#2 - Yeah, about three weeks - well anyway, I got to playing that tape around, I played it for Sam and he kind of chewed me out for not going ahead and cutting records immediately with him.

#1 - Sam chewed you out for not -

#2 - He sort of chewed me out. He knew not to chew me out too much, because that's the first time anybody made any mention of me being empowered to go around making any kind of deals with these people. I was there to listen and put them on tape if I thought they had any kind of potential and let Sam hear them. Well, I thought Jerry Lee had potential when I first heard him, so I put him on tape. Got his name and phone number on the back of the tape. We could call him at any point, see. Then it wasn't any big deal. Sam didn't really chew me out. He just said, you know, when anything like that walks in, sign it. So, after that when

somebody walked in, if I thought they could cut hit records, I'd start making tapes, hire musicians and stuff. Anyhow, we'd get some tapes cut, then sign some contracts and Sam would put them out. But he had the say - he was the only one who had the say about what was released. I talked him into a few little things - not a whole lot. We pretty much agreed on the stuff. We just cut tapes all the time and once in a while we'd go through them and pick out the best stuff and put out some records. And when we had like 6 singles out with Johnny Cash - make up an album - 12 sides - never cut an album with Johnny Cash - it wasn't the thing to do in those days. Albums were only about 10% of the market at that point, I think, something like that. "But now, anyway, with Jerry Lee, we sat around listening to that tape for two or three weeks and I was going to call him but he walked in one day, him, and let's see, his cousin, J. Brown. Jerry Lee had started a little goatee. I told him to shave it off. I said "I been meaning to call you, I want to cut some tapes - Sam likes the stuff we've got", but he said he'd learned some rock and roll songs. Said he'd written one, written a song. So we went back there - Now, I don't think we heard anything that day. That's right, it was on a Monday or Tuesday. But I remember we set it up for Thursday when he would come back and I would have three or four musicians there and we would cut some tapes. So he came back - Sam hadn't seen Jerry Lee at this point, Sam went to the disc jockey convention that week over here in Nashville, that's the reason I remember it was on Thursday. Also, I remember the heat kept going off. It was as cold as shit. And I had these - it was a heat sound, that's what it was, had these electric heaters in the control room to keep warm and they kept blowing the

circuit breaker, you know, tripping the circuit breaker, cutting off the board. So I remember it was kind of cold and on a Thursday. I had Billy Lee Riley and Ronald James and J. M. Van Eaton on the drums and we taped "End of the Road", that was the song he had written, his first one we taped. We worked on that a whole and cut it and then we did, he had learned it, "You're the Only Star in My Blue Heaven", remember that Gene Autry thing, it was a waltz, well he had put it in 4/4 time. Instead of [sings the song as waltz] Jerry went [sings the song in 4/4 time], playing the piano. That was my favorite at that point. Well, anyway, "End of the Road," and we did "You're the Only Star in My Blue Heaven" and I think some other song. Then I asked him - "Crazy Arms" at this time had already been a big hit, by Ray Price. It had been a hit for six months and then it had been covered by the Andrews Sisters and they did a big pop hit. At this point it was on its way down by the Andrews sisters. It had been a big hit twice - it had been a hit for six months. I said, you know "Crazy Arms"? He said, "I know most of it." I said, "Let's do it now" or something like that. So he did it, and he didn't know some of the words, sort of made up some of the words and it was a one take, and on that particular take, Billy Riley had gone into the head. He was playing the guitar and the bass player was off somewhere. So all we really had on that record was the piano and the drum - set of drums, no bass. But we had a mic on the bass drum, so it had a good bottom. At the very end of it the bass player walked in - I think Riley was playing the bass. He didn't think we were cutting for real. We sort of weren't. But at the very end of "Crazy Arms." Riley picked up the electric guitar, or the bass player, somebody picked it up and hit a

wrong chord, a bad chord and it is still on the record, just because they didn't think - accidental chord he found. It was on the B, I think, the wrong chord, but it didn't bother us too much. So I made the tape and then we listened to it all day. I loved "You Are The Only Star in My Blue Heaven" and "Crazy Arms" - we kept drifting back to "Crazy Arms". So when Sam came back from Nashville the next Monday or whenever I saw him that day we went back to the control room and played him "Crazy Arms". That was the first one I was going to play. Well, I started the tape and the instrument, he took it off on the piano, ta, ta, to dum, ta, ta, ta - something, before the voice ever came in Sam stopped the machine and said, "I can sell that", then we wound it back and started again. And then the singing started and he just flipped. And it was a good record. We made a dub right then and there on the lathe - we had two lathes - a lathe on the left and a lathe on the right. The left was for 45's and 33. The one on the right was for 78. So we just played the tape a few times, "Crazy Arms" and loved it more and more and played it over and over. Then Sam said, "Let's cut a dub and I'll take it down to Dewey tonight." So we put a disc on there and cut a dub and Sam took it down to Dewey that night. In the meantime, we cut a master and we were having it pressed, it took about a week to get the record. But Sam took the dub down to Dewey. I think we got records in about five days actually. Took it down to Dewey and Dewey put it on the air and the phones light up and before the night's over we knew we had a hit. Dewey got 120 calls, or something. So, by the time the record was at Popular Tunes, there was a demand for it. Now that record wound up selling about 120,000 which was a good sale considering the thing had been a hit

already and was on its way down. It still is one of my favorite records that I ever did with him.

So, anyway, Jerry Lee wanted to hang around Memphis. So I spent several nights out there taking him around to different clubs trying to get him a job because I wanted him to be my piano player. I was looking for a piano player. So I was trying to make it possible for him to stay in Memphis and play the piano while we were getting this record out. So Jerry Lee was my piano player around there for about two weeks. And then he was on the road and has been on the road ever since. It may have been ten days, it wasn't long. Because, you know, people heard that record and they wanted to see that cat and he got J.W. Brown to start playing bass, and kind of managing him and stuff and then Jerry Lee wound up marrying J. W. Brown's daughter. Where Jerry Lee got sort of escorted out of England when fashionable leadership - back in the rocking 50's -

#1 - Well, that was not a commercial move.

#2 - But I loved Jerry Lee's piano playing and we had a lot of fun, he was a lot of fun in those sessions back then. And so was Johnny Cash. They had a sense of humor. And when, you know, we'd come in and make tapes and we'd cut - one time, when Jerry Lee was hanging around for that 10 days or so, I felt like he was going to be a hot thing, so I got him in the studio as much as I could and cut a lot of tapes. One day we cut 13 sides going into the night. Lot of old things, now all that stuff's been out, those old kind of songs - he did them good. "Silver Threads Among the Gold". But first what really got me about Jerry Lee was the way he did "You're the Only Star in My Blue Heaven", that's what got me excited that particular day when we cut that

and "End of the Road" and "Crazy Arms" and maybe one other. Later on when we got to hear "Crazy Arms" it was the one we wanted to hear over and over. Then the next record was "A Whole Lot of Shaking Going On". That was record Number 2 and I had the back side of it, "It'll Be Me."

#1 - Was "Shaking Going On" a one take?

#2 - Yeah, that was a one take. It was a one-take with no run down. I had the mike set up for 5 mics. We had been working on "It'll Be Me" and I didn't like to stay on one - you know, it gets redundant after a while, you've got to stop and resume it later. So I needed some diversion, so I walked out in the control room and said "Why don't we get on something else for a while, Jerry, and come back to this?" And J. W. Brown pipes up and says "Jerry, why don't you do that thing we've been doing out on the road that everybody likes so much?" He said, "All right." I said, "Well, let me go in there and turn on the tape machine?" So I went in there and he would play and record, sit down and he did "A Whole Lot of Shaking Going On" and I did a little touch-up mixing, whatever - as we were rolling. And that was the record. I don't think we played it back at that point. Played it back later - in a day. Of course, once we got to playing it back, we loved it. So we played it over and over and over. Sam came in, we played it over and over and over. And we put it out.

#1 - And you knew it would be a hit?

#2 - We thought it was the best thing we'd had. We'd cut a lot of stuff with him, too. That was the one we thought had the best chance, so it was out and doing pretty good, but it wasn't selling like huge quantities until Jed Phillips went up to New York and got Jerry Lee on the Steve Allen Show. And he did "A Whole Lot of Shaking Going On". It went

from 100,000 sales to a million in a couple of months. And I was happy about it because I was earning my first free ride with "It'll Be Me," which originally was going to be the "A" side. But, there again, we made a dub and took it down to Dewey, while we were waiting on the - well, I don't know whether we had records then or not, but we took the thing down to Dewey, it was probably a record by that time, and Dewey played both sides and "A Whole Lot of Shaking" was the one that got the calls, so that was the record. But Sam liked "It'll Be Me.". That was his pick for the "A" side. I was sort of, I had to try and be a little bit objective about it. If it'd been the "A" side I'd have made more money, but I think I kind of thought "A Whole Lot of Shakin' " was the one. But they played, those records got pretty good, they got heard anyway, pretty good, by the end. Sam had a lot going there as far as reception by then. You know, he'd had Elvis and "Blue Suede Shoes," and Johnny Cash. I never worked with Elvis in the studio.

#1- How about running over that story you told one time about when you had the band in the top of the hotel and Elvis would come sit in?

#2 - No, it was - when Elvis first started, I had just got back from Boston and he'd been gone about three weeks and Sleepy Eyed John was managing him. Sleepy Eyed John had the Eagles Nest every Friday and Saturday nights. It was out above Clearpool. It was a dance hall kind of thing. Sleepy Eye had a house band and I was the singer and M.C. with this house band. It was a big Western swing band patterned along what Ray Price had at that time. So Sleepy Eyed John thought Western Swing was going to be the next big thing. So we had this band with three fiddles and we did all them things and Elvis was the floor show. So I got to introduce

him three or four times a night, two or three times, and I got to introduce him and got to follow him too. And I guess I did pretty well.

# 1 - I don't think anybody has followed him since?

#2 - Well he was the rage, even then. He was, from the time they played his first record on the air in Memphis, he was instant! I've never seen anything like it, he was a big local hit. You know, three weeks later when we were playing the Eagle's Nest he didn't have any pink Cadillacs or anything then, and he would try to make dates with my young girl friend there, who later became my wife. But she seemed to be steadfast and staunch. She was rather pretty. She'd come and watch me pick.

#1 - Did you ever sit around and play with Elvis casually?

#2 - Well, my biggest association with Elvis was because he would come back and sign records, like everybody always goes back to certain places. He would come by and hang around fairly often, you know, and it would be like, like I drop by Jack's Tracks. And most of the time we didn't make any big deal of it. Most of the times it would be just me in the control room and J. M. or somebody sitting around or Riley and he'd drop by and sit around an hour or two and then drift off. Or maybe we'd go to Taylor's. And we'd pick around some. Several times he was in there, he interrupted quite a few sessions when he'd walk in and we were cutting. You could usually count on it, especially at night. Sometimes he would come in at night with some of his entourage and everything would sort of stop. It was fun, nobody objected to it, you know, but it was - he did sort of interrupt a few sessions every once in a while. Then several times he was there, and Jerry Lee was there and Carl Perkins and some of them, they'd be out to the studio

talking and I'd run the tape machine, and those tapes are somewhere.

#1 - Are those the ones RCA sued Shelby over?

#2 - Un-huh. That's something else entirely. Oh, that dialogue stuff, I don't know where that stuff is. Some of them must have got lost. There was one tape there that Elvis did a lot of talking, they were asking him questions, and I was asking him a few questions. But I don't know where those tapes are. Well, when I left Sun Records everything was in the control room. And I made a bunch of safety tapes one time for Sam to take home. But I don't know what he did with them.

#1- Was Johnny Cash before Jerry Lee or after or during?

#2 - Well, when I went to work at Sun Records, Johnny Cash had already had "I Walk the Line", that was his latest record and it was already a hit and Sam, he didn't let me work with Johnny Cash for a while, or Carl Perkins. He let me work with Roy Orbison and Sonny Burgess, there was a bunch of people around there. The first thing I ever did with Johnny Cash was a thing called "Home of the Blues", and it was a fair hit but it wasn't a powerhouse. The first time I really worked with Johnny Cash was on "Ballad of Teen Age Queen." I'd been trying to cut that myself and I'd made a tape and he liked the sound of it and he wanted ME to play the guitar with him. So I played guitar on that and Sam ran the board. And I counted it off - it started with - "Go Now" (sings part of the song), well, we cut the rhythm track with me playing the guitar and Luther playing the guitar, electric guitar, and bass and drums. I guess we had a piano. Anyway, Sam cut the first track while I was playing the guitar, then I got these voices in there - over dubbed (sang) all that stuff, all them answers and

everything. And the record was a big hit, a big hit. So then Sam let me work with him some more and we did "Guess Things Happen That Way". I played the guitar and it was the same kind of deal. I taught some of those guitar players how to run the board so I could play the guitar sometimes. I played "Big River", I played the guitar and the bass drum at the same time. Playing the guitar, I had it in some tune (made sounds like a guitar), that was the back side of "Teen Age Queen." It was a two sider record. It was the biggest thing he'd had for several releases.

#1 - So?

#2 - Yeah. So I got to work with Cash more and more and Riley and Sonny Burgess. I spent a lot of time with him. But we just made tapes all the time. And Jerry Lee would come into town for a week or two and we'd cut a bunch of stuff with him. Pick out the best and release them. Same with Johnny Cash, he'd come in with his songs, that he had learned and everything and listen to whatever I had there, what I had being getting up, and he'd learn some of them and we'd cut tapes.

#1 - What's the run down on "Ring of Fire"?

#2 - Well, this was years later after he was with Columbia. I was living in Beaumont, Texas, at the time. I was in the bathtub one night and he called from Nashville, called from somewhere, wanted to know if I could come to Nashville and help him cut a record. I said, "Sure." So I came to Nashville and played guitar in "Ring of Fire", had them put a different kind of mic on the drums, just to get their attention and hummed the horn part to the trumpet players. Bill McElhiney wrote down and they played it. And it was a big hit.

#1 - What did you, Did you ever get involved with Bill Justis back then?

#2 - Uh-huh. Well, I think Justis was involved at that point with "Teen Age Queen". We wanted vocal groups by then. We decided we needed vocal groups on some of them records and Bill Justis was a local orchestra leader, fairly well known around Memphis, probably the best known local sort of orchestra leader, and he had the best band. And he was a good musician, excellent musician, schooled, good all around musician. So we were at a point where we needed someone like that to come in and help us with some of these kind of things. In the meanwhile, I had been working with Bill as an artist trying to come up with some kind of records. He wasn't employed here at that point. He was, we just got to working together. He would bring in musicians and I would engineer and we'd try to cut tapes, we cut tapes. We were doing that and in the process we were needing somebody, so Sam agreed to hire Bill Justis, whose job would be to help with vocal arrangements and stuff. So we got the barber shop quartet and a girl and worked out these parts on "Ballad of Teen Age Queen" and over dubbed it and then Justis got to working with Charlie Rich. Justis is the one that sort of brought him in, brought him to everybody's attention. Sam's, mine. Well, Justis got into producing records. While he was producing, I was the engineer. Of course, you know, I said whatever was on my mind.

#1 - Was there actually a different producer and engineer at all sessions back then?

#2 - No. When I was producing, like with Jerry Lee, they didn't have a producer function then. That started with RCA when Steve Sholes started putting Chet Atkins' name on

records as producer. Up to that point it was know as A & R, the guy who worked for Record Label - he's there at the sessions. Well, at Sun, most of the time it would be me in the control room and the band out in the studio and we'd be making tapes. Well, whatever we wanted to make and Sam would come in and listen to them and ever so often we'd press no several.. It had no form to it, no routine, no schedule - we'd just cut records and every once in a while it'd be time to put out a single or two or three.

#1 - There was never any pressure?

#2 - No, not much. Now, when Jerry Lee got real big and we needed "Great Balls of Fire" we wound up cutting "Great Balls of Fire" several times and decided we wanted to cut it over and waited for Jerry Lee to get back to town, and stuff like that, but there was never and pressure and we got "Great Balls of Fire" in pretty good order. You know, that was a follow up to "A Whole Lot of Shaking."

#1 - Did you work on "High School Confidential " too?

#2 - Well, Justice was, by his own admission a mechanical idiot, so he couldn't get that bit of operating the board and being a musical sort of person. But it was kind of like, you know, we just worked together.

#1 - Did you work on "Raunchy"?

#2- Yeah. That was, we did that about three o'clock in the morning. We'd been working on this thing. It was kind of like "A Whole Lot of Shaking" in that he'd been performing it out live and people had been digging it. But we had been working on something else - we'd been working on "College Man' and we'd been doing some calypso sort of stuff, all kinds of different things, trying to come up with a hit sound. And it was about 3 o'clock in the morning and we were still going and tired of working on that and Bill said

"Want you to hear this thing we been playing around these dances and people just love it". It's a thing that Sid Anchor wrote. So Sid was there and we cut "Raunchy". Then later, we overdubbed horns.

#1 - How did that rhythm come about?

#2 - (Strummed) - simple. I mean it's something any guitar player could do. It just sounded right. I loved it. I loved it that night. We played it over and over. I don't know if we played it that night. You know, we'd cut these tapes and all these people would drop by and we'd play them for them and put them out - the ones they liked best. Everybody loved "Raunchy". The ones that were big hits, everybody loved them. "Whole Lot of Shaking Going On," "Crazy Arms" But before "Crazy Arms" was actually on the market, people were dropping by there just wanting to hear it. And about the second day Sam made the statement, "I'm going to start charging them by the dollar to hear this record." It was great, I could sit back and listen to it a hundred times, you know, that's the nice thing about making records - you get it right once and then you can listen to it forever.

#1 - That way you get to hear it before anyone else

#2 - Yeah.

#1 - What did you do with Charlie Rich?

#2 - Mostly with him I ran the board. On the way, we hung out a bit - tried to write some songs. All them guys - well, I got to using him as a piano player, too. And he was the piano player on a lot of the Johnny Cash stuff. And I got to cutting his songs with different people, Jerry Lee and - in fact he played the piano on that song Jerry Lee sung, I doubt if very many people know that.

#1 - "Crazy Arms"?

#2 - No, it was (Sang "I'm Blue, So blue") And Jerry Lee played the piano on "Match Box", I think by Carl Perkins. I believe, I know he played on something and I think that was the one. Then it was within a week or so that I had him as my side man piano player. That was my big excitement about Jerry Lee, right then I was without a piano player. I didn't know he was going to be a star in ten days on the road. I was with a lot of musicians but they all drifted off you know most of them drift back. Here lately, I think I'm still trying to get up a band, same thing I was trying to do when I was about 14. It's fun though trying to do it, you know, I may actually do it one of these days. But now, I want five horns - so I, because I want to play the trombone. I want to be one of the two trombone players. If I can only have two horns, I want two trombones. If I have three, I want a tenor sax.

#1 - OK

#2 - I would like to have a couple of trumpets for one song, but most of the time I just want one trumpet. Just this one song you need two trumpets on, just this one little place. It's been a big source in keeping me confused. I could get a band where I could play "Brazil". But there's this one song - called "The Song I Never Could Write" that needs a couple of trumpets in it. One little place.

#1 - Did you ever run into Bobby Bland back in those days?

#2 - He would drop over in Beaumont. He came over a few times. So I did some, when I had a studio there with Bill Hall in the early 60's. We did some work every once in a while for Don Robie who had Peacock Records that Bland recorded for. As I remember Bobby Bland was over there a few times either hanging around or playing or doing

something. I don't think I ever did record him any, but I wouldn't swear to it.

#1 - That was one of my favorite records - still is - that "Two Steps From the Blues."

#2 - I remember he cut some records during that period of time that I liked a whole lot. Had some really good horn sounds on it, Boogie Woogie, beat.

#1 - He played at our Senior Prom in Houston. He played at dance parties. It cost us \$250.00 bucks for the whole band. Cookie and the Cup Cakes would play some too. Remember their big hit.

#2 - I cut a bunch of records with Cookie and the Cup Cakes, I think.

#1 - They used to Play "Matilda", that was their hit.

#2 - Yeah.

#1 - They used to play at our parties when I was 17 or 18 and I figured this has got to be heaven and - all these other kids - Johnnie and the Jerk-offs playing and I was sitting up there watching with my mouth hanging open. It was well known if you would take a bottle of tequila to Cookie and the Cup Cakes they would put on quite a show. More than they'd put on if you didn't bring a bottle of tequila.

#2 - I'm trying to remember if I cut a bunch of record with Cookie and the Cup Cakes, or not. I think I did, in Beaumont. I cut a record with Joe Tracks one time. Albert Collins - instrumental stuff.

#1 - Which stuff did you cut on Albert?

#2 - Oh, a bunch of stuff - all that stuff, Yeah I ran the board. That was done in the studio in Beaumont. And it was on Bill's label.

#1 - I've watched him play a lot. He's got this guitar -

#2 - Well, actually, I kind of, he came in one time and did some tapes and I liked him and liked the stuff he was doing and I played the tapes for Bill and he had a label at that time and he agreed to pay for this thing and we cut Albert Collins. So I've done a lot of things with Albert Collins, a couple or three albums.

#1 - I've got a couple of those albums floating around. "Deep Freeze" and "Frosty" and - I don't remember all those titles. They all have something to do with ice - I watched him. My dad got along pretty well with him. We used to go over to Dallas and go to the bars over there, used to watch him.

#2 - That studio I had in Beaumont was a good studio. I never did have the proper equipment in there. It stayed mono. I had a three track tape recorder but we never hooked it up, because I didn't have the console to go with it. But that was a fine studio - big room - 14 ft. ceilings.

#1 - This was after you were fired from Sam's employ and then did you go right down to Beaumont or how did that come about?

#2 - Well, after I left Sun, I started Summer Records on the monies I had coming in from songs I had written for Sam's publishing companies, which was a fairly good amount. I made more money the year after I left Sun than I did the year I worked for Sun. I started off at \$60 a week and when I left I was making \$90. Me and Bill Justis were both making \$90 a week - but we were both writing songs and I had two or three: "I Guess Things Happen That Way" and "Ballad of Teenage Queen", and back side of "A Whole Lot of Shakin'" and a whole lot of other stuff there, as a writer. That was the first time I had made a sizable amount of

money. You know, Sam paid sort of low royalty rates. Adds up.

\*\*\*\*\*

#1 - Did Summer records have many releases?

#2 - "Motorcycle Michael" was the first one. Me and Don Robertson hung out a lot. He is one of my favorite piano players.

#1 - What've we got from Beaumont now? Albert Collins - and we need to get into "Patches" and what else did you all do?

#2 - I don't remember. "Patches" is one of the first things we did actually. Well, let's see, we were in Beaumont - how did we get to Beaumont? After I left Sun, I started Summer Records and sort of put out three releases and spent up my money for the year and I needed some gainful employment. So Chet Atkins and I had discussed - we talked about me working for RCA on some other occasions. So I called him up and asked if he wanted to hire me to help him make records or something. He said "Yeah." So I started commuting from Memphis to Nashville, usually every week I'd come over here and stay three or four days and go back to Memphis. During that time, well I was independent when I was with RCA. I had my publishing company and they paid me a regular thing but it was like a consultant trip. So I could build me a little studio in Memphis and make some records over there and if they liked them, they could put them out. Well, I made one or two over there and they put them out and then I cut some other people here that Chet turned over to me. But I never cut a hit for RCA back then. So I did that for about a year and a half and nothing was happening so I decided I would move to Beaumont, Texas. So I called up

Bill Hall. I'd never been there, he'd been inviting me, so I was at home in Memphis trying to write a song and nothing was happening, so every time I try to write a song and nothing happens I get a touch of phoneitis. So I called Bill Hall, and we got to talking and I'd never been to Texas and he said "Why don't you come on down? I said, "All right." So I flew down there the next day.

Bill had a little studio there, a couple Magnacorder tape recorders, a board and stuff, and I had some equipment in Memphis and we decided I would move to Beaumont, and we would turn Beaumont into a recording center. We'd pool our equipment and buy some more and get another location and do that. So we found a place and I went back to Memphis and about a month later I moved to Beaumont, on July 5th, 1961. We took the wire snips and went over there and cut all of the wires out of the studio that Bill had and moved the board and tape machines and stuff and hooked it up on Pearl Street, right across from Rich's Snack Bar, where they had a lot of good eats. King Edward Hotel next door with a big fine swimming pool and then I had Allen and Dickey come down. They came down while I was still building the studio. I was the head carpenter.

#1 - Had you done anything with them before in Memphis when you were with Sam?

#2 - I'd cut several records with Dickey on Sun and Allen was one of his backup singers. Then after I left Sun I had worked with him some. I cut one record with Allen with RCA. One time while I was over here, I was working with Chet, he played me this dub of Patches as possible material for Allen. So, I played it for Allen and he thought it was all right but he thought it was kind of hokey, Dickey liked it,

and then months later, after I had moved into Beaumont, got Allen a job- well they both got jobs teaching school. Reynolds had done that a year prior to that and Dickey hadn't taught yet but he had graduated from college by then so they both got jobs teaching school in Beaumont. That was going to be their means to move down there so they could be with me in the studio and we'd make records and publish tunes and stuff. Before Allen had to do that I made a better deal with him with the hotel next door, where Webster was running the bar - the Taproom - where they would pay him \$150 a week - \$50 to tend bar from 4 to 7 or 8 in the evening and then another \$50 a week to come in and sing and play. Because by then, I'd got to hanging around over there and drawn a little bit of a crowd and they would give a beer for some entertainment. So I worked a deal with the taproom there and they hired Allen and then before Dickey had to go teach school - they were both going to teach school and had to drive a bus too, but before Dickey had to teach school, he had a hit with "Patches", He was on the road.

#1 - Was that ever recorded before?

#2 - No, I don't think so.

#1 - I can't hardly remember, but - #2 - No. Cynthia Wheel, and ...

#1 - Berryman Wheel.

#2 - Berryman, yeah. But it was after I left RCA and moved to Beaumont and built a studio when we actually cut this song. But Dickey had wanted to cut that song all that time. He thought it was a hit.

#1 - Allen was right it was hokey, Dickey was right, it was hit.

#2 - And I had the back side of that too

#1 - What was that?

#2 - A song called "More or Less". It was more or less a song.

#1. - What was "I Saw Laura Yesterday" did that follow?

#2 - "Linda", yeah. That was the next one. We cut it in Nashville though. While we had a hit record with Dickey, and rather than cut an album in Beaumont, we needed an album to get a hit single. So we needed an album. So rather than trying to cut it in Beaumont - it was rather tedious cutting in Beaumont there, because nobody had made any records there. I had to get up a band and vocal group - so "matches" had 9 different splices in it - 3 or 4 cuts, with 9 splices. Because when Dickey would sing the vocal group would mess up. But the record turned out pretty good. Sold a million. But I didn't want to do a whole

album like that, you know, splicing and all, would be a little too tedious and nobody else did. So we came to Nashville to cut the album. And we cut different kind of stuff than we would cut in Beaumont. The stuff we cut in Beaumont sold better than the stuff we cut anywhere else.

#1 - When did you first hear Dickey sing "She Thinks I Still Care"?

#2 - That was while, - I remember coming up to Memphis on a trip from Beaumont when I was building the studio, or it was either that or shortly before I went to Beaumont - it was during the early period and I liked that song a lot and nobody else seemed to be interested in it, but I kept having Dickey sing it or kept singing it myself. I just thought it was a hit. Dickey didn't think much about it one way or another. He had kind of written it for Adam Way. It was slightly different (singing 2 versions) So George Jones

used to hang around the studio a lot. When he was in town, he'd drop in there. He liked Richey's Snack Bar across the street. That drew a lot of people. Mrs. Pershin could cook up some real authentic Cajun shrimp gumbo every Friday. And she made real good - everything was good - chili, vegetables, a great Place to eat, directly across the street. And right next door to them was an electronic supply place, when I needed some tubes or something -

#1 - If you needed anything, you never had to leave the block.

#2 - And catty-cornered across the next block up was the City Auditorium. It was kind of easy to lure Johnny Cash and - well, I had him come down one time. I had, but that is another story. But all the People came to the studio when they came to Beaumont. I'd go over to the auditorium and get them and we'd go to Richey's Snack Bar and then go to the studio. All the people I knew from Nashville; Roy Clark, Jerry Lee, they all played at the Beaumont auditorium.

#1 Did [unintelligible] come along to sing. Did you have anything to do with that?

#2 - I cut "Colinda" with him - that was the first time I worked with him. Bill had been working, with him. Yeah, he'd had several records out, some of which were hits in the Cajun belt.

#1 - We had them in Houston.

#2 - That's the Cajun Belt.

#1 - Who else drifted through there, anybody else?

#2 - Jiving Reeve -

#1 - Jiving Jeeves and the Jokers?

#2 - I think so. Benny Barnes, Autrey Inman, actually Charlie Rich came down there one time and stayed several days.

#1 - talking to me about moving to Beaumont.

#2 - I was prepared to go out on a limb. I was going to come with some sort of monthly thing for him to write for me and come down here and we were going to work together but I didn't want to do it unless he could be right there. So then he didn't want to leave Arkansas.

#1 - Did you have anything to do with Dale and Grace in Beaumont?

#2 - No, that was done in Houston. No, wait a minute, there was a studio over in Lafayette, I never saw it but they cut records over there and I don't know where that Dale and Grace record was cut. I forget, I think it was cut in Houston. That was one of Major Bill Smith's deals.

#1 - Did you work with Carl Perkins at all?

#2 - I did just a few sides with him. I just started working with him when he left the label. I never cut in Houston, I remember what I cut with him. There was one thing that was in a movie, I know.

#1 - After Beaumont more or less, then you came back working in Memphis and Nashville, or did you go from there?

#2 - I went from Beaumont to Nashville in February of '65. Moved up here with the moving van that had a 9 foot grand piano on it, a four ton air conditioner, filled it up. Cleaned out my bank account paying for the moving. I had about \$134 in the bank when I came to Nashville. But, I had some stuff on the way, I had a - we cut a hit in Nashville a couple or three months after I was here, with --Dickey Lee, "Laurie" and that was done here at Foster's old studio, the one Sam built, that was in the Cumberland Lodge

Building, that they have torn down. That was a good studio. A great big thing.

#1 - When you came here, you got a deal with RCA right away?

#2 - No, I never had a deal with RCA other than producing individual artist. What did I do when I first got here? I cut some stuff with Johnny Cash, everybody loved the "Night Owl" and I had about five songs in that and "The One on the Left" was a hit.

#1 - That cross over?

#2 - Yeah. I kind of got lucky. I'll tell you what I had when I came to Nashville. I didn't have a lot of money but I had some equipment. I had a complete - had two Ampex tape recorders and Telefunken microphones, cutting lathe with suction system and hot stylus and Gotham Champion cutting head system and a whole bunch of songs that I had been writing a year or so, my last year in Beaumont. My last year in Beaumont I didn't do much other than write some songs. Didn't make many records. Put I hit town with about 30 songs.

#1 - You hit town with 30 songs?

#2 - Yeah, 30 new ones and I got most of them cut. A bunch of them were hits. One of them was Charlie Pride's first record - first hit record - first chart record. "Just Between You and Me" it was his third release cut, the #4 in the charts. He got the #2 in one of them. His first two records didn't chart. They got a good bit of play though. His third record went to No. 4 in one paper and No. 2 in another. Then his next record, I wrote his first two or three hits. "Just Between You and Me" was the first one - that's one of those things I had written in Beaumont and made a piano and voice and guitar demo, with an arrangement

basically like a Charlie Pride record, And the "One on the Right, on the Left", was one of them 30 songs and "Flushed from the Bathroom of your Heart", "Daddy Old Legs," "Egg-Sucking Dog"

#1 - "California Girl"?

#2 - No, I wrote that in Nashville

#1 - "Katie" too

#2 - No, that was after "California Girl". I was trying to think of some more of those 30 songs. Most of them you'd recognize. You know, it was a time that I didn't seem to be doing much. I wasn't cutting any records, but just writing songs. Because I knew I was going to Nashville or Hollywood, one or the other. I'd stayed in Beaumont, except that Bill didn't want to buy a new board. I had already bought the three track. The studio in Beaumont was a great one but we never got the equipment. I didn't have as much equipment as I thought I wanted. Everyone else had gone three track by then. We were still doing it mono. One of the biggest problems I had in Beaumont is I didn't have anybody technically to help me, like I'd had in Memphis or somewhere else. So I went down and took some courses in electronics and learned all I needed to know about amplifiers. Got to where I could fix it myself. But I couldn't expand, couldn't add to it.

#1 - You did run into the Winters! [Edgar and Johnny Winters - ed.] What did you think about them?

#2 - That they were pretty talented. I wouldn't, I felt like they, you know, I felt like I wouldn't be surprised if they made it. And I wasn't. Edgar was the one - Johnny was the guitar player, that's about all he did, but Edgar played the saxophone and piano and wrote music. I had him write me some fiddle charts one time and he brought in some

kids that he worked with and they were not bad. Not good enough for a record, but they were good for a 14 or 15 year old kid. He was the one who seemed more serious about music in general. Johnny was a kind of happy-go-lucky guitar picker. Ken Ritter was producing him. Ken is the mayor of Beaumont now and has been just about ever since we left there. I guess he still is. Still works for Proctor and Gamble though.

#1 - Ever run into [unintelligible] in Beaumont? I was lucky to see Johnny Winter a good many times before he got discovered.

He played around in honky-tonks in Texas, 50 cents to get in. People would wander around. It was back in the days when dope was it. He would wander around..

#2 - Well, Ken had this label and he'd bring the Winters. Johnny was his artist - Edgar was an assistant to Johnny sort of, Johnny, more or less was the boss. That was when Ken Ritter was producing. And he'd come in and rent the studio, and cut these records and put them out under his label - Frolic, I think, and sell a few around the area. Never made any money out of it. Ken, you know, just liked being in the record business. It was fashionable being in the record business and Hughey, when I first got to Beaumont, Hughey was still cutting hair. But he'd had a few hits. Hughey cut my hair when I drove over to Winning, about 20 miles away from Beaumont, he cut my hair.

#1 - I would love to get an interview with you, Hughey, Shelby, Chet and Sam, all five of you in the same room.

#2 - Sam don't know these other people. Well Shelby, He knows Chet a little bit. Not much probably.

#1. - Did you have Chips back with you?

#2 - Just barely, he was around, he'd drop by once in a while. He was a guitar picker.

#1 - He was telling me how they used to over-dub when they didn't have equipment, put a lead tape over half the tape. Tape it to play it back then, when they would come to that part, put a new part on and peel the tape off.

#2 - I never did that one.

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

[Bob Webster now enters the conversation]

#1 - What can you add about the Beaumont days?

#3 - Jack and I are going down there before long to spend the night, they're remodeling the King Edward Hotel where we did a lot of our things.

#1 - Yeah

#2 - Remember when Reynolds and Dickey first came down there, they were both going to teach school. But I got Reynolds a better deal over there at the tap room, when you and [unintelligible] \$50.00 a week bartending for about 3 or 4 hours, right! and \$50 a week for singing - how many nights a week was it?

#3 - Usually when we didn't have someone else.

#2 - But it got to be a trip, I mean it got to be a happening place.

#3 - Was it the same place that Mike Condra ran later on?

#2 - No, I never heard of him.

#3 - This would have been after you all left.

#2 - It all started one night. Webster Bennett had bought the tap room. Me and Billy used to drop in there

occasionally - it was just a real quiet place that served beer.

#3 - That's where I met the both of you.

#2 - Yeah, it was always a nice little room.

#3 - It used to be a private club long time before that so it was very well appointed, well located bar. This was the thing, the place. The guy that ran it after you all left, later went to Houston and later opened up a series of pubs there which finally culminated in Liberty Hall.

#2 - I don't know.

#3 - I'm pretty sure

#2 - I never heard that name.

#1 - They still call it the Tap Room?

#3 - Right.

#1 - He told me Janis Joplin used to come down there and sing which would have been after you all left.

#3 - Then they closed the hotel, they welded the doors shut and he went to a place on another street, another part of town and called it the Taproom.

#1 - O.K. - that was the Taproom.

#3 - But he did operate it for a while.

#2 - See, in Beaumont, more than any other place I've been, we had characters hanging around that weren't in the music business. It was really great. There were a lot of characters living in the hotel next door, Joe Davids and Dickey Lee lived there for a while and Dickey worked there, and there was Burt and there was Russ Bennett who had a thing in the hotel there selling office equipment - adding machines, cash registers, desks, and stuff like that.

Well, Russ was sort of a guy that gets into something and immediately he wants to get into something else, too. And he was a natural born sort of guy who wanted to own a

saloon or something. So he bought the tap room one day. He and Bill, we'd drop by there in the afternoon sometime, have a beer or two. Nobody would be around much. Then one day we went in there and the place had changed hands and it was smiling Russ Bennett. We knew him from the office machine place.

#3 - You bought a desk from him?

#2 - We hung around the place. We knew the lady at the desk and, you know, we were on the scene all the time. And they'd come over to the studio. There's a chair down at Studio A that I've get to get that was stolen from me by the engineer at the King Edward Hotel. He brought it over to the studio. It's marked "Control Room Chair."

#3 - Came out of the lobby of the hotel.

#2 - It had, you know, seating. It had plastic, worn kind of thing.

#3- Worn chair.

#2 - Well it wore out and I took it off, but the main thing, it's still there. I'm going to get that back and my Mickey Mouse clock.

#3 - Well, I've already - Jim said you could have that.

#2 - I didn't mean for that to be sold - those two items. Well, anyway. Well, I ain't quarreling about that. I don't want that, but the Mickey Mouse clock - that's a sentimental sort of thing. Jack Spears, had one of the cartoonists at Disneyland do it. I want to put it up there. It's got a copy-right, Walt Disney Productions and everything. Mickey Mouse with a cowboy suit on. It was a little out of character in Studio A out there but it worked. But it would work fine here.

#1 - You started working with Tom T. Hall, before Pride?

#2 - Sort of about the same time, I think. When I came

to Nashville I had those 30 songs and, of course, all the other songs I had, you know. I had a pretty good jazz music catalogue at that point. I had "Miller's Cave", "I Know One" and "I Saw Linda Yesterday", bunch of stuff.

#3 - I do remember now what happened. I was in there one night drinking a beer with Jack Evans, we were the only people there, I think and another guy hung around there, he was in the loan business, and I still see him. He lives two blocks from where Katie and I used to - and I still see him. We were in there having a few beers and Russ Bennett was behind the bar, and he asked me why I didn't buy half the joint.

#2 - And help him run it, huh?

#3 - Yes.

#2 - So he could tend to his other business.

#3 - I used to be a bartender years ago in New York.

So I says "How much do you want" and he said, "Oh \$300.00 [? - ed.]".

#2 - (Laughing) \$300.00!

#3 - But it increased in value, because when I sold it... but we had a lot of fun.

#2 - Faron Young still owes you for two six packs - right?

#3 - No, that's Webb Pierce, for blowing a hole in the ceiling. That was quite a debt. You could blow a hole in the ceiling. But that was good. We had a lot of fun, then it got to be -- Then I quit fooling around. Bill, Jack and ....

#2 - Webster is real straight, always got a tie on, Traffic Manager at Houston Chemical. Company. He had to get all the box cars unloaded on the right shift and everything. They said he was one of the best. Made good money, drove a snappy little Oldsmobile, you know.

#3 - I wondered though, there was a patio and pool between the -

#2 - A great big fine, modern igloo.

#3 - Between that part of the hotel, you know, and the building where Jack had a studio and Bill's office was a very small parking lot and I was walking through that parking lot and went over to Bill's office

#2 - And we lived -

#3 - Jerry came walking in and he said, "Where you going" and. I said "Just walking around. I came into town for lunch. You know, I got to go back to the office". "When are you going to quit fooling around with a cheap music bum like me and Bill." And I don't know if it was that day - it wasn't that day it was shortly after, that I went back to lunch one day and called my boss in New York and gave him notice. But the joint was running pretty good. We were making money - we sold so much beer it was pitiful - incredible.

#2 - So, we sort of had the run of the hotel. The hotel manager was one of our best buddies.

#3 - We married him.

#2 - Yeah, we pretty - Bill Harper produced his wedding. And then Mrs. Hartley Travel thing was in the lobby there. So we were always butting in, and Bill was always sending DickeyLee on trips, you know, big tours. He'd go over there and get a string of tickets 12 feet long, you know. So it got to where when we wanted to take a trip, we just go to bars. Hartley and she'd make all the arrangements.

#3 - Our barber was there across the hall.

#2 - Yeah, the barber shop was there.

#3 - And I still, when I'm in Beaumont now, in the mornings when I awaken, I ease right down to the shop.

#2 - Besides that, there's a place right across from the hotel where you can leave the car in the morning and they fix it that day and you pick it up that night. And then on the other corner next to the hotel was the L & 11 Snack Shop. And they had some of the tastiest goodies in tine world. Open late at night where everybody'd go and eat oyster stew.

#3 - And potatoes - what were they - scalloped!

#2 - Au gratin potatoes. And it was right across from the City Auditorium.

#1 - Where did you run into Earl? how'd he get into the picture?

#2 - Earl lived at Anita, before my time. He is, of course, a chemical engineer.

#3 - They worked at the same place. He came to work at the Houston Chemical Corporation then we got to know one another you "now. Earl was running around. He had gotten a divorce or was getting a divorce, Earl was a nice person too, and, of course, when I get to know him and had this heir joint, I naturally became one of Earl's friends. 'then you know Earl was as much into the music aversion then as he is now. You know how that is. So he gravitated to Jack and Bill's immediately, as soon as he began to hang around the hotel bar. And he ultimately moved in. We had an apartment with three vacancies, 801 was the number, we have reason to remember that number vividly.

#2 - You've got to remember John, I was a star in that hotel there.

#3 - Absolutely.

#2 - The cowboy told me once that we never advertised who would entertain, but we had live entertainers six nights a week. We were open six nights a week. All

started one night when me and Bill Hall and Russ, and I don't remember if you were involved at that point or not - there wasn't anything but a juke box, wasn't any sound system or anything, we were just sitting there, there wasn't anybody around, I think Big Syd was there. I said, "Why don't I go get my guitar and entertain everybody." They said it was a great idea, so I went next door and got my guitar and came back to the Tap Room and started singing. Big Syd kept saying, "Play Malaguena". He had had a few cocktails. And I thrive on a good heckler, so that got up my energy and I got to singing and then some people dropped by. Then the next night, I got to singing again and within two or three days I had talked Russ - I think Webster was involved, because I talked him into putting a little sound system in there so I could be heard better.

#1 - We had a fine sound system.

#2 - Yeah, the first high fidelity P. A. system, stereo.

#3 - Before we had live entertainers, you know, before the entertainers came on, in the afternoon and early evening, we played stereo records.

#2 - Uh-huh

#3 - LP's

#2 - had speakers at each end of the room.

#3 - I had plenty of stereo records. Bill Pall, unknown to me, had enrolled me in a couple of record clubs, and the records kept coming in. I couldn't stop the flow.

#2 - And then Allen and Dickey got there. Neither one of them wanted to teach school. We got Allen this gig here tending bar - they were needing somebody to come in the afternoons.

#1 - Dickey's record all of sudden broke. He didn't teach school.

#2 - But for a good period of time there we had me and Allen and Dickey in there just about every night performing. It got to be, you know, crowded. People drop by to hear it. It was always informal. Reynolds was the only one that was official there, see, but then I would be there most every night and these people would come to town, Chet Atkins was in there, and Johnny Cash and the Carter Family and Merle Kilgore, Charlie Rich, Roy Clark and Jerry Lee. The Tap Room was a happening place.

#3 - We had the Stonemans - Jack talked me into booking them in there too.

#1- The Stonemans in there?

#2 - Yeah, we had the Stonemans in there and it was a happening joint.

#3 - It held 60 people. We'd get a hundred people in there and then the 5 or 6 Stonemans would get up and do their number.

#2 - We'd get in there and it would be closing time. So they would have to lock the door and quit selling booze. But everybody was having such a good time and Russ and Webster would be so happily drunk by then, they keep it awake. And sometimes there would be a packed house until 4 o'clock in the morning. And then, they got to passing out keys, to me and Bill Hall, so we could go in there on Sunday, and then you could walk right out the door - back door of the Tap right into the pool. "We'd go out there and get some people and say "Come on in we'll have a beer - we've got a key to the place". And it'd be packed then on Sunday morning. It got out of hand - out of hand.

(3 people talking at once)

#2 - The hotel was part of our facility. Bill Hall had a key that would fit any room. He used it too. Webster and

Dickey had an apartment there and Joe Davis was there and Earl lived there, didn't he? And sometimes I would go check in the place days at a time.

#3 - He had 801. It had a huge living room.

#2 - I always liked to hang around there, you know.

#3 - If you had 801 you didn't have to check in. 801 was a room easily this big and there were 3 bedrooms - it had a kitchenette, And we had a key made for each. That was where we lived, you know. But the manager we had for the most part, most of the time Harrison was his name.

#2 - He, John D. Harrison, an English guy, and he loved us. We could do no wrong. If I wrecked the room, he'd just out it on my bill.

#1 - Yeah.

#2 - I never could resist louvered doors, you know, see if you can go through 'em.

#3 - And then, this guy Russ Bennett was a very enterprising sort of fellow. He was a con man. That's what he was. He talked Jack and me into going into partners with him. The three of us and we bought us a Vulcan boat. This boat, we were told it was a Chris Craft and indeed it was, a Chris Craft kit boat. You know give it to the kids, put together, you know - sort of tinker toys. Oh boy, it was a great one, that boat.

#2 - Well actually, it was just that cable - we were out one time - it wouldn't start a couple of times, but we were out one time and the guys went along on the river and the cable broke, the steering cable and the thing took a sharp left.

#3 - Nobody thought to turn the throttle down.

#2 - Went into the bank before somebody remembered to turn it off. Well none of us were really boat owners - the kind

to get out and fix something, and I got stranded out in the middle of the river in the widest part one day when there was no wind, no oars and the motor wouldn't start, we just had to drift in - it took about two hours. We kept talking about going down and fixing the boat - there wasn't that much wrong with it when we got it. but it sat there and it rained and it sat there some more and it rained some more and the boat sunk - not from water coming in through the bottom but from filling up from the top. It got too heavy and went down.

#1 - It was overwhelmed by water rather than by the sun.

#2 - Yeah, filled up with rain water.

#3 - Last time I was on, it was a Sunday, Bill Hall and I and Russ.

#2 - It did rain in Beaumont, you know, it will rain and when it rains the bottom just -

#3 - We went out, we went pretty far up the river and the cable broke again. So the only time, you know on a boat like that, the motor cable, you know, it goes in circles because it's a centrifugal force. So the only way we could get back, we went into the bank that time and a couple of guys came on the boat to help) us get off. And when we could get back, I laid down on my back and fixed a way where I could get my hands up underneath, you know, the gas tank or something and get hold of this little, well it's the tiller, or something, it's only about that long. And Bill sat there chuckling and this guy Russ Bennett was up there, you know, telling me how to steer the boat - going, you know, this way and that way. And he is about as much of a boatman as I am, and this thing was killing me, because it had no leverage - big long, like a tiller and of course getting it into the swift part was difficult too.

#2 - We could have fixed the boat if we could have tuned up the engine and fixed the cables, it would have done all right. But we were three non boaters, putters-off of things to do later. People are captured going on boats. It's the only boat I've ever owned part of.

#3 - I was on twice. After that second time I never wanted to go on again. But that guy, this Bennett, we loved - He is still in Houston. He is down at Clear Lake.

#2 - He used to have an empire going on there for a while building skyscrapers and all that stuff. He was an energizing cat, he just couldn't wait for anything. He always got to get the job done, some of that too. Not only Russ Bennett, you know, he'd go hog wild in five minutes, get in any kind of business.

#3 - He never should have lost that Boston accent.

#2 - But he was trying to con us.

#3 - But for a while there we were making money.

#2 - Well, they got to giving away more beer than they were selling.

#3 - That's what happened to the old quarters.

#2 - But not on the scale like this. This got totally - it became a complete - the Tap Room became every man's property, sort of, you know.

#1 - That's why the old quarters - too much hassle to collect money for beer.

#2 - But during the time that it flourished, it was a happening room, and an illogical place.

#3 - We had a crowd of people we called up and say who is going to entertain, we never committed ourselves. But it got to where there were people I was hiring all the time. A girl, Big Helen, they called her, Big H, she played for cocktails, she played the piano and sang, and beautifully.

#2 - She was part of my local group. Sang with "Patches."

#3 - Yeah, and so she sang, you know, and finally the school district told her to either teach school or play piano. Well, anyway, another guy, Joe, what's his name and Jack brought David Parker down to play guitar.

#2 - Walter Forbes was a lot more on the scene in Beaumont than around here lately.

#3 - Lamar, the college was there - folks seemed to stay. That's why they loved Allen, because Allen, boy, they still love him down there. And the folks seem to think so, you know with Walter.

#2 - Allen and Dickey did a good thing together. They did a lot of duet stuff, Joe Beanie.

#3 - Yeah, when Dickey was in off the road, he'd be down here entertaining anytime I wanted and the people who did a show at the Auditorium across the street played when in town.

#2 - A lot of them stayed at the hotel.

#3 - Yeah, a lot of them, and they'd get up and sing for different people.

#2 - That was a fun place. I had a lot of fun in Beaumont. I was there 3 ½ years and I'm glad I went.

#3 - Remember when Bill brought Charlie Price down.

#2 - We all went to Houston to meet him.

#3 - There wasn't any freeway then and I remember coming home at 2 o'clock in the morning, you know how foggy it gets down there? And this Oldsmobile, it was a great car, but the gas gauge only read "Empty", "Half full," or "Full" and we're whipping along coming from Houston to Beaumont, you know, when it's foggy you don't see anything, anywhere. I heard Charlie say something to Bill, he was in

the back seat, but was looking up from`. "It's obvious we're out of gas.

Well, we put him up, and then we did a number. Allen and Dickey doing their thing - whatever. In my joint, Charlie could see everybody and all of this alive, everybody all the customers there. And Jack was the one they'd asked for the most. It was kind of a carnival time.

#2 - He forgets too, at midnight when we'd lock the doors, not let anybody in any more, but people would call up and ask if different ones would be there.

#3 - But he told me at one time when we were hiring and our policy was to have everything, every night, so for a while there, you can see why I didn't have time to fool around with a bunch of railroad tank cars out there.

#1 - Jack was telling me, you all worked with Cookie and the Cup Cakes.

#2 Oh, they did "Matilda" down there - That was their smash hit.

#1 - I was over at Houston in high school in '61 and '62 and we used to have Cookie and Bobby Bland play for our dances

#3 - Well, Bobby Bland was with Duke Records at Houston.

#2 - Didn't we do a bunch of stuff with Cookie and the Cup Cakes?

#3 - We did "Matilda"

#2 - I did "Matilda" Hadn't they done that before?

#3 - No, in eight years they did a lot of things. #2 - Is that when I got Curie. George Curie

#3 - Yeah, and on top of that he used to come over, Finally the Duke people started to send people over, remember?

#1 - Yeah, was Bobby Bland ever over there?

#3 - Yeah, I think so.

#2 - I'm pretty sure he was there sometimes. That guy who sang "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head", used to come over there.

#1 - B. J. Thomas

#2 - Oh that was B. J. and the Fire House #1 - That's right.

#2 - And Ken Ritter, of course, was always helping do something down there with Johnny and Edgar.

#1 - Did Ray Head ever come in? Back in '62 Ray Head was doing James Brown stuff.

#3 - Now an interesting thing which I always got a kick out of, two weeks ago tomorrow, I guess it was, when I was driving from Houston. I was coming into Beaumont, I had caught the local station there, probably from 5 to 6 p. m. and come to find out he does this all Saturday afternoon, he plays records made by people in that area either by people who have made records in Nashville or what, but local people. So I heard Cookie and the Cup Cakes, not "Matilda"- but another one he had after that was somebody "Champagne Brothers", they were in Jacksonville.

#2 - Did I cut that?

#3 - I don't remember. You were the one that was running the board, anyway.

#2 - Champagne Brothers - that was, I think, I cut some stuff with them in Memphis one time - that's where I met Hughey Muff.

#1 - They played in Houston. They played at our dances and everything.

#3 - I listened to this most of this hour and luckily he played George Jones records. He played "This Could Go On Forever." I was waiting around to hear a John Dean record to see if he did it there or went to Nashville to do it,

#2 - Jack Scott - remember him?

#3 - There are countless local hillbillies you know, I was here, I hadn't been there since last year. I was driving along ... , and hear all these records, they were so familiar to me - that last hour driving to Beaumont was just great. And then I went to the station a few days later and found out that the disc jockey there was Beaumont's Paul Berlin. That guy, he's back in that radio station where he was then. They had a good radio station way out #60 on the dial, they played Rock and Roll.

#2 - I carried a lot of stuff on "Moon Mulligan" down there. "Moon Mulligan" remember him? We cut a bunch of stuff on him.

#3 - Moon lived near there. - A grand piano sitting over in the studio. -

#1 - But Tompall and Charley Pride were

#3 - I think so.

#2 - Once I got to Nashville and got settled in and got my little cubby hole in the RCA Building, where I had Chet Atkins right down there on the main floor - RCA Studios A and B, right there where I could book. By the time I got my lathe up there and my two tape recorders, I started cutting records and getting songs cut and, I think it was during that time, maybe, I got into Tompall, after I was...

#1 - Oh, we could check that the records. Did Jack Johnson bring Charley Pride to you, too.

#2 - Yeah

#1 - Then you pretty much arranged to engineer and finance?

#2 - I got - It wasn't a demo - it was a master. I paid for it and produced it and Jim Malloy engineered it.

#1. - You mean you did a master instead of a demo? And just took it over all together.

#2 - Yeah, that's what came - that was his first record. I owned it. I paid for it and subsequently sold it to RCA..

#3 - That'll make his insurance effective for you. The other is for Arthur and Mr. Black?

#1 - Incidentally, we are going to pay the smaller fee on the policies than Al Nicklos because right now the insurance company has got a sort of a sale on.

#2 - Oh, yeah? I'd like to be in on this and horse trade. I'd like to beat out Allen Nicklos and... (Singing "There's A Little Bit of Everything in Texas and a Whole Lot of Texas in Me").

#1 - You know, I heard, when I was in Austin there one time, I heard B. J., he was probably on Conquest Film and played "Anybody going to San Antone", he played the version that you cut and then played another version that Charley Pride cut with somebody else later.

#2 - I don't know if he ever cut it later.

#1 - Or maybe he was live or something. But it was incredible, because the version you cut was so much better than the other, and that's a fine song.

#2 - Yeah

#3 - A really fine song.

#2 - (Singing) "Is Anybody Going To San Antone."

#1 - What was it like working with Pride? I understand some of the professional's atmosphere would get kind of tense?

#2 - With Charley Pride it was always a hassle. Just a question of how much. It was never comfortable, like it should have been, because Charley Pride is up tight.

#1 - Did you pick all the material and you just had him sing it, or did he try to choose the material?

#2 - I just gave him - let him hear a lot of songs - let him learn the ones he liked. I picked out songs that I

thought fit his voice and play them for him, but I gave him plenty of

choice. I always gave him a lot of choice. The first record I cut with him I had put together a tape of about 8 songs that I had gathered up - most of which I didn't publish. And he came to town and I gave him the tape, and he took it and went down to visit his father in Mississippi for several days, and while he was there he wanted to learn songs - which he did. So he came back to town and he had learned 7 or 8 songs real good. He sang them all to me and I said "Let's cut "Snakes Crawl At Night" and "Atlantic Coastal Lines" and that's what we cut and we did that in an hour and a half, and then I cut a side cause I had one I'd written that I wanted to get on the market with me singing it, so I cut a split session. It cost about a grand to tape the session. So I cut "Snakes Crawl At Night" and "Atlantic Coastal Line" the first hour and a half and spent the other hour and a half cutting this other thing, called "What Makes the Babies Cry, Mama?", and it came out on Amy Moller with the back side of something I'd cut in Beaumont that I had in the can. So I got two records out of that session.

#1 - Did you pick the rendition on the Pride section or was that RCA, or what was that?

#2 - I picked them the first time and from then on I picked them a long time, until he got to know who they were.

Charley would go out and hire some people to play with him on the road and then he would bring them into the studio and then I would have to be the diplomat and let them sit out while somebody else did the studio playing.

#1 Interesting, this is how the mail goes out now.

#2 - Hugh, this?

#1 - Yeah

#2 - All I can - does it say something?

#1 - Just the catalogue is so dull... recording..

#1 - Well he didn't add to the story.

#2 - Well you'd be glad to have him on tape as a story, as separate story or whatever.

#1 - It's a whole story but I don't want to do that.

#2 - Keep him on tape.

#1. - I was toying with the idea of going down to Memphis, and try to sell the story on it somewhere separately... Sam Phillips day, whenever it is - it should be written up.

#2 - Yeah.

#1 - But I never even met him before.

#2 - You could call him up and get my half of the conversation, anyway.

#1 - If I do wind up pursuing this into a book, I'll have to talk to him. I wouldn't want to do it without his permission.

#2 - Yeah, he'd probably do it. He told me one time he wouldn't let anybody interview him except Paul Ackerman.

#1 - Well, I don't imagine Paul would get around to it.

#2 - No

#1. - I could pull my credentials, although it isn't done yet - my family's credentials, I mean they aren't mine.

#2 - Maybe my record will hit and make it easier.

#1 - Well. that wouldn't hurt.

#2 - "On the Cover of A Rolling Stone" (singing)

#1 - To me the story should be run, regardless, even if there was no record, it should be run - it's history. It's valid, it had an enormous impact, it has helped shape what we are listening to now, which is really dreadful, but I mean it helped pave the way for the whole Rock and Roll

era. If it hadn't been for Sun Records, I don't think there would have been -

#2 - Sun was a happening place. It was a hang out place. That's where it happens - where you get certain people hanging out during a certain period of time. Get the right combination and then the music flows. I've been around a couple of places where it's been flowing. As far as Nashville is concerned, I feel closer to that right now than I ever had with the attic. I'm about to reassemble all the elements you need with the recording kind of thing, you got to have a bathroom next to the control room - you need a restaurant close by, or a fully stocked kitchen. So we got a nice kitchen here.

#1 - Hear anything about

#2 - Yeah, I think about it three or four times a week. But I don't plan on doing anything about it until the right time. If it's never, that's all right too. In the meantime, the tapes are pretty well, got the attic insulated so they'll stay in good shape. Wouldn't want to put them any place where there is an extreme temperature one way or the other. Tape will last for a long time.

#1 - Yeah, that's the nicest thing about the music business --- is that records last almost as long as forever.

#2 - Well, one thing I'm a little bit proud of is as far as the records I've cut in the business, a lot of them still get played. (slick-click, (singing) Come in we're making a movie - got your cameras? when are the cameras going to be here? Didn't you bring the movie cameras? Don't you have the movie cameras in your car?

#1 - You better have. There is a rumor that you've never had as much fun cutting records as you had in Memphis.

#2 - Yeah.

#1 - What's the matter now? Why isn't it as much fun? - #2  
- I don't know.

#1 - Not the right question. What I'm trying to get at, I think, is to me now, music is too layered and too artificial. It's not music to me when it takes a year to cut an album, not the way you did it, but for instance somebody who works a year to come out with a Linda Ronstadt, album for instance. It costs \$300,000 to produce something which is pieced together virtually, instead of being able to cut, you know, go in there in an hour and cut an album.

#2 - All right, I'll tell you why it was more fun. There wasn't anything you had to do before you made the music. You'd just walk right in and make the music. You don't have to mess around getting the drum sound, you don't have to mess around getting the earphone balanced right, you don't have to do all that stuff. I mean we didn't do it that way back then. We didn't have baffles, we didn't have earphones, except when we over dubbed - didn't have any cue system. We just did it acoustically. Sometimes, the walls would sing back to you a little bit. It wasn't like singing into a bunch of cotton. Still the recording studios are too dead right now to suit me. And that's a cyclic thing - studios get live, then they get dead, then they get too live and too dead. But music don't change that much. Well, all studios now-a-days have to be versatile to be commercial studios. They are called upon to do a lot of different set-ups and you can't have stylized kind of sound in a commercial studio that you could have in a place like Sun, or a place like my attic. I couldn't build a studio if I was trying to do it commercially, because people are too indoctrinated and brain-washed with all of this bull shit,

engineer stuff E.Q. and time cubes and linear phasers and all them gadgets. Well I decided I don't like the sound of gadgets, I like the sound of pure musical instruments and out of the orchestra there's hundreds of them, flutes, fiddles, Conga drums, bass drums, trombones, trumpets, clarinets. Mostly what I'm into right now is cutting some tapes that I like to hear at home. Different sounds, different musical sounds. But I don't want to do it with gadgets and gimmets - I want to do it with music.

#1 - When did you know you had reached the point where what you heard sounded right to you would also be right for the radio?

#2 - I don't know if I've reached that point.

#1 - There is an interview somewhere where they asked, "When did you know you had really made it?" When did you say to yourself "I've made it"?

#2 - I don't remember saying that yet. It's just being able to want to keep looking for something - is the name of the game. Not having the curiosity pounded out of you by convention, by bull shit people.

#1 - That seems to me like, kind of what J.M.I was going to do. I read somewhere, quoting you or Allen, that J.M.I. was all about music we can take home and listen to.

#2 - Yeah

#1 - As against what was coming out of Nashville at the time, which was music that was being pumped out.

#2 - Well what I have found is that most of the hit records that I've had weren't usually like the other stuff that was selling at that particular time. I don't have trouble going out on the limb. I had trouble getting people - other people going, out on the limbs musically.

#1 - Well the most interesting thing about Waylon's album was that you stripped all the excess things away from him and you let him play the guitar, and for the first time on a label name that can remember it made people listen to what he was singing, and how he was singing it and what he was playing on the guitar. It was stripped to the bone and to the room and to the local.

#2 - Well, if you listen to Waylon sing and play the guitar, when he's right, which is a good part of the time, then that is completeness. Waylon is elegant, him and his thumb.

Waylon's got a million dollar thumb. All I'm saying is Waylon is terrific - just him and his guitar. Anything else you could add to it, it ought to be something to enhance it rather than to act upon it or to change it.

#1 - But up until "Dreams" it had been covered up.

#2 - Well, see it's a mystery to me why people admired Waylon's guitar playing around town, and they wouldn't let him play on his own records. That kind of thing mystifies me. One of the facts why people didn't think Waylon was a good guitar picker is that they wouldn't let him play on his own records. You can't do it that way, because you've got to make records - ear phones and baffles - making records is not the natural way people go out and make music. They don't make music in any other situation where they're strapped up with ear phones and they've got to work two mics and all this crap. Everybody's cut off in a little cubby holes, can't see anybody and half the time the records were not cut by the same people at the same time - the guy who played bass may not even know the guy who played trumpet. Probably don't. That ain't no way to make NATURAL music. And that's all the music I want to make

from now on, just NATURAL music. I want it to be naturally and anatomically right. Rhythm - that's the key to it for me, right rhythm patterns, deciding which foot you want to put forward, the left or the right. Well, in dancing school the man starts on the left and the woman starts with the right. And in a marching band, everybody starts with the left foot. But I don't think you got to stay on the left. I like to shift the foot sometimes, you know, and then come back to it. Surprises, spontaneity, that's a good word, music is supposed to be spontaneous - right?

Unless it's classical music or something. And that's done in a certain way. But it's still sometimes the symphony is long, sometimes not quite so long. But it seems to me that music, other than stuff written out note for note, ought to have surprises in it. Seems to me that would be the essence of it. Well, that's the kind of music I want to make - where there's room for spontaneity. But you can't hardly do that when in the samba beat pattern. It's something like that. I'm talking about getting music beat out of mental grounds up into your ass.

#1 - Spadey [Brannen] does that.

#2 - Yeah, but Spadey sometimes - this movement I'm talking about is an action and a reaction at the same time. It's something that happens when music is doing a certain thing. It's really jazz that I am talking about. But jazz ain't something you plan - jazz is something that has to happen. You start playing a song and if it ain't jazzing, you can't make it jazz. But if it's jazzing and you go with it - if it ain't jazzing in the thing and do something else - you can do it later. I don't like story songs. You can't jazz them. You go through once and you've got the story and what

else you going to do right then - you know you can't do these story songs more than once. I don't like songs that you can't do more than once because I'm trying to make records. I like songs you can do five times and they never get tired of it because you don't do it the same way. It's them little subtle things. Music is a subtle thing anyway, that's the whole essence of music - subtlety. Guess you could live without it. You don't eat it, it has no vitamins or minerals, but I think it is necessary. The rhythm part of it comes right out of it - primitive.

#1 - It had to have started with drums.

#2 - Come right out of nature.

#1 - It seems to me the first instrument had to have been the drum.

#2 - Yeah. The rhythm, the first instrument we had was some kind of rhythmic thing. I mean 2 and 2 had always been 4. If something is divisible by 2 it's always been divisible by 2. So you find certain patterns emerging. Well these patterns are innate to the human body, too. You know like 1, 2, 3 (in rhythm) 1, 2, 3.

#1 - It's a waltz.

#2 - Still 1, 2, 3. Put three of them together and it's nine. That's still divisible by 3.

The fox trot is 1, 2, 3, 4. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; - two of them is divisible by 4. It's slow, slow, quick, quick. It's slow, slow, quick, quick.

But still 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; 1, 2, 3, 4; 1, 2, 3, 4. Brazil is one-uh, one-uh two, (sings some numbers) and that is a 1 and a 2 and a

#1 -

#2 - In dancing they teach you there is an exact foot position. There's that one and there's that one for the left foot forward and there's that one, I believe that's about it.

#1 - We haven't talked about J.M.I.

#2 - I had Rick Finezack write up a little story on J.M.I. It's good because it's just sort of 3 or 4 page thing but it's in the right sequence. It's laid out right. It's in good outline. You can expand it - any part you wanted to. I'll get you a copy of that. I just had him write me some stories just to have. What about J.M.I.?

#1 - Well, they were wanting to get it on type.

#2 - The J.M.I story?

#1 - Because to me what they called later Progressive Country was something that was found on sound.

#2 - Well, I suppose there is some connection. I think one of the early records of that particular kind of thing was Waylon's record of "Good Hearted Woman". That's one we didn't cut it but we worked it out - we made to tape - we did cut it and the cut we made was Waylon singing it and me and him playing the guitars. That was awfully close to the record he cut a few days later, playing that tape far the bond aver at RCA. I guess he played the tape - we worked it out - worked out the rhythm of it. da ta da. (singing). See those major dances, like the waltz, tango, samba, jitter bug, fox trot - and then there are some Latin kind of things like the Mambo which is an off-shoot of the rhumba. When I was there at Arthur Murray's training class, there was one we dedicated to rhumba and mambo. I never did like the mambo very much. The rhumba was all right, but all those other things the bossa nova and what was that thing going around - cha-cha - and all those are offshoots of the

rhumba and the mambo. Mostly mambo. Was it mambo or mamba? I didn't like it. Jerky - it was jerky. But they're all the same dance - just styles of the dance. It's sort of outlaw, so-called music I don't think it was a style of something else rather than a total thing, you know. It ain't a waltz - it's a rhumba or it ain't a rhumba. It ain't a mamba, it's a cha-cha. Passing part of it and that's a good part of it, passing part, getting somewhere else from this point to that point by way of somewhere else. So, that's been here all the time. That kind of beat.

#1 - What is your ultimate goal?

#2 - I don't have any one in particular. Thing I'd like to do best is to be able to get into a spaceship and play a star. Go visit some other planets in this galaxy or go visit some other galaxy. That's what I'd really like to do. Be a spaceman, that's what my ultimate goal is to be, in my lifetime. I mean, get in a ship and blast off. I don't know if I'll ever be able to pull that off. But, I've been waiting for 16 track. Shortly after I discovered the mono tape recorder I was asking Sam wouldn't it be possible to put two of them things on top of each other so we could have the voice on one track and the band on the other. I was looking for stereo about two or three months after I found Sun Records Studio, you know. And it was only about 6 or 8 months later that they came out with it. If they hadn't, I'd have probably invented stereo. I figured we had to separate them two tracks, because of their magnetic jazz going on - we thought we could stick a piece of leader tape in there between them and the tape would have been about a half inch wide. But it would have been nice if you could have the voice on one track and the band on the other, then you could change it later on or have it separately, that

was what I was needing back there. If I'd had a two track at Sun, of course that was available, we could have; Sun stayed mono after a lot of other people had gone to three track. Not too long. But it was still mono when I left there. So we were building a new studio at the time. Sam was -

#1 - He talked about it for years.

#2 - That's one of the things - when I went to work for Sam, there were things I didn't like about him too much. But there were things I did like about him. One of the things I liked about him was that he was into machines like I was. He was always talking about a Scully lathe, he wanted a Scully lathe for years. It cost about \$7,000. He could have bought ten while I was working for him. He was still talking about it - "One of these days I'm going to have a Scully lathe".

#1 - Sell one or sell the whole business.

#2 - I never did know about this Holiday Inn stock, whether he had a bunch of it or what.

#1 - How come you didn't buy in on that?

#2 - Didn't particularly have any money to buy in on it. Or any particular inclination to buy stock anyway. I was more into buying something else.

#1 - Who is the best singer you've ever heard?

#2 - George Jones, Jerry Lee and Louis Armstrong.

#1 - What about songs - do you have any favorite songs?

#2 - Yeah, I've got a lot of favorite songs: "When I Dream" which I regard as the most near perfect song, it's not perfect,

but I can't find anything wrong with it; "As I Lived" is a melody and a three minute script - that's one of my own

songs, I think. My favorite probably is "Some Cowboys Hated Horses".

#1 -

#2 - I produced the only record. I got one song that I wrote that has not been sung by anybody but Louis Armstrong. That is "Why Did Mrs. Murphy Leave Town."

#2 - Of all the people, the things, I'd really like to have another crack at is the band I could put together right now, or four or five years from now. And not call it country. I don't mean we'd change the songs, but just wouldn't say its a country album. It don't sound funny at all to me to hear the steel guitar on "Almost Persuaded" with Louie singing it. Louis just sings right into whatever. I came back and told Charley Pride "Why can't you be like Louis?" He reminded me of that several times. He later remembered it.

#1 -

#2 - Most of the time, and Betty Berger who was Sister Zula, who was the one that hired me for Arthur Murrays. Betty worked over there at Sam's Radio Station in Memphis.

#1 - Was that a million song?

#2 - Huh?

#1 - Was that a million dollar song?

#2 - What

#1 - "Since I Met You Baby"

#2 - I didn't do that. I did a version of it later. Yeah that was a big hit back in the rocking 40's. Bobby Joe was a big singer back then.

#1 - O.K. but I thought you did that more recently. #2 - No.

#1 - Well then "I Almost Lost My Mind" did you do that one?

#2 - No. I re-did them four or five years ago down at Studio B. I was producing " - " with Ivory Joe. I've got a tape up there in the attic of Ivory Joe and Charley Pride singing this song. I got all kinds of tapes. I'll pull them out some of these times. I got an original of Elvis, talking, interview from Germany. The girl's the only one who's got the other copy.

#1 - How come Elvis never cut more jazz music songs?

#2 - I got a bunch of film too. Remember that album by my father?

#1 - That's the one you did with, on him.

#2 - Well, we did it originally with his voice and the piano. And we over dubbed some people. I took four voices and made it should like a choir with stacking tracks. Well, I'm going to go back sometimes and re-do that and have a real choir, maybe some trombones and no telling what all else. Put it on there and release it commercially. My father might get to be a Rock and Roll star, which would be all right. But in case my Father ever has a hit I got him on film in the cute little set we have down there. Ken Threadgill - I got a whole album in can of him, produced by me and Waylon Jennings and Kris Kristofferson. And I got that on film

#1 - He is still going strong. The last I heard.

#2 - I got Charley Pride at the Astrodome, hour and 10 minutes, plus all the cows and everything, you know - horses. An hour and 10 minutes of the Astrodome, the bigness of which is illustrated by the fact that Charlie Pride is there. And we got shots of the board that says "Thank you, Charley", for drawing the second largest attendance in the history of the Astrodome for Friday night (whatever it was), second only to Elvis.

#1 - That was the rodeo wasn't it?

#2 - I've got his fantastic shot at the top of the Astrodome in the day when the sun comes through, it's like a giant spaceship, and it's a straight shot up and Ron turns the camera so it looks like the thing turns and comes around like a spaceship. I could use just that much in some sequence, for my son's fishing country movies. The Astrodome is a great place to write a movie about, you know, just go down there with all them lights, the space and all the stuff you could get there.

#1 - What about the Superdome, it must be alike.

#2 - Uh-huh.

#1 - I haven't been able to go in yet, but it must be unbelievable. I watched the Astrodome being built. I lived about three miles from there. Used to go over there when it was under construction. They never had any guards or nothing over there. You'd have to have dynamite to hurt it. We used to go and get a six-pack and go sit down on the concrete before they had the seats there and watch and just look at it.. They had a crane at home plate with arm that stretched to the top of the structure, and it would be sitting there at home plate and there would be this steel arm. We'd get out and walk around the field and just walk around, nobody ever said boo to us. They didn't have a watchman or anything. It was just like a different world when you walk through those doors.

#2 - Where was that?

#1 - The Astrodome. It was just like another planet, self enclosed little area.

#2 - I loved it. When I went down there that time I took a film, a small film crew, we ran two cameras and took the sound off the P.A. mix which was pretty good, because

they've got a control room up there and everything. And they kind of gave us the run of the place. I knew the guy that kind of runs it, Dick Weekly, and he let me play with the lights, you know, and I wanted to get a bunch of the cows over there a whole big building with big cows and everything, it was during the fat stock show. So what I've got, I wanted to shoot Charley Pride - just to get some stuff I could use. Well I got that. But in addition, what I really did was cover that event, sort of, on film. And I own that film. One of these days - it looks good too. It's great. Some of it, footage, just footage, and it'll be great ten years from now. We did it on good stock and the place is so photogenic. I fell in love with it. I could, you know, why not just find a couple of places like that, get all the good visual stuff and sculpt a story to use it.

#1 - Robert Altman did a whole movie in Nashville.

#2 - Well, he did Nashville. He did a - I was thinking about that the other day - that he can have a TV Show called Nashville. Every week its a different story.

Different personnel, different - that was a good movie, besides from being a satire it was entertaining, but it was just one little story that took place in Nashville.

#1 - He took a lot of cheap shots.

#2 - That's what I did at the Astrodome. It was like I did at the Astrodome, and Charley Pride happened to be there. Well I happened to be there because I budgeted that thing and brought a camera man down from New York and a sound guy - and Ron and his equipment and it cost me 5 grand, and we picked us some fine print. Had suites and suites and rooms and rooms - Ron said it would cost \$3,500 and I said "It's going to cost five." And I went along to make sure because the hotel bill was \$1,500. It cost five. I was right on

budget. It was my sort of one and only production though when I took a crew out to do something, I took film for an hour and 10 minutes. Those guys got good film, hour and ten minutes of it, it's all developed and everything and paid for. I'll watch it sometime, maybe write in one of my TV shows. I had a chance to sell some of it to a network show one time, which I would have done except that I would have gone to too much trouble putting it together for them, I decided I would just wait. But I could have gotten my 5 grand back right there. The Dean Martin summer replacement show. They came over and looked at it, the producer and director. I showed it to them on my system, when I was over at Jack's Tracks. And they wanted it, wanted to write it in the show, cause it's got Charley Pride singing his biggest song - "Kiss An Angel Good Morning." And great shots of him when they brought him out in this car, after they do the rodeo for a while and then they come in and clean the place off in short order and wheel this thing out and they dig out the dirt and plant a big plug and stick it in his umbilical cord and the stage starts revolving. Then Charley Pride comes down, Now I've seriously considered trying to get a helicopter to bring him in from the top and let him come down on a helicopter. You could stage that, we could get a little helicopter in that place. And stage the scene, you know, where this star is going to make his entrance in this helicopter. Stir up a lot of dust.

#1 - Fly right out the top.

#2 -Then get somebody in this limousine open convertible type - not an open car - convertible. He gets on stage and does his show and then when it's over the limousine wheels up there and he walks down with his cowboy hat and he gives

it to somebody and he gets into the limousine and the guy in the front seat, he goes all the way around - It's great.

#1 - I saw Merle Haggard do that.

#2 - We could catch it. I got it, magnificent - all of that event. It was a big event - 40 thousand

#1 - 40?

#2 - Or something like that. It was the second biggest attendance that they had had for that particular night in the history of the Fat Stock Show. I think it was Friday.

#1 - Elvis was the biggest?

#2 - Yeah. It said that on the board: "Thank you, Charley Pride." (had his picture and everything) you know, and that time when they had the hand clapping a all, I got lot out of that, you know, and right in time with the music.

#1 - What video exactly did you show Pierre that got his interest up in a cable.

#2 - That 13 minute thing I did.

#1 - That with Waylon in it?

#2 - No, with me in it. Didn't you see it?

mandolin song, Sing "Hello Out There",

#1 - No

#2 - Oh, go see it. What I did - I went out to Opryland and just a solo setup. Went to Opryland and taped it with three cameras. I had about 35 minutes on tape. I'm playing a mandolin song, singing "Hello Out There", "When I Dream" I'll show it to you. Then I edited it down to 13 minutes, 31 seconds. It's a little video presentation. Got it in my attic - I'll show it to you

\*\*\*\*\*88

[This is where the transcript ends. I'm guessing this conversation took place about 1977. In 2005, the film

footage cited above is used in the bio-documentary "Cowboy  
Jack's Home Movies" - WLS]