

**Oral History Interview of
Jimmy Dokey**

**Interviewed by: Curtis Peoples
April 16, 2011
Anson, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball***

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Interview Series Background:

This collection features interviews related to the Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball in Anson, Texas. Topics covered include the traditions associated with the ball, the leadership within the Cowboys' Christmas Ball Association, music and Michael Martin Murphey, and the way in which the ball has changed over the years.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Jimmy Dokey of the band Muddy Creek. Dokey discusses his interest in music, playing gigs, and playing at the Cowboys' Christmas Ball. Dokey further discusses how the ball has changed over the years and his participation in the event.

Length of Interview: 00:26:25

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Background and growing up in Merkel	5	00:00:00
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Muddy Creek	10	00:08:22
Playing the Cowboy Christmas Ball	14	00:15:20
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Anson, Texas, Cowboy Christmas Ball, dance, holiday traditions, Jones County, Texas

Curtis Peoples (CP):

I want to record everything today to put down in the archive, and what I've got here is a release form, if you want to read it, you're more than welcome to, it's basically saying that we have the right to make audio recordings, it's also got video and things like that, but today we're just doing audio recordings, and that we have permission to do this.

Jimmy Dokey (JD):

Not a problem.

CP:

Name, signature, and date right down there. All right, and if you don't mind, I'd like to get—get your name right here, Jimmy, could I get an address on you, is that okay?

JD:

Yeah, it's [REDACTED]

CP:

[REDACTED]

JD:

[REDACTED]

CP:

[REDACTED]

JD:

Hawley.

CP:

Is that H-o-l-l-y?

JD:

H-a-w-l-e-y.

CP:

Oh Hawley, okay. And what's the zip over there?

JD:

[REDACTED]

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CP:

Email or phone number?

JD:

Phone number is [REDACTED]

CP:

Great. Okay, well we'll get started with the interview here if you want to have a seat. We'll probably be going about thirty minutes here, and if you need to go at any time, you just let me know because I think—I know a lot of people have got some other things going on today. Let's mainly talk about Cowboy Christmas Ball, but I would like to start out first by getting you to state your first name and date of birth and place of birth if you don't mind.

JD:

Okay, my name is Jimmy. I was born in Merkel, Texas, October 26, 1953.

CP:

And your last name again?

JD:

Dokey, like Okey dokey.

CP:

Okey dokey. Okay, born in Merkel, Texas. Is that where your parents are from?

JD:

It is.

CP:

And what are your parents' names?

JD:

M. L. and LaVyrle Dokey.

CP:

Were they born in Merkel, or—?

JD:

My mother was born in Merkel. My dad was born in, where is it? Somewhere between here and Dallas.

CP:
Okay.

JD:
One of the little towns back out in the woods.

CP:
And then they I guess they migrated over. I guess your dad came to Merkel, and that's where you grew up. Are they still living?

JD:
My mother recently passed and my dad's still living, still living at Merkel.

CP:
Okay, well growing up there in Merkel, what was it like? What kind of work did y'all do around there?

JD:
My dad was an oil field worker as was his dad. Of course, he had done a lot of traveling around working here and there. Times that whenever the kids were small we went with him and worked different places, but always come back to Merkel. During school, little league baseball and all that, of course we had to stay home all day and he went off and worked, but he always come back.

CP:
Growing up there, I guess the high school was in Merkel. Is that where you went to school at? What was high school like? Any kind of special extracurricular activities or anything going on?

JD:
No, at that time it was just a small school. The grade average would have around twenty to twenty-five kids per grade. Not per class, per grade. Of course, we had a football team, a track team. We never did do any good with it.

CP:
You played on the teams?

JD:
Oh yeah, I loved sports. I played baseball, football, ran track, done a little high jumping.

CP:

Did they have any kind of music school, any teaching or anything like that?

JD:

At that time the only music was whenever we would gather at somebody's house on the weekend or something and just have what we'd call front porch pickings.

CP:

Suanne was telling me you're a musician, I guess. What musical instruments do you play?

JD:

Professionally I played lead guitar and bass fiddle. Of course, I could play just about anything, but I do it to myself. I don't play it in front of anybody.

CP:

So you started out playing guitar there?

JD:

Yeah, I started out playing guitar.

CP:

How old were you when you started?

JD:

I was about eleven or twelve years old. My mommy and daddy bought me a little guitar because I wanted one really bad. My mother played piano, and my uncle played guitar. They had a little band whenever they was growing up, family type of band. I would just love to sit around and listen to them, they would just get together every once in a while and play. So they finally bought me a guitar and I taught myself how to play.

CP:

Didn't ever take any lessons or anything, kind of by ear and went for it, huh? Well kind of getting onto Cowboy Christmas Ball, I kind of want to jump forward to that. I'd like to learn more about the music later on, so do you play at the Cowboy Christmas Ball?

JD:

I do, I play with the band Muddy Creek. We're the house band for the Cowboy Christmas Ball.

CP:

Okay and how long has Muddy Creek been the house band for Cowboy Christmas Ball?

JD:

We've played two years. Of course, I've always loved this place. I'd come over here and danced in the past, and always loved the atmosphere. I like the old cowboy stuff. I'm a member of SASS, the Single Action Shooting Society. We dress for the 1800s period and shoot 1800s period guns. They do it kind of like the Christmas ball, we gather up, and it's a social event more than it is a shooting event. The shooting is just kind of a sideline.

CP:

And where do you meet for that event at?

JD:

We have a club here in Abilene, and we have a club here in Snyder, a club in San Angelo. We'd just make the round to shoot.

CP:

Just kind of rotate there. Is that a yearly event, or—?

JD:

No, it's a now, I shoot somewhere every week.

CP:

That's an all the time event, okay. When was the first time that you came to the Cowboy Christmas Ball?

JD:

I was trying to think a while ago. I believe it was about 1987 was the first time that I came over here. I had heard about it all my life, but I finally came over here then, and that's the first time that I actually came and danced.

CP:

Have you come back pretty regular since then?

JD:

I have not been a regular. I have come when I had the chance. During the past, you know, first one thing then another would not allow me to come, but every time that I was where I could come, I would come. I always—I loved it.

CP:

So are you a full time musician out playing all the time or you got another job?

JD:

No, I do have a regular job.

CP:

And what do you do for a day job there?

JD:

I'm a quality control manager for a boiler manufacturer in Abilene. In fact, the boilers in Texas Tech, we completely rebuilt one of those. Y'all probably got pictures all over of where we had a big crane to set the steamer in from the top of the building. That was us.

CP:

Over at the physical plant there? Okay. I'll have to see if we've got some pictures of it, we may. When did y'all do that?

JD:

It's been several years ago.

CP:

So with the band that you play in, can you tell me some of the other band members in Muddy Creek?

JD:

Yes. I know you already talked to Karen Shelnut, she's our keyboard player and lead singer. Of course, myself. Karen and me is the one that actually started this band about fifteen years ago. We've brought in Gary Sanders, our fiddle player, which is probably one of the best fiddle players in the country. He's won numerous contests that we could get him to enter. He's very modest and won't enter a lot of contests, but we force him to because he's so good at it. Dwayne Burns who lives right here in Anson, he's our steel guitar player. Pat Carriker is our drummer.

CP:

So you said you started this about fifteen years ago. Did y'all just decide, We need to start a band, What kind of got you thinking about—?

JD:

No, it actually, all of us were band members many years ago in various bands, and we've all run into each other at one time or another, except for me and Karen. It was a little over fifteen years ago that a friend of mine called and said he wanted to have a jam session. He was getting together a bunch of musicians. That's where I met Karen. All she would do then is she would sing a little back up harmony. We couldn't hardly get her to sing a song, couldn't hardly get her

to talk. Now we can hardly get her to shut up, can't get her to stop singing, but she has a beautiful voice. She can do Patsy Cline, she could do the modern stuff, it doesn't matter. She is a very talented person, and she doesn't have to read music to play the piano. She plays everything by ear. Of course, she can read music, but she's just talented enough, she can listen to a song and go play it. She's a very talented person. Her personality is very outgoing. I think she's probably the anchor to the band that keeps us all together and keeps us all getting along good. We very seldom ever have a time where we don't get along good.

CP:

Does the band go out and play other places?

JD:

Sure we do, and everything—we had narrowed it down now to, This place has got us spoiled. We try to make every place else that we play like this. We have succeeded in doing so in a couple other places. We're getting the same type of atmosphere. It's mainly the people that want to come out and dance and have fun. We don't allow any smoking, no drinking. It's a family-type deal. The more kids that we can see out there, the better we like it. We have one place where we've been playing ever since we started is called the Grand Old Oplin out in Oplin, Texas. It's an old-style—it's kind of like an old timey barn dance. People bring food, and we'll play for an hour and a half or so, they'll stop, drag out all their food set it out on the tables, everybody just joins in and start eating. Get all done, clean it back up, get back on stage and go back to playing, back to dancing. All the colleges in Abilene have designated it as a place for their students to go. All the colleges in Abilene are all Christian schools, but that was a great feeling for us.

CP:

So how often do y'all play that gig?

JD:

We play that twice a month.

CP:

Oh wow, that's great.

JD:

We've got college kids, we've got three and four year old kids out there dancing with seventy and eighty year old people.

CP:

So it sounds like a well-attended event.

JD:

Everybody mingles great. It's a fantastic event.

CP:

So it's like packed every time you guys are playing?

JD:

It is. We'll have anywhere from a hundred people to four hundred people, depending on how many of the college students show up.

CP:

For the people coming, is it a free event?

JD:

It's a paid event, it's \$5 a couple or \$2 or \$3 a head.

CP:

That's pretty amazing for it to get a draw like that consistently. That's great.

JD:

Like I say, it's an event that most people think is in the past. We're trying our best to keep it alive.

CP:

So I'm sure you guys are playing. Is it just all country music? Do you try to mix in anything a little different?

JD:

We do strictly country.

CP:

Strictly country. Now growing up playing, I guess you said you were born in '53, you'd have been graduating about there near the height of all the big rock and roll and all that. Did you ever play that? Has it always been country music for you?

JD:

At one time I tried to play a little bit of the rock and roll. I could not get into it like I could country. My heart just wasn't in it.

CP:
Okay.

JD:
Like I said, I grew up on the country music because my mother played and my uncle played, had a little band. That's the kind of music that they listened to, and it just—

CP:
What kind of artists did you listen to growing up and as a teenager and as you got old out of high school, what was it that influenced you—maybe your playing style? What did you really like to listen to?

JD:
Whenever the rockabilly came in. Now I took a liking to that. I've kind of mixed that in with the traditional country that kind of set my style. I like both of them, and I blended them together. My form of guitar playing was kind of like the rockabilly that was mixed in with old country music. It was something a little bit different that I think helped keep people's attention.

CP:
Keep it kind of fresh.

JD:
Yeah, it was something different, and yet it was tradition.

CP:
Do you got a favorite guitar that you play or anything like that, or what's your rig like that you—
?

JD:
My favorite guitar, I guess, I have more of them than anything else is a Fender Telecaster. Of course, I've got Gibsons. I've got a Gibson, it's a 1960 model. It's called an ES-330. It's an electric acoustic hollow-body type guitar that's an original. I hauled it around in a trailer playing it for years. I just happened to be on Ebay one day and I saw one sell for ten thousand dollars. It was identical to mine, I thought, I need to put this thing up.

CP:
Have you still got it?

JD:
I've still got it.

CP:

Yeah, it's hard to get rid of them, I know it. You said your first time was 1987 to come to the Cowboy Christmas Ball. You've come back a few times. What's it like playing these Cowboy Christmas Balls? I know Murphey's on Thursday nights, I believe is what's going on? And you guys are doing Friday and Saturdays?

JD:

Friday and Saturday nights.

CP:

How'd you get that gig or is it just something you asked for or kept auditioning?

JD:

We auditioned for it probably ten years ago. It got down between us and the band Lariat. At that time, Lariat had done a little bit more of the modern stuff which the committee here was trying to attract some younger people. The older people were dying off and they wanted someone to fill in. So they hired them rather than us. It got to where there's been kind of a turn in everything. Now the kids are really liking the traditional country music now. It sounded real good for them, so they've come back to us now, and even the colleges in Abilene, the kids that follow us at the other places, they're coming over here to this. They've discovered this now, and it's really great to be up there on the stage playing and see people or kids especially that I recognized at other places that we're playing.

CP:

What are some of the artists or songs that the band will play at the gig? I know you've got probably a big set list. Or how long do you play actually for a dance and what time do you start, what time does it end?

JD:

We actually play four hours.

CP:

Four hours? Wow. I'm sure that's not straight, you've got some breaks in there.

JD:

Right, we try to take a break every hour.

CP:

What are some of the favorite songs that you see people dancing to for their favorite artists?

JD:

Johnny Bush, Ray Price.

CP:

The old stuff.

JD:

Yeah, that's the stuff they love to do. You can dance any type of dance, even the dance that the kids are doing now falls right in with it as well as the old traditional style of dancing. It all blends together.

CP:

So you're not really playing any kind of new stuff?

JD:

No.

CP:

Well, that's great. This is a great event. It's been a repeatable event for a long time. It's the same and the traditions are there. I think it's great for future generations. What do you find about it that's most appealing? Is it that tradition? What is it?

JD:

It is the tradition, keeping the old tradition of the old cowboy alive.

CP:

What do you see as the old cowboy?

JD:

Formal, dressing up to go out to dance. The way that the old cowboys dressed up wasn't real dressy. If they had the money, it was, but the biggest part, the cowboys didn't have the money, so, you know, they would brush off a suit, put on a tie and come in and check their hat at the door; check their hat and their guns. We still have a few that come in wearing their guns, and they check them at the door.

CP:

Oh really?

JD:

It's just to show. You know, it attracts attention and makes people remember you. And it's just the fact of checking your hat and bowing to the ladies asking them for the dance. You see that all through here, and the man gets the lady, escorts her to the dance floor, dances with her, escorts her back to her seat. It's just the old traditional stuff that they're keeping alive.

CP:

Do you have any aspirations or any thoughts for the future where you would like to see the Cowboy Christmas Ball? Does it need to stay the same as where it's at right now?

JD:

The only thing that I would like to see is bringing in more younger people. We've got to try to figure out how to do that to keep it going.

CP:

Do you got any ideas on that?

JD:

We've tried throwing in some newer music to see if that would bring in more of the younger people, but it's not the music that's going to bring them in. You're going to have to appeal to their heart for the tradition.

CP:

Well it sounds like what you guys are doing down there on this twice a month can kind of help advertise a little bit. Do you ever advertise for this events?

JD:

We sure do.

CP:

You do?

JD:

And usually a month or even two months before this one takes place, we'll start seeing people coming out in their formal dress trying it out and see how it's going to work on the dance floor, down there and we'll see them out there at the dance.

CP:

So do you see a lot of interest down there and around keeping this event alive? And the legacy, I guess, would be my next term, is that the long-term legacy for this event, do you see it continuing on? Do we have enough young people getting involved?

JD:

I do see it continuing. I think that this last year—well it was probably half and half of younger people of thirty and down versus the people that were sixty and up. It was a real good split, and I was tickled to death to see it.

CP:

How big were the crowds this year on a Friday and a Saturday night?

JD:

It's not quite as big as it was whenever Murphey would do it on a Friday night or a Saturday night. By him doing it on Thursday night, it seemed like the crowd is falling off a little bit. Overall, it mixes out pretty good, but the nights that he played Friday night, you know, we would play on Thursday night, we would open for him on Friday night, and then he would finish it off. We would have—this place would be packed, it would be sold out. This last year they didn't have a sellout night. I don't know if it's the economy or him being on Thursday or what.

CP:

How long has he been doing the Thursdays now?

JD:

Well, this last years was his first year.

CP:

Oh it was? So he's been doing the weekends up until this past year.

JD:

It was a deal that he had a prior commitment with the Hall of Fame or something that didn't allow him to be here on Friday night.

CP:

So do you think he was going to continue with it Thursday?

JD:

He said he was, he wanted to keep it that way.

CP:
Okay.

JD:
Whenever he was here on a weekend night, you know, we'd sell out. It was too crowded to dance. The building is actually capable of holding more people than what the dance floor would hold. That was the only complaint that I heard from people was it was too crowded to dance.

CP
Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

JD:
Yeah, it makes you wonder.

CP:
Well, is there anything you would like to add about the Cowboy Christmas Ball itself from the past, the future, or anything that we've left off here that we haven't discussed that you would like to add? General thoughts about it?

JD:
I feel like it's going to continue to grow with the younger people that are really getting hooked on the traditional country music, and I think it's going to—

CP:
I've kind of seen that that people are going back to older styles. I grew up and my parents listened to country. Of course, I rebelled and I listened to rock and roll and stuff, but then I'd come back and when all the new country came out, I was like, Well, that's classic rock they played here. And so I've been listening to all the older stuff and even older than that stuff, because it's really what I'm getting into.

JD:
Bob Wills' music, I love it, western swing-type music, and we do a lot of it too. It seemed like the younger people really don't know what to think about it, but you could throw out some Johnny Bush or some of the Ray Price good swing type music and boy, they just packed the dance floor.

CP:
That's interesting they don't know what to think about that old Bob Wills Texas music.

JD:

The Bob Wills is just—it's got a little bit different beat to it, but they're coming around. In fact, last month we were playing down at Oplin, and we had a bunch of college kids from Stephenville that came down to hear us, and they were requesting Bob Wills' music. I was tickled to death, so maybe it's a migration that's starting.

CP:

I think so. I think it's a conservative return to roots kind of thing. Everybody's kind of realized we got too busy and too out there. Well, I appreciate you spending some time talking to us and we'll be definitely be seeing you this year come for the Cowboy Christmas Ball. We're going to try and really get the word out in Lubbock to get people over here. We were going to have our own little Cowboy Christmas Ball we thought maybe in Lubbock, as Murphey went around his tour, but being with the university it's too hard for us to pull off because of the red tape. So we're trying to get the word out for people in Lubbock. It's only a two, two and a half hour drive over here and get you a hotel in Abilene, which I was told I better do now because apparently things book up pretty quick, I didn't know that, that's good to know. Hopefully we can help y'all out with that and before we go, for Muddy Creek do you have any CDs or recordings or things like that that you all have done?

JD:

We went in the studio one time, which was about ten years ago and was going to record one. We had our songs all picked out, went in there and done it, and the guy that runs the studio done engineering mixing to it. I went back and listened to his mix down. I asked him, "Who is that?" he said, "Well, I changed this up and I changed that. I come back in here and added this and that." I said, "That's not us." He said, "Well, if you want to sell CDs you're going to have to listen to me and do it my way."

CP:

This was in Abilene?

JD:

Yeah, and we've never been back in the studio since. I told them, if we're going to record, we're going to record us the way we're playing.

CP:

Well, we'd like to come out and bring some recording equipment sometime and just get some generally good rough kind of recordings, so we'll be talking with you about that, if that's okay to do that during the Cowboy Christmas Ball.

JD:

Sure. You bet.

CP:

A little filming, little audio recordings. Hopefully the sound company will let us take some feeds off the board and things like that, and get a little live Cowboy Christmas Ball music there, nothing we'll probably put on CD, but at least we'll have it.

JD:

Hey, we don't do any original stuff, we do everybody else's music, so we're not opposed to putting it out anywhere.

CP:

Hey, I appreciate it. Thank you so much.

JD:

Thank y'all.

End of Recording

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