

**Oral History Interview of
Leonard Davila**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson and Daniel U. Sánchez
December 10, 2013
Austin, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Crossroads of Music Archive***

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library**

15th and Detroit | 806.742.3749 | <http://swco.ttu.edu>

Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by Leonard Davila on December 10, 2013. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

This oral history transcript is protected by U.S. copyright law. By viewing this document, the researcher agrees to abide by the fair use standards of U.S. Copyright Law (1976) and its amendments. This interview may be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes only. Any reproduction or transmission of this protected item beyond fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the Southwest Collection. Please contact Southwest Collection Reference staff for further information.

Preferred Citation for this Document:

Davila, Leonard Oral History Interview, December 10, 2013. Interview by Andy Wilkinson, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses almost 6000 oral history interviews dating back to the late 1940s. The historians who conduct these interviews seek to uncover the personal narratives of individuals living on the South Plains and beyond. These interviews should be considered a primary source document that does not implicate the final verified narrative of any event. These are recollections dependent upon an individual's memory and experiences. The views expressed in these interviews are those only of the people speaking and do not reflect the views of the Southwest Collection or Texas Tech University.

Technical Processing Information:

The Audio/Visual Department of the Southwest Collection is the curator of this ever-growing oral history collection and is in the process of digitizing all interviews. While all of our interviews will have an abbreviated abstract available online, we are continually transcribing and adding information for each interview. Audio recordings of these interviews can be listened to in the Reading Room of the Southwest Collection. Please contact our Reference Staff for policies and procedures. Family members may request digitized copies directly from Reference Staff.

Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

<http://swco.ttu.edu/Reference/policies.php>

Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 44.1kHz/ 16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Transcription Notes:

Interviewers: Andy Wilkinson and Daniel U. Sánchez

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Cecilia Morales

Editor(s): Walter Nicolds

Final Editor: Daniel U. Sánchez, Elissa Stroman

Interview Series Background:

The Crossroads Artists Project encompasses interviews conducted by the Crossroads of Music Archive Staff members. They hope to document the creative process of artists and songwriters from all across the Southwestern United States.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Leonard Davila and his music career. Although Davila had his own band – the Street People – he also played with numerous Tejano and Conjunto legends. Many of these legends became steadfast friends and Davila describes the contributions they made collectively to music. A portion of the interview deals with Davila's the Mexican American Experience music festival.

Length of Interview: 02:31:48

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
<i>Tejano</i> bands and experiences with them	5	00:00:00
Biographical and genealogical information including youth in Milwaukee	7	00:06:00
Interest in Baseball	9	00:10:31
Early musical interests and influences	10	00:11:50
High school information	14	00:22:14
Instrumentation and recording	16	00:28:46
Street People (Band), The Mexican Revolution	19	00:35:00
The Mexican American Experience	22	00:40:06
Playing music on the road	29	00:57:24
United States Postal Service	31	01:04:08
Austin Tejano Music Coalition	33	01:08:24
Back on the road	35	01:18:49
What is the difference between <i>orquesta</i> , <i>conjunto</i> , and <i>Tejano</i>	38	01:24:27
Difference between <i>norteño</i> and <i>Tejano</i>	45	01:39:36
<i>Tejano</i> in other regions: California, Kansas, Chicago	45	01:40:40
Terms such as <i>Chicano</i> , <i>Cowboy</i> , and <i>vaquero</i>	48	01:47:07
No cultural boundaries in <i>Tejano</i> music	50	01:51:56
Musicians producers, and recorders associated with	54	01:58:07
Jazz and blues greats: James Brown, Miles Davis, Hugh Masekela	60	02:09:12
Son in European Baseball League, visiting the Vatican	64	02:16:45
Meeting Bob Hope in Vietnam	66	02:22:00
Mexican-American Culture Center (MAC) and the Flood Aid Concert	67	02:24:01

Keywords

Tejano, Street People (Band), Austin, Accordion, *Bajo*, Gonzalo Barrientos, South by Southwest, Austin City Limits, Mexican-American Experience, Austin Tejano Music Coalition, *Conjunto*, Mexican-American Culture Center (MAC), *Orquesta*, *Norteño*, Little Joe

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

Out in West Texas without finding a rock-and-roll band with a name like—well, the famous one from Plainview, the String-A-Longs, who had that song, “Wheels”. (scats an brief imitation of an instrumental piece). All Mexican-American kids, except one. And so the names were all Anglo rock-and-roll band names, but they were, you know, a group of people that were—that integrated.

Leonard Davila (LD):

Even to this day, it's a—I play with Ruben Ramos, Mexican Revolution, back when the band was just starting. I'd just come back from Vietnam. But we—we played, you know, the English tunes, we were playing pretty much all the English stuff that was happening, but when Ruben won this Grammy for “Viva la Revolución”, I was talking to him about it one day because all the other groups that were nominated were like, “All that Jazz”, English-titled albums by the *Tejano* artists. And his was the only one that was “Viva la Revolución”. So, I mean, I think—I mean, I had a group called Street People, played with, back in high school, Manuel “Cowboy” Donley, *Y las Estrellas*, “And the Stars” you know, because he did rock-and-roll. He did country tunes and then did the *rancheras* and all. But I've always, myself, you know, we always played the English songs. When I played with these buddies of mine from high school, and we were talking about—I talked to Cowboy—actually, Dave Gutierrez, who was booking Cowboy Donley. Have you heard of ___ (inaudible)? They asked me to come sing with him. Years later, I said, “Hey stud, how come you asked me to join this band?” And he said, “Well, because you were the only one singing rock-and-roll.” (laughs) I said, “Okay.”

AW:

I'm just thinking from my musician hat—that's two different set of dance gigs you could get. I mean, you could get a lot more opportunity to go out and play.

LD:

Yeah. I mean, I—we started a group called Street People after we played with—

AW:

What date would Street People, the beginning of that be?

LD:

Oh gosh, 1976, '77, something like that. But, you know, we did *Chicano* stuff, and then we'd opened up for James Brown, and we'd go up for Jose Feliciano, we'd open up for Freddy Fender or Johnny Rodriguez—

AW:

So all over the map.

LD:

Ernest Tubb, I remember they called him. “Hey, Leonard, can you do a country gig?” “Yeah man, where at?” “In El Campo.” “Okay, yeah man,” so there we go. I had a friend here—well, he’s still a friend—Moses Vasquez. Moses used to play with Beto Villa. And he sings—he’s in his eighties, and he sings—he sang like Ray Price.

AW:

Really?

LD:

Yeah. And so when we do country gigs, they say, “Hey, Moe, come on man, let’s go.” We—you know, we knew the tunes, so, backed him up, he’d—his joke was that one time Ray Price couldn’t show up, and they asked him to play. They promoted it as Half-Price. (laughs) Moe, he sang, you know, he sang good. He became a millionaire.

AW:

Really?

LD:

Yeah, he had a little tamale house. But Moe used to tell me, “Leonard, I’m going to tell you how to make some money, man.” He said, “With Beto Villa, I’d buy the records for a nickel and then sell them for a quarter.” He said, “Everybody’d be over here having a good time, and I be over here selling records.” He said, “That’s how I bought my place.”

AW:

Really? Is he—you say he’s in his eighties?

LD:

U-huh. Yeah.

AW:

Is he still pretty sharp?

LD:

He’s—you can’t really understand him much. His daughter, Peggy, takes him everywhere. She’s got a TV show here.

AW:

I just wondered if he would be someone that at some point we could interview and have him tell that story.

LD:

You know—

AW:

Maybe?

LD:

Yeah, yeah. You know, maybe. Because there's times that he's, you know, he's just there and other times, you know, you'll—

AW:

I'm that way myself. Let me—while we have a pause, let me say this is the tenth of December, 2013 in the evening. Andy Wilkinson and Daniel Sanchez with Leonard Davila in his beautiful secluded home way out in the southwest part of Austin. Buda, actually.

LD:

Buda, yes. It's a Buda address, but we—we're in-between pretty much Driftwood, Kyle and Manchack. Manchaca, but they call it Manchack.

AW:

Yeah, I know, it's—for the longest time people said Manchack and I kept looking at the map, and I say, "Well, I see a Manchaca, but I don't—"

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

It's the opposite of what my mom did when we were going to South Texas and he goes like, "Are we at Edinburgo yet?" And I go, "No, but we're close to Edinburgh."

LD:

Edinburgo. That's right.

AW:

We—just to recap real quickly, too, for the tape, because I didn't get it turned on soon enough. We're letting Leonard know kind of what we're doing down here, and he was telling us about growing up in South Texas, and making kind of a roundabout way through, like, Milwaukee to San Antonio and then finally, to Austin in '59, and had been playing piano accordion, which you had actually been taking lessons in Wisconsin, right?

LD:

Right.

AW:

And moved back to Texas and in 1963, by that time in a band, and was in bands that we were just talking about that played a variety of different things, and so that'll kind of catch us up a little bit. That's really, really interesting. You know, kids like me, when we were starting to play, we only had one thing to play. We didn't—none of us spoke Spanish, so we were doing good to figure out what the Rolling Stones or the Beach Boys, the Beatles were doing, and that's all we did.

LD:

And you know, and we used to—I used to sing Spanish stuff, but I really didn't understand what I was singing. I was mimicking the words, and I knew more or less, but I never—it was just a—

AW:

So you didn't grow up speaking Spanish in the house?

LD:

Yes—no. Actually—actually, my great-great-grandmother, she—they all spoke English.

AW:

Really?

LD:

They all spoke English. They were from Uvalde. I grew up with English, and when I learned Spanish was when I was out with the kids, and then we went to Milwaukee, and I thought I was Italian when we moved. It's funny.

AW:

Because you played the piano accordion?

LD:

Well, well, it was—I remember in '55 or '56 when Zorro first started, came out on Disney, and I was watching TV with some friends and I said, "Oh man, look at that Mexican, fell off the horse," and my mother heard me say it and she says, "*Mijo*, you're Mexican." I said, "Unh-uh." You know? Because all the kids in the neighborhood were Italian. We'd go to their house and, you know, Mama'd get mad at us and I knew exactly what was being said, and they'd talk to us in Italian. There were a lot of Polish people in the neighborhood also, but you know, the kids that I went to school with were all Italian. Scaffeti's and Carini's and Pucci's. I was—as a matter of fact, I remember one time, some of the neighbors went and asked—I was little. I was little. They asked me to take this petition to my parents to sign it to get this Mexican family out of the neighborhood.

AW:

Was that your family?

LD:

No, it was another one.

AW:

Oh, it was another one.

LD:

By that time, I knew them. I told them, "Well, I'm Mexican." They said, "No, well you're all right." I mean, this is the parents, this is the parents telling me. And I was, you know, maybe fourth, fifth grade, fourth grade. Third grade. You know, it was like—I didn't—I took it to my parents and they didn't sign it. (laughs) We were—I mean, and it was, you know, parochial school. A public school down right next door to the Catholic school that I went to, and—but I've always—grew up in diverse neighborhoods. I mean, we'd be in there. It's funny, but I see these programs, the apartments, the way they have them up there out north. I remember we'd share one bathroom with three different people in the hallway, on the different floors. We all went downstairs to wash the clothes and hang them in the basement. The soot and all that would be— But that's the way it was in Milwaukee, you know, for us. And then we finally moved to a house, to a neighborhood. But yeah, that's—those are the things that I remember. Playing accordion when I was a kid. Played baseball. I wanted to be a baseball player, went to see the Milwaukee Braves all the time. Got knot hole tickets, so we were able to go and these—Hank Aaron and all these guys, Lou Burdet and all those guys would sign the balls and then we'd go play home run derby out at Lake Michigan, see who could hit them into the lake.

AW:

That ones that were signed?

LD:

The ones that were signed.

AW:

Oh gosh. (laughs) Oh man.

LD:

I mean, we would get them—we'd go to all the games. The games were maybe a quarter for us or something, I don't remember what it was, but we'd go with the boys' club. So every time the Braves played there in Milwaukee County Stadium, we'd go and they'd get us to be ball chasers, or you know—so, you know, you'd get to see the guys. And now I see them and it's like—we

saw Warren Spahn here one day, took my dad. And I said, "You know, Dad, I had some," he was signing some autographs and charging, and I said, "I remember I had—I think I had the 1957—a ball with the 1957 World Series Champions, the Milwaukee Braves beat the Yankees. We had that signed and probably hit that one into the lake, too."

AW:

Oh, gosh. If you want to get a frog man out there to go see if they're there.

LD:

But yeah, that's kind of how I grew up. And musically, I got involved when I came to—really, to Texas.

AW:

Yeah. What did you listen to at home in music?

LD:

Well, here in town?

AW:

In Milwaukee, what'd you listen to? And South Texas, before you got here?

LD:

In Milwaukee, Laurence Welk. You know, that's what was on TV.

AW:

A lot of accordion there.

LD:

Yeah. As a matter of fact, I did a—with LaDuca Brothers, they selected so many of us from our class, and we played with Marin Florin.

AW:

Really?

LD:

Yeah, at—they had a concert with all these different age groups, and I was one of them. He played and we'd follow him, the charts that they had for us. Simple stuff. Yeah, I saw—that's what I grew up in. There was some country, The Grand Ole Opry. When I'd come home—because every year, we'd come home to Texas for vacation. We'd catch a train, come back, they'd pick us up in San Antonio, we'd either go to Three Rivers, where my mom's from, or

down to Pearsall. We were usually here a couple of few weeks during the summer. When I was over here, it was all *conjunto*. It was *conjunto*. And my grandparents—my grandfather was a musician, and I had a Tio Panchito Treviño. He wasn't my uncle, but he was my godfather's brother. So he would go there and all the kids would, "Tio Panchito, Tio Panchito," well, he's—he became very well-known in South Texas because he had—in Pearsall he had the drive-in theater, he had the theater, he had the dance hall, he had the—so, we'd always go. We'd be there and we'd go to the dances and I'd see the bands playing, and my grandfather would walk to this little *Salon Juarez*, I remember it was just a couple of blocks from the house, and I'd walk with him over there and he'd play with the band. I'd fall asleep there next to him. They were playing with bands that had horns, you know, orchestras. So I got into that. I've always—I liked the accordion.

AW:

What drew you to the accordion?

LD:

I guess just—just having the lessons. My parents actually wanted me to play accordion because back home, they played accordion. But it was piano accordion. So that's kind of how I got it. Moving to Austin, it was all orchestras here. Alfonso Ramos, Nash Hernandez Orchestra, Manuel Cowboy Donley Orchestra, gosh, Chris Carmona Orchestra, Lauren Salas Orchestra. So they all had, you know, big horn sections. Four or five horns.

AW:

Was it because most of the work was for dances, for dancers?

LD:

For the gigs here? That's really what it used to be. It was dances. It was dances at the Pan-American recreation center. There was dances at the city coliseum. I mean, if you played at city coliseum, you made it. You know, you were—and I played—the first time I played at city coliseum, it was like, aw man, it was like, man I never thought I'd be—I wasn't even old enough to go.

AW:

Yeah. How did you get to go hear them?

LD:

Well, my friends—I had some friends in high school that they had a band. Rudy, Ray & The Dreamers.

AW:
R-E-Y?

LD:
R-U-D-Y R-A-Y.

AW:
R-A-Y?

LD:
It was Rudy and his brother, Raymond. It was Rudy, Ray and The Dreamers. When I first was in the seventh grade, when we moved to—we moved to Austin in the summer, in the seventh grade—excuse me [coughs] excuse me—and I was taking band in seventh grade. Rudy was playing his saxophone, and he was playing a little *porquita*, you know. And I went over to him, because they had me playing the trumpet. He said, “Yeah man, we’re going to play,” I said, “You can play it,” because I recognized the tune, *New Laredo* or something. And I said, “You play with a band or something, man?” He says, “Yeah, my brother, man. He said, “We’re going to play here for the sock hop.” And they had already been playing for a while. Well, I went to the sock hop, and my parents went and left me off there, we danced. I was never afraid to dance, because in Pearsall, you always danced with your cousins, or you know, your grandma or aunts or whatever in the *salones*, “banquet”. Now, I see the *salones* now and I used to think there was a lot of people, but it was maybe the size of this room, you know. With the flaps on the windows and you know, stage over there.

AW:
Just like those German Texas dance halls, same thing, yeah.

LD:
Same thing. You know, so I’d always danced. So I came here—heck, I was a dancer. And I had a friend who’s still a friend to this day, they lived right there in the projects next to us. We’d go, I knew her and we’d go dance and both would be twirling away. So, I liked it. But I always liked the fact that the girls liked the guys in the band. So—no, I got to—doing that, and Alfonso Ramos, I used to hear him as a kid. They became dear friends, the whole family. They would practice there at the Pan-American Recreation Center. They’d record there.

AW:
Really?

LD:

Yeah. One-mic recording. So they—you know, I'd always—we'd got to the Pan-Am center—it was a recreation center, but you could hear the band practicing up there, so we'd—I'd go sit up there in the stairs on the fire escape, and just look through the window and watching them play. And they lived only a few blocks from me. And—one—the way I started playing, I started singing. Actually, what happened was, there was a band playing for a friend of mine's—he had to get married. He was like, fifteen or sixteen. They had a band, and the drummer wasn't there. So I sat on the drum kit—they had his drums set up with a couple of branches because we had no drumsticks, and I played the drums. I used to see my grandfather do this. So I was just keeping the beat. And when the drummer came, the vocalist hadn't gotten there yet, and this other friend of mine was there, and he said, "Hey, let's do 'Rain, Rain, Rain, Rain'." You know, we used to kind of sing it together, that band knew it so we sang it together. Good harmony. Well, the next day, I get a call from this guy. He says, "Hey man, I'm starting a band. You want to sing with us?" And I said, "Well, let me ask my mom." So we started, and then, what it was is all the guys in the band were guys that I got. I got a drummer that played in the band with me, another sax player, so guys that we knew—that I knew, we got together and Fats—that was his name, Edward Fuentes, he was called "Fats" by everybody. Named the band, Fatz and the Dominos. (laughs) Fatz and the Dominos. And he put—and he said—I'll always remember this: he put F-A-T-Z. He said this way he wouldn't be sued by Fats Domino. He spelled it F-A-T-Z. And then, that band lasted for, you know—

AW:

Was this the 1963 band, the first one?

LD:

Yeah. And we played, and I have a friend that I saw here a couple years ago, she said, "Leonard, do you remember that you played—we were having a graduation party and you played for us?" I said, "Really?" She said, "Do you remember how much you charged us?" And I said, "Fifty dollars." And she said, "Yeah, that's what you charged. Fifty dollars" And it was like, seven of us, so I remember we'd make five bucks each or something like that. And—

AW:

Kind of like it is today.

LD:

Pretty much, yeah. (laughs) Yeah. But then that band— one of the guys in the band, he wanted to start his own band, so some of the guys left and played with him, so Fatz and Dominos broke up. And about a week later, I get a call from Dave Gutierrez, who's— actually was best man in my wedding. He used to book Cowboy. He was the manager. And he came and asked me—came over and asked me if I wanted to play with his band, and I said, "Yeah." He said, "Okay, well

learn these songs, for this weekend coming up.” It was like, “Oh, wow.” So I learned, you know, James Brown and stuff like that. Got to playing. Then I was doing harmonies with him. I could do harmonies with Cowboy. I did that through high school.

AW:

Okay. What school did you go to here in Austin?

LD:

In Austin? Junior high, I went to Allan Junior High. John T. Allan Junior High. Then I went to Johnston High School, Albert Sydney Johnston.

AW:

And what part of town were you living in?

LD:

East Austin.

AW:

How far east? Can you kind of give me—

LD:

Between Comal and Chicon street. Between First and Third street. Well, now it's Cesar Chavez and Third.

AW:

I'm just curious. I'm trying to put it in my head. And while I've interrupted you again so rudely, what's your date of birth?

LD:

July 27, 1948.

AW:

One month and one day younger than me.

LD:

Oh, wow.

AW:

June 26.

LD:

So you're the old guy. All right. (laughs)

AW:

You and I are old guys, yeah. Sadly, we're older and older. So did your folks like having you play music?

LD:

Well, my daddy had a funeral home. And I used to help him there at the funeral home. I'd clean up—before I could drive, you know, get the flowers, I'd go with somebody else. I always had chores, chores around there. And they really—I told my mom. I says, “Mom, this guy asked me to sing in his band.” She says—she tells me in Spanish, “*Que borracho te dijo que podias cantar?*” You know, what drunk told you you could sing? Well, when I recorded my first record, I gave it to her and I said, “Here, Mom. But we were just—it was—started off with Fatz. It was high school things. We did an out-of-town gig one time. I remember we made fifty dollars and one of the guys quit school. He says, “Man, this is going to be—”

AW:

I don't need no degree.

LD:

I don't need one, I'm going to be a musician. Quit school. I mean, I stayed in school. I played in the high school band. I remember one time our band director had said to call the guys in and said it was either the high school band or the coliseum. We took the coliseum. So you know, it was—we had a band director who was a jazz musician, Richard Young. And he, man, he'd take us to his gigs. You know, meet us and we'd go here and play jazz and he'd come and play. And his thing was: you don't have to quit this when you're ninety. You're not going to march eight-to-five all your life, this kind of stuff. It made us want to—and, you can make money doing it. And the girls like you, stuff like that. He was—he played like Al Hurt.

AW:

Was he a white guy? Black guy?

LD:

He was a white guy.

AW:

Richard Young?

LD:

Richard Young. His wife was the orchestra teacher at one of the high schools. Then I don't know what happened, but during the summer, we came and found out he'd been relieved of his duties as a band director and we got another band director that came in. It really changed the atmosphere. There was quite a few guys in the band that played with different bands, you know. And then, at the time, there was like Roy Montelongo, you remember Roy Montelongo? He's a hall of famer, he was a star back in the day.

AW:

Was he a *conjunto* player?

LD:

No, he was orchestra. He used to play with Beto Villa. He was a saxophone player. He used to play with Alfonso Ramos also, and Louie Guerrero, I don't know if you—Louie—

AW:

No, I don't.

LD:

Louie was one heck of a musician. I played with him with Cowboy. But he played Carnegie Hall, back with the sextet of the University of Texas. He's the one who wrote "Peanuts, La Cahuata".

AW:

Yeah. Say his name again?

LD:

Louie Guerrero. And yeah. Louie wrote "Peanuts" (scats instrumental piece). And the Beach Boys recorded it, and they've archived it pretty much. It's been recorded in so many different languages. But I played with Louie. He's the one who really kind of taught me the harmonies. He was a singer, he played with Ysidro Lopez and all the big bands of the heyday. He was a professional. That's all he did, played music. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to—because the guys in Cowboys band, most of them, that's all they did. So that's what I did and I just started playing music for money. We'd always go play. All I knew at the time, back in those days, I was making more money than my mother was and she was working at IRS. So I mean, I was—we used to kid about it. I was talking to a friend of mine, "Man, we had so many shoes," because we'd go put a pair on layaway and next week we'd go take them out and put another pair on layaway, another different color. Then the Beatles came out, we'd buy those Beatles boots.

AW:

With the zipper on the side.

LD:

Hurt your feet.

AW:

But they looked cool.

LD:

Yeah, they did. I got to playing this kind of stuff because I liked the *rancheras*. I'll tell you a little thing that happened here in Austin. It was either you were *conjunto* or *orquesta*. I, when we got Street People going, Manny Guerra, who was a—Manny recorded many groups. Sunny & the Sunliners, Joe Bravo, Jimmy Edwards, David Mar, you know, all these groups. I went down and I was recording, we were doing an LP. I put an accordion in there. He says—because we had horn players. I was playing trombone, too, and then our sax player and I put an accordion in there and Manny says, “Leonard, why you doing this, man?” I said, “Well, because I like the accordion, you know,” and it just—we did it, and here in Austin, it was a hit. I mean, man, we started getting air play, it was—and then, pretty much where I went, I noticed a lot of the bands were starting to do this, put accordion in. And Manny called me up, and he says, “I just want to tell you, man, you know that move that you did with the accordion player?” He said, “That was a right move.” It was about the time that we were—you know, it was more economic. Poor people started using the accordion instead of the big bands, you know, four or five horns. In those days, we still bought suits, had tailor-made suits.

AW:

Yeah, and an accordion covers a lot of territory, musically, and a lot of volume of sound, too.

LD:

Right. So you know, then it started becoming more like keyboard and accordion. You know, piano, strings and the accordion. Then we went that way. I quit playing trombone, just, you know, front of the band.

AW:

Now, were you still playing keyboard? Or had you picked up the—

LD:

I never—after I played the accordion, I took it out and played—fiddled with it here and take out some tunes, I didn't have a piano, you know, fiddled with the tunes, take out the keys, you know, I could read. I'd just play it, but I never played it with a band. I'd sit up there sometimes and play

a keyboard part. “Hey Leonard, play the strings here.” “Okay.” You know? But I never played the accordion. First accordion player that I spoke to, he was a casket-maker. And he used to make caskets and he was accordion player with one of the *conjuntos* and I saw him one day, and I said, “Who’s the best accordion player around here?” Our group was already—we were working. We were working. I said, “Who’s the best accordion player around here?” And he says, “Well, there’s only one guy that beats me.” And I said, “He’s the one that I want. He’s the one that I want.” Sonny, Sonny Trujillo. So, Sonny was playing with a *conjunto* and I says, “Hey, you want to come do this?” I took him to San Antonio, and added him to the LP that we had already done and we took out some parts. That’s what we did. It was—I really enjoyed it. The guys that I played with, who had never had played with an accordion player before, were all, “Hey, man, this is pretty good,” and then Ruben added accordion, Alfonso added an accordion player, Jimmy Edwards and all these guys.

AW:

What was the name of that record, that album project that you did?

LD:

With the accordion? It was Street People. Let me— (stands up and walks out of room)

AW:

Oh, it was Street—that’s what it was called.

LD:

We only did—

DS:

That would be a key moment in time.

AW:

Yeah.

LD:

Los Callejeros. (returns to room) Yeah, that was our second album. And I remember I got that idea to where it looked blurry from when you look at it.

AW:

Oh man, what a cool—

DS:

Oh, okay. Cool.

LD:

And the other side, see how it looks when you look, it kind of gives you that blurry—

AW:

Yeah. I thought that was just me.

LD:

When Foy Lee—we recorded that for Foy Lee, he had Tear Drop Records, and Foy Lee had recorded Sunny & the Sunliners, and all these bands. He asked me why I wanted that, I said, “Well, because I want to look blurry so it’ll get your attention and maybe—”

AW:

May I look at the disc? Teardrop.

DS:

I can run and get our camera, take a picture of the cover.

LD:

I have a—(walks across the room) do you know my daughter, Andy?

AW:

No, I have not had a chance to meet her. She was—when she was in Lubbock, I was traveling. I’m almost always traveling. So, I did not get a chance to meet her. I hope to get to meet her.

LD:

Well, this is our first cover, and that was her on it. I’ll be right back. (walks to another room)

AW:

I’m going to pause this for just a second.

(pause in recording)

LD:

And then I did another one that we just released it with Street People. We released it as a—just for turntable, radio play, and they released it on cassette, and they were going to do it on the first CD. And I quit. I said, “You know what, catch you later.” We got a white boy playing there too, Allen. Allen Anderson.

AW:

Was he a keyboard?

LD:

He was a keyboard player. And our senator—well, he was state rep, he wrote the—

AW:

Liner notes?

LD:

The liner in the back.

AW:

Was it Barrientos? [Gonzalo Barrientos, Texas State Representative from Austin 1975-1985, Texas Senate, 14th District 1985-2007]

LD:

Barrientos. Gonzalo. He was state rep at the time.

AW:

I love that. “Not printed or mailed at state expense.” Keep the opponents off my case.

LD:

Prior to that, I recorded with Alfonso Ramos, and with The Mexican Revolution, and Cowboy and Fatz. I was one of these guys who was—I don't know what happened, I tell my wife, I was blessed in this life. I must have done something great in the first one, because I have a great family. They never gave me the problems I gave my parents.

AW:

I know, isn't that nice? I'm the same way. I'm so lucky. I think—I'm so glad my kids turned out different, or weren't the same as I was.

LD:

And I've always played with groups that were popular. Heck, we worked. It wasn't like we were looking for gigs, you know, because I started booking with The Revolution. Man, it was one of those things where everybody was calling you.

AW:

What were the venues? Where were you playing? What kinds of gigs were you doing and how far were you having to travel? That kind of thing.

LD:

We'd travel Detroit, Chicago and everywhere in between. California, New Mexico, Utah, Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Kansas, Ohio, Florida, Louisiana. I mean, we played every place.

AW:

Wow. Yeah.

LD:

And we played—back in those days, I mean, we were doing five, six days a week.

AW:

In that time, did you have to pack your own PA system?

LD:

Mm-hm.

AW:

So you had to probably carry a trailer or a bus and all that kind of—

LD:

We traveled in vans and we'd buy new vans. You know, you had twelve-thousand miles for a year in your warranty and your warranty would be up in two, three weeks, you know. No, we— and then finally, we got the point where we—

AW:

What years would this have been that you were doing this traveling?

LD:

Oh, I would guess '71 to '86. That was when I came back from Vietnam. Before that, when I was in high school, we traveled.

AW:

What years were you in 'Nam?

LD:

I was there in '68 and '69.

AW:

And '71 through '86 was all Street People?

LD:

No, that was the Mexican Revolution and one year with Alfonso and then Street People all in that time. Now, I've been off the road for twenty-eight years. I have some friends—my daughter took a picture of us. These guys that played from the Royal Jesters to Little Joe and the Latineers, Little Joe y la Familia, Mazz, with Street People, we—and we started playing again.

AW:

Really?

LD:

We got a—I was talking to one of my buddies, he's in Las Vegas right now, he books bands, and I do an event. This'll be our fifth year. We call it the Mexican American Experience.

AW:

Oh, cool. When—what—where do you do it?

LD:

We do it at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center. It's right on the lake. It's a beautiful, multi-million dollar facility. And I—what happened was is I did a thing for South by Southwest, and I'd been bugging, bugging people to hey, let us get some Chicano acts in there. It's always—when they say Latino, to me, Latino is like that bowl of fruit right there. You have all those different varieties, none of them taste the same. They're all different. But when they say Latino, it's always south of the border and down to the South Pole. I'd been bugging them, you know wanted to get some—first it was Tex-Mex and then *Chicano* and then *Tejano*, the names change. But the gig is still the same. You're still playing English music and country and soul and then *rancheras* and *cumbias*. So I was told, "Okay, you got one shot. If it doesn't work, you had your shot." Well, I got Little Joe y la Familia, Ruben Ramos, Los Lonely Boys and the Texas Tornadoes. And they told me, you have to find your own venue. Well, South by Southwest is the biggest music event in the world.

AW:

I know it. I actually played—if you can remember, remember when it was all in the same hotel building off of First and the river?

LD:

Yeah.

AW:

That's when I first played. Everybody was in one building. It isn't like that anymore. So when did you put this group together? What year of South by was that?

LD:

That was—it's been five years, it was—

AW:

So 2008?

LD:

Eight, something like that. And so what I did was—this friend of mine, Skeeter, the one who's in Vegas now, he—we used to play together with the Mexican Revolution. He played with Little Joe and—so I said, “Hey, Skeeter. Look, man. I can do this gig, how many bands can we get?” We've got twenty bands. We got twenty bands. And this is before they told me, “Okay, you can—South by Southwest. Okay, you can do it. We want to meet with you.” Well, we had all these twenty bands. Ram Herrera, you know. Big names. The Lonely Hearts, Larry Lang and—

AW:

Yeah, Lonely Nights.

LD:

Lonely Nights. And we had twenty bands. And we had five bands a night, and we did it free. Anyway, South by Southwest said, “Want to meet?” I said, “Well, we already got a venue.” “No, we're going to put you over here.” So they put us over there in the black part of town, right where the Victory Grill is. The Victory Grill has a lot of history. Well, they put us in an empty lot right next to the Victory Grill, which is called Kenny Dorham's Backyard.

AW:

Yeah, put a big stage out.

LD:

This is not a big stage, just a stage out there. Well, Little Joe calls me. Because I said, “Hey man, I got this gig, I need some help. It's free.” “Yeah, we'll help you, Leonard.” And they've always helped me, man, these guys. I said, “Here's the deal, man. I want to show these guys that we can pull a crowd.” And everything that was in the paper was the—a hundred people at this parking lot over here, thirty people over here and they were making big deals about it. Well, Little Joe calls me up and he says, “Leonard, I can't play Saturday, man.” I said, “No, our gig's on Wednesday.” He said, “No, well, they called me up and said that they wanted me to play Saturday.”

AW:

Oh, South by did?

LD:

Yeah. And then it had been like—because Joe called me, and the guys from the Lonely Boys, “No, we’ll open for Joe.” Joe says, “Nah, we’ll open for them.” It was—we had been in those types of negotiations, whatever you want. Well, they moved Los Lonely Boys over to Momo’s, which is a venue that sits about two hundred people, and then they move the Tornados to another day. Our gig was Wednesday, they moved them to—our gig was Thursday, they moved them to Wednesday. So when I found out about it, I said, “No, wait a minute. You told me I had one shot. Leave my acts alone.” So okay. So we got Little Joe and Ruben and they got another group, Los Texas Wranglers, *conjunto*. And another group that South by put in, El Tule. The first thirty minutes, they ran out of the concession. They didn’t have anything. I mean, it was packed. If you know how South by Southwest is, you got to walk to walk three miles to get to wherever you’re going, because there’s no parking.

AW:

Oh, exactly.

LD:

And the people that were there—people my age, younger people, but it was packed. It was—I mean, it was—

AW:

What kind of crowd? Was it—

LD:

Very mixed.

AW:

I was going to say. I bet it was very mixed.

LD:

Very mixed crowd. The thing ended, I had to jump all kinds of hoops because they didn’t want me to advertise on the *Tejano* station, they wanted me to advertise on the *norteño* station, and I said, “Well, you might as well advertise in China, because those people don’t know who Little Joe or Ruben is.” So I spoke with the people over at M.S. radio, who owned the *norteño* station and Scott Gilmore, who we became good friends, he’s their general manager of all seven stations, and I told him what the deal is, and he says, “Nah, go ahead. Go ahead. We’re under contract with them, we’re their official station, but go right ahead.” For that year. And they told me—we had a meeting about a month after South by, and at that time, I had already gone over. I said, “These people aren’t going to call me back.” I didn’t know what was going to happen, so I went over to the MAC—we call it the MAC, the Mexican-American Culture Center. I told them,

“I want to do this thing during South by,” “No, we don’t want anything South by, they did so much damage to our building,” ten thousand dollars damage that they had done, after—

AW:

To the MAC?

LD:

The MAC, yeah, they did it. I mean, tore it up. So I said, “No, this is not a South by event,” “What are you going to do?” And I told them, they says, “Okay, we like the idea.” So I already had that place secured. So we had a meeting about a month later and the first thing they tell me is, “Leonard, everything was great, but we’re going to do it different next year.” And I said, “Okay, what are we going to do?”

AW:

And this is a meeting with South by?

LD:

With South by. They said, “Next year, you’re not going to be able to advertise with that *Tejano* station. And the bands are going to have to request—apply to play.” And I said, “Hey man, I’m not going to ask these—all the guys I’m contacting are Grammy winners. They’re not bands that are trying to—they’re bands that are trying to help me make these people realize that I’m here. I didn’t move.” When you say—because when they say Mexican or Latino, for some reason, our acts aren’t in there. It’s got to be rock *en español*, “in Spanish” or something different. So I said, I told this guy, I said, “I can’t be asking these Grammy winners to play free,” and one of the guys says, “Well, they’re not the Rolling Stones,” I said, “Well they are ours.” I said, “Hell, man, Keith Richards and all those guys are the same age as Little Joe and them, so is Bruce Springsteen. What are you talking about? You’re just talking about old people—Neil Young man, you’ve got Pete Townshend and all these guys. They’re all the same age.”

AW:

Yeah.

LD:

So I said, “Okay. So I never got back to one of their meetings and we did our own event, and we’ve had like right at four thousand people each night.

AW:

So you do it every year during the week of South by?

LD:

During South by.

AW:

You're going to do it again?

LD:

We're going to do it March 12 and 13.

AW:

I'd like to come.

LD:

Sure, sure.

DS:

Can I ask a question? Do you think that difference in opinion of what you should be doing was because they didn't know how to properly promote what you were doing, or because they wanted to go a different way?

LD:

They're not interested in what we're doing. They're—

AW:

Yeah, they didn't want the competition, either.

LD:

Well, like I told _??_ (Andy coughs, inaudible), "I don't understand it, man. You guys threw a party and we're not invited, and then we decide to throw a party, and you don't want us to throw a party. So what's the deal?" Because the venue—and they've told me. They want the venue—they want to use the MAC. We named ours the Mexican-American Experience because the venue is called the Mexican-American Culture Center. So I said, "We'll see." I had, you know, city councilman and city manager there in Austin that—I mean, I told them. I said, "I'm trying to promote this culture because we're not—we're just not asked to participate in any of these things." I love Shakira and all these other groups too, but I like this other stuff, too. And there's a lot of people. And the people that go to our events, I mean, we've got from little kids to eighty, ninety-year-old grandparents.

AW:

And that doesn't describe the demographic for South by.

LD:

No. And it doesn't. Last year, what happened is they closed our street. So our shuttle buses couldn't get through, it created traffic jams. And we had maybe fifteen hundred people each night last year. A lot of people through it was closed because we have shuttles that take—they park out at the schools and they come over—but now there's a rainy street district there that's right in front of the MAC that is now—it used to be all old historical homes, now they're all clubs. I mean, it—it took over from Sixth Street. So all of that is a South by venue. They closed the street going up to our place. With the police, it was like, hey—block of Rainy, not River street. We had a—had a—there's a big circle up there, and our advertisement was, leave grandma and grandpa and go park over at the school and get the shuttle back. And—but they've told me. Anyway, we've had meetings with the city and police chief and commanders and stuff and they assured us it wasn't going to happen again. But we do get city funding to do it, and it's a free event. And we've gotten some good coverage because we get a lot of people there.

AW:

I detect a fair amount of pushback now about South by, because these same things. John Conquest is a pal of mine and he had his not South by Southwest—

LD:

--event?

AW:

--event every year because of all the things that you were talking about.

LD:

And they—we were called into a meeting. Every year, South by Southwest brings in a hundred, three hundred million dollars or whatever-the-heck they bring in to the local economy. Well, they called me in for a meeting—I'm chairman of Crossroads Events. That's what we do, it is Crossroads Events, and they've informed us that we're now in the same tier—this is starting last year—the same tier as South by Southwest and ACL [Austin City Limits Music Festival].

AW:

In terms of how much impact you have. Economic?

LD:

Well, in—in how is it. We have to go through all the same BS that they have to go through, for permits and sound and everything that South by. And I asked them, "Well, okay. I'm in the same tier as they are. Now, can you say that we at least bring in, out of that three hundred million, maybe we bring in five million? Since you're putting us in the same category that they are." It's been—golly, they have put more stuff on us—but the whole city's gone that way. And you

know, South by has a lot to do with that, and I understand that they wanted to do a zone in the city that during South by, nobody else can have an event unless they go through them, and that was shot down.

AW:

Yeah, you'd think that there'd be an anti-trust case or something like that.

LD:

Well, you know—they have—I have a friend who—actually, his father-in-law who lives two houses down, we went to junior high together. He's the president of Amigos en Azul. It's a Hispanic police organization. So they—

AW:

Friends in Blue?

LD:

Yeah. But it's Amigos en Azul, and they do our security for this thing. I was advised by Senator Barrientos to— “You need to get these guys because if something should happen, they're off-duty policemen, and they come and they'll call and they'll come right away. Be better for PR instead of having a private firm.” So we use them and Luis lives right across the road here. So we find a lot of the tricks—I shouldn't say tricks, but some of the things that you have to do. During that same week, Fan Fare in San Antonio starts.

AW:

So you have to compete with them for acts?

LD:

I don't. We don't. What we do is we do *orquesta*, big band on Wednesday before the—before the day Fan Fare starts. And then we do the *conjuntos* and different kinds of things on Thursday. We do our—we do Wednesday and Thursday, and another organization does it on Friday and Saturday. And they wanted to switch with us, and I said, “No, I want—first come, first serve man, I want Wednesday and Thursday.” “Well, why?” “Well, because a lot of the bands that we know, they're off on Wednesdays and Thursdays. They'll come over here and help us.”

AW:

They're not giving up a night off to help you.

LD:

To do that. So, but ours—like I say, they've been successful. We really—I mean, we've had Little Joe, Sonny, Los Tres Amigos, Joe Bravo, Patricia Vonne. Patricia, Haydn Vitera, we're

hoping to get Los Lonely Boys. What our event is, we promote what Mexican-Americans do. If you do jazz, if you do hillbilly, whatever, and you do it. And that's why we call it the Mexican American Experience.

AW:

Yeah, I really like that. Daniel didn't go, but our other colleague in the music archive, Curtis Peoples and I went down last year to the west side in San Antonio to that nice performing hall that is part of the school district.

LD:

Yeah. Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center?

AW:

Yeah. And Larry had organized an evening with Oscar came up but also Roy Head.

LD:

Roy Head and the— [Traits]

AW:

And Archie Bell.

LD:

Archie Bell & the Drells.

AW:

And Garibay—just this huge line-up. But it was all soul and R&B. I was struck by talking to—I can't remember now how many, but I don't think I talked to anybody who didn't say when I said, "What did you grow up listening to?" "Oh man, we listen to R&B." And they all grew up in that neighborhood. It's an interesting—it's like the Mexican American rock-and-roll bands of the sixties, you know. I think there's not much awareness of the breadth of that—of the styles of music that are appreciated and enjoyed and performed, and performed well—

LD:

Everybody played. I was talking to Ruben one day, and I said, one thing I'll always remember is we were in west Texas. I believe we may have been in Sanderson, Texas.

AW:

Railroad town.

LD:

Yeah. And we were playing there, and we were doing a Carole King tune. At that time, that was before we had sound engineers doing our sound. So I went out front, and there were some young ladies there. I was listening to the mix, and I heard them say, "Wow, they don't even have an accent." She says, "Are you with the band?" And I says, (in an exaggerated Spanish accent) "Yeah, but I want to told you one something. We do Spanish, too." (laughs) And—but, you know, it was, you know, they expect it for us. The band was The Mexican Revolution.

AW:

So they expected something very different than Carole King.

LD:

But that's what we grew up with. I grew up listening to KNOW, which is a rock station here. But I didn't go—I had a little transistor radio with the antenna.

AW:

Yeah, me too. What color was it?

LD:

Red.

AW:

Turquoise is what I got.

LD:

And—but I didn't dare change the station that my parents had it on when I came home. If I wanted to listen to radio, we'd go outside and I was listening to, you know, everything else.

AW:

I don't know about you, but I didn't want my parents knowing what channel I was listening to.

LD:

Well, they probably didn't know, you know, what we were playing. But my dad, he had—here in Austin, the way it used to be here, in the morning, Lalo Campos had a radio program. Five to ten. Jose Jaime Garcia had a program on another station, FM station from ten to, I believe, it may have been noon. Marcelo Tafoya had a radio program in Georgetown that came on at one o'clock. One to three or four. Rosita Ornelas had a radio program in Seguin that went on from three to five. George Martinez and Taylor had a program that went on from whatever time the country program was off, until sunset. So in the wintertime, maybe he had thirty minutes. But everybody had these stations. One would be off, boom. The other one would come on. So you'd

advertise on all these stations and you'd get the word out. Because people knew where the dances were going to be, they'd know—and my daddy advertised on those stations, you know, with his funeral home business. So that's how I started kind of listening to it. And then I'd have to learn Spanish. I learned Spanish because my dad serviced mostly Hispanic families. So I'd have to be around, then I started driving the hearse, or I'd drive the minister, or the priest or whatever, and we'd be speaking in Spanish. So I picked up on my Spanish. I failed Spanish in high school three times. (laughs) That I did.

AW:

That's all right, I made A's in Spanish in college and I couldn't speak a word of it. I could make a good grade, but other than that. It was embarrassing.

LD:

I still have contact with my teachers. When I came back from the military and we were playing, we'd go—they'd ask me, "Hey, can you guys come and do a concert here for us in the morning, you know, for the Spanish club?" I had friends that were teachers. So we'd go and do these concerts, we'd get a lot of graduation parties and weddings, sweet fifteens and sixteens. We did a lot of those gigs. Bands quit doing them. Of course, nowadays a lot of people do the DJ. (coughs) Excuse me. Back to what I was telling you about these friends of mine that we booked up—we were talking one day, I said, "Hey, Skeeter, what are you doing?" Because Skeeter and I worked together with Crossroads. He and I booked the bands. So he says, "Nah, I'm not doing anything right now. ___??___ (inaudible) some old stuff." Then I saw this other guy who played sax with us, Alex. He used to play with the Royal Jesters, and with Jimmy Edwards, the Latin Breed, fantastic sax player. "Alex, what are you doing, man?" "I'm doing some DJ work over here on the side. Sometimes, I'll go sit in with a band." Then, "Okay." Kind of let it go, and then Skeeter and I talked, we find more that there were guys that did it full-time like us, because I never had a job until I started at the post office.

AW:

I was about to ask when you got off the road and, '86 is when you started the post office?

LD:

I started the post office in '85. I was booked like a year in advance. So when I went to work at the post office, it was like, "Hey man, what are you doing here?" Because all these people I had played for, "Well, I'm going to work." "Nah, man!" Because I'd never—other than helping my dad and that. Luckily I had some supervisors that knew me from my music. I was—

AW:

You could arrange your schedule or something?

LD:

I was a part-time flex. I'd go in and they'd say, "What time?" "I got a gig on this day," And believe me, the postal service supervisors do not have good reputations. They can be mean SOB's. I just happened to luck out. One supervisor my first day of work said, "Davila, come here." I said, "Yes sir." He said—they give us a scheme to learn. It's a zip code. You have to learn it by memory. He said, "If you don't pass that scheme, you see that door? You're going right out through it, I don't care where you've been." I said, "Oh, sure. You know, I'm first day. And the reason I took the job because for years, my wife, I'd be on tour, she said, "Honey, you got to come in Saturday, I've got your flight." "Well, for what?" "Well, I signed us up, take the post office exam." So they'd call me. I was a veteran, keep the name on your roster. So I took several exams over the years. One time, it was just—she had gotten ill, this was in the back of my—well, what am I going to do? So I got a letter from the post office and I said, "You know what? I'm going to take it." My daughter, "What?" She was a senior in high school. "Dad's going to work?" That was it. That was her line. And I says, "Yeah. I've been working, girl. This is work." She says, "Dad, you're not going to last two weeks." And I said, "You know what? I'm going to be there two years." And I would have walked out that first day if I hadn't told her that. And I told my wife, she says, "How did it go?" "There's a supervisor there that either I couldn't play for him, or he thinks I've charged him too much, or his wife likes me." Because right away, he hit me with this. I mean, I've met—I saw, I didn't meet—touch base again with a bunch of my high school classmates and people that I had played for, their kids, they all work there at the post office midnight shift. The supervisor was—I was a part-time flex, what they call, so they can bring you in at any time. So they would let me come in after my gig. I'd drive in from Waco, as soon as I got in, I did my gig over there, come in and work, later. And I did that for a year until I got all my gigs out of the way. I wasn't taking any more contracts. But yeah. That's—when I quit, I had friends come in to town, say, "Hey Leonard, we're playing over here, man, why don't you come?" "Yeah, okay, I'll be there." And I'd never go. They say, "How come you didn't go?" "I don't want to get the itch." You know, I said, "If I get the itch, I'll quit this job in a minute." Then it got to be where I was stuck there. I already had too many years to—

AW:

Are you still there?

LD:

No, I retired nine years ago.

AW:

Oh, did you? Nine years ago, wow.

LD:

Yeah, so. Nah, I did twenty-two and then with three years in the military, so I got twenty-five years credit. The day I retired, Senator Barrientos was having breakfast with this other songwriter, Johnny Degollado, Johnny's a song[writer]—has a *conjunto* and he's written a lot of hits for a lot of bands. And they were there, and they said, "Hey Leonard, come here. What are you doing?" I said, "Oh, nothing. Just retired man, I'm going to enjoy it now." He says, "Well, we're having a meeting. Can you come to this meeting tonight?" They were having it in a club. And what happened was that there was no *Tejano* radio on the air. It had been cut off completely. They went from seven, or eight—

AW:

Yeah, you just made a list of—

LD:

Eight Spanish-language radio stations and there was—they all, poof, cut off *Tejano* and it went strictly Mexico or strictly foreign. Everything was foreign. The DJs were foreign, the music was foreign, everything. No more Little Joe, no more Sonny, no more nothing. And they were having a meeting with a bunch of bands and some business owners to see what they could do to get a radio station going, or to get somebody to—. So Senator Barrientos was the one who headed it up, and there was a lot of people there. They said, "Well you know what? We need a spokesperson." And the senator was still in office. And he said, "You know what? I think Leonard ought to run the show." So they had an election, and I was the first president of the Austin Tejano Music Coalition. And we started—

AW:

Austin Tejano Music Coalition?

LD:

ATMC. And it's—we started different chapters in San Antonio and Houston and Dallas and west Texas. I think Lubbock even had a chapter. But you know, they were all wanting to use our logo. Use it, I mean, we just put this thing together to do this.

AW:

And what was the object? To make sure that *Tejano* music had a radio venue?

LD:

Our objective was to get *Tejano* radio programming.

AW:

Got it.

LD:

We met with people from Univision and Border Media. We picketed them, we picketed their sponsors. It was like, "Well heck, I shop here, man. No well we're advertising Spanish language." But it wasn't the Spanish language, it was—and then it was no more—totally—you never heard anything about Austin anymore. It was always things on—from San Antonio or L.A., or Houston. Border Media, I believe their home office was in Houston. It was—and I had a meeting. In fact, it was Senator Barrientos, Ruben Ramos and myself, we went over to Univision and we met with Tim McCoy. We wanted to buy block time. I said, "Okay, we want to buy some block time to have *Tejano* programming. He said, "Well, what days do you want?" We want Friday, Saturday and Sunday. From midnight to midnight Monday morning. "No, no, no. We can't do that. What do you want that for?" We want to make this thing community. And he said, "Well, what radio station do you listen to, Leonard?" I said, "I listen to KXTN in San Antonio out here where I'm at." He said, "Well, listen to that. That's our sister station." I said, "You don't understand. I want to know what's going on I-35 and Ben White, and I don't care what's going on in I-35 and Loop 410. I want to know that my neighbor over here, that his kid got a scholarship to the Naval Academy and not that he was arrested for robbing a place, or DWI or anything like that. I want to know something that's good about our community. This is not just the music, man. This has got to do with what's happening with our town, you know? Because before the way it used to be is, "You know what? There's a fire over there in the east side, man, you'd get all these people going. I remember that, because everybody was listening to the program. You know, I would hear advertisements in San Antonio looking for Hispanic firefighters for Austin. And I didn't hear those advertisements here. Well, you know, everything else, it really catered more to the immigrant community. And I had meetings with people from LatinWorks, who's the largest Hispanic advertising agency in the country. And then when I asked, I said, because I was telling them what I was trying to do, they said, "Leonard, we don't have to." "Well, how do you market to me?" And he said, "Well, we don't have to, because if you don't like it, you change stations and we're going to catch you on one of those other stations. The English station. He said, "These people that we market to in this demographic, that's a captured audience. They can't change stations and know what's going on. So, that's what we're dealing with." "Oh, okay." Well. Then we started telling people, "Hey, this is it, man. They're not going to cater to us. You might drive a Corvette or Volvo or whatever, we're not in that market, they're picking us up in the English stations, you know?" And I hear Kashada, Southwest Airlines and all these advertise on the Univision station in San Antonio, but I find that what it is they have all these stations that they can say, "You know what? We'll throw in San Antonio market, too." So there's a few token stations, but I know there's some people, there's listenership there. I have a grandson. They live—Lynn, my daughter, they live in upper middle-class America, Austin. Gated communities and stuff. My grandkids don't know Spanish stuff. One day I did a mix with Flaco Jimenez, Santana, Los Lonely Boys, Little Joe, Sonny, just—Freddy Fender. He and I went to Gruene [Texas]. I had a branding iron made for my son's in-laws, for his steaks. He likes cooking barbequing and stuff, so I said, "I'll have one made for

you. So we went and I played this CD. And then my grandson says, "Popo, can you change the stations?" And I said, "I just made this CD, I want to hear how it sounds on the truck." So on the way down there, he's listening, he says, "Can you play that one again?" "Yeah." So I play it again. And I was just noticing what he was. He was ten, eleven years old. And he—these kids in the neighborhood, they play guitar, their parents play with the Beatles tribute band, you know, so they were musicians there. When we came back, he had asked me two or three times, can you—I said, "If you want to hear it again, hit that button right there." So when we came back, I left him off, came home, my son-in-law called me, he says, "Popo, what'd you do to my boy?" I says, "Why?" He says, "Well, he wants a copy of that CD that you made." I said, "Oh, okay." So he's playing it for his friends there in the neighborhood, the little white kids in the neighborhood, some African-Americans, but he was playing the music for them. So to me, it was like, well, he was exposed, and he thought it was cool. They were listening to it. Which made me feel good. I said, "You know what? It's not offensive. It's the beat. The beat is there, and if they like it, they're going to like the beat."

AW:

Music doesn't have boundaries.

LD:

No. But there are some people who—I mean, I've heard some of these salesmen from this radio station, *Tejano* radio station going into a business, and trying to sell spots because we're playing *Tejano* music. And when I went to the station, I said, "Look, man. Don't do it that way." I says, "Tell them you have thirty-thousand listeners an hour. Because *Tejano* music, to that black guy that you were trying to sell spots to, he doesn't who it is from the man on the moon. You know, you can do this all day long and you have a hundred thou listeners, they're going to want their name there."

AW:

That's right.

LD:

So sell them to it that way, because they don't know what *Tejano* is. They don't know who your listeners are. They don't know that it's me or my wife, or my kids who are college-educated or professors at UT. They don't know that they listen to that. And I've been to—you know, my wife ran the president's office at the University of Texas for eighteen—fifteen—fifteen, eighteen years. And she just retired a couple of years ago with forty-four years there. And we'd go to these parties that they'd have, some of the Hispanic—and they'd be playing jazz, I'd say, "Shit, just let me go play. Bring a Little Joe CD or something. Hey, yeah, man!"

AW:

You know where I first heard Little Joe? I was in—working those dances at the Kerrville Folk Festival.

LD:

At the Kerrville Folk—okay.

AW:

Yeah, Little Joe was big.

LD:

Now, did you ever work for Willie and Carlos there in Lubbock? They used to have—

DS:

You're talking about Carlos Perez?

LD:

Carlos Perez, yeah.

AW:

No—this was late sixties, '68, '69, '70. Whoever was putting on the dance would call the police department and they would say, "We need four officers." And then someone at the police department would say, "Well, who's able to work that night? And here's what you get paid." So we never did actually work—I mean, I met those guys, but you never did really work for them in that job.

LD:

We'd go play—we went and played our West Texas gigs were, we'd play in Plainview at Pete's Palladium, we'd play in Lubbock, over at the—it was called the convention center, I think. It used to be a bowling alley.

AW:

Oh yeah. Yeah.

LD:

And then we'd go down to Snyder, we'd go to Pecos. We'd go into New Mexico, right across there—

AW:

Like Roswell or Clovis, or—

LD:

And Hereford. We'd play all these towns. I mean, we'd go up and play in that area a lot. Then we'd play the big cities, Dimmitt. (laughs) We'd play in Dimmitt too. I mean, we played everywhere. In those days, it was like, you'd have a dance every Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Somewhere. Somewhere. And down in the valley, it was during the week. So down there, there was—for what reason, I don't know, but it was Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesday?

AW:

Really? How interesting.

LD:

Yeah. We'd play Monday in McAllen, Tuesday in Alice—

AW:

Because I think Lubbock it was pretty much always weekend.

LD:

Yeah, but we'd play—Alice had their dances on Tuesdays and McAllen on Mondays. Westlaco Wednesdays or Brownsville. Then we'd come back—I mean, Texas was big enough to—

AW:

Oh, yeah. You can make a career just here.

LD:

You could. I mean, then we'd play Taylor, San Marcos and Kyle and Round Rock and Georgetown. They were always packed. It was—

AW:

Yeah, I remember in the late sixties, work in those dances, they were packed. The other thing was, they were hardly ever a problem. Occasionally, you would, but you'd have a lot more problem at a wedding than you would at a big dance. I don't know why.

LD:

But there used to be—gosh, somebody was always going to fight somebody somewhere.

AW:

Oh yeah, but a fight—you know, as long as it didn't involve guns or knives, a fight was a fight and it was no big deal.

LD:

We played—we kind of followed—I would say, the migrant workers, too, because we'd play down in Florida when it was—the crops were going. We'd be in California when they'd be, you know, doing the oranges. Same with Florida. Michigan, the apples, the apple season.

AW:

I don't know about the late sixties. I don't think there was as many migrants in Lubbock at the time, but when I was a kid growing up and we had a little farm out by Slaton just outside Lubbock, migrants came through all the time to—

LD:

We'd see people playing and, Hey, man! Remember? We were in Ogden. I mean, because you'd see them. You'd see a lot of the same people.

AW:

Wow, that's cool.

LD:

Yeah. It was—gosh, I remember one time we did a—on our truck, we had a truck, it was one of these cube boxes. And we had Austin's Own Street People, I had it painted on the back. Real nice. And this guy followed us from—I think it was from El Paso, we were almost in California. You know, they'd pass us and they'd wave. And we had—on the back, we had Austin's Own Street People. We were putting gas somewhere out in Indio, California, and they went by and they said, "Hey, *Montablas!*" *Montablas* is an area over here on the other side of the river, you know, where it was mostly *Chicanos*, you know, lived there. But that's where they were from. We—I mean, we'd see people, I'd see people that were from Austin in Michigan. They'd be out there doing the migrant—migrant labor. I mean, they'd go and it's like, Man, you guys are expensive. But we'd find out that the promoters were charging a whole bunch of money.

AW:

Right.

LD:

You know, back in those days, they'd be charging fifteen, twenty dollars a person. Here, we were charging five. But it was—they were out there working and they wanted to hear the music. And *conjunto* was real heavy at the time.

AW:

For the people that are going to listen to this a hundred years from now, distinguish between *orquesta*, *conjunto*, *Tejano*.

LD:

Well, okay. *Conjunto* is—has the accordion, the *bajo*, the bass and the drums.

AW:

And *conjunto* means just a group, right?

LD:

Yeah. But *conjunto* was known because if they said, “No, it’s a *conjunto*, we knew that it was just going to be an accordion.” I mean, when I was a kid I’d hear Paulino Bernal, the Conjunto Bernal and those guys, and they had two accordions, and it’d be like, wow.

AW:

So I would hear Santiago talking about his father putting together his *conjunto*, meaning the band—

LD:

And that’s mostly what the—

AW:

And typically smaller bands, right?

LD:

Yeah, usually four-piece, five-piece rhythm and an accordion. And the *orquesta* was they’d have—

AW:

It was a big band.

LD:

The bands.

AW:

Horns, drum kit—

LD:

Right. Keyboards, you know—

AW:

And hardly ever an accordion, right?

LD:

Hardly. Hardly ever accordion. And Little Joe was the first band that I heard that had an accordion in some of his music. And he did it just with *conjunto*. Then he started adding—he got Joel Guzman, Joel Guzman from Seattle, the Seattle area, and Joel came as a keyboard player.

AW:

Oh, I didn't know that.

LD:

Yeah. He was a fantastic keyboard player. And I hired—I say I hired them—I just produced a TV show with KLRU. It was called, *Vamos al Baile*. And I had talked to a friend of mine here who—he used to be mayor *pro-tem* in Austin, and he works at the University of Texas and one day I told him, “Hey, Johnny, come here, man. Let's go have lunch.” So we went and I said, “Do you know anybody there at KLRU?” I said, “What I want to do is get something in Austin City Limits.” He said, “Well, I know this guy. I haven't talked to him in a few years, but let me look for him.” He said, “What do you want to do?” I want to talk to him because I've got a proposal I want to do. He called me about thirty minutes later and he says, “Hey man, he's CEO of the KLRU where they do City Limits, the whole TV thing.”

AW:

Yeah, I know Terry Lacona there, but I don't know any of the—

LD:

Okay, well, Bill Stotesbery is—

AW:

Now, I don't know any of the brass over there.

LD:

So Johnny said, “Let's go meet with them.” So I met with them. I said, “I want to do this. But I don't want to do a concert, I want to do a dance. I want to do a *baile*, “dance”. I want to show the way it is.” He said, “You know what? I like the idea.” They've never done anything like that before. And so he said, “Let's do it.” And we did it, and we filmed it in July, and it showed in August—I mean October, first parts of November, but it showed everywhere. New York, Virginia, showed it overseas, streamlined. I mean, it showed eight, nine times in L.A, different—

AW:

Are you going to do it again?

LD:

They said they want to do something else again. They think it was a success, I mean, they said, "This is something good." They gave me the title of executive producer.

AW:

Usually, that means you give them money, (laughs) executive producer.

LD:

Well, what happened was I got the bands. I got Little Joe, Joel Guzman and Ruben. They're friends. I said, "Hey man, I want to do this thing and I need—" They all agreed. So we did the show and then we named it *Vamos al Baile*. It was mostly to show different people dancing. I got a hundred dancers, because only three-hundred and twenty people would be allowed in the studio, including the bands. So I wanted to make sure that I got people that were going to go and dance.

AW:

Not stand around.

LD:

Not stand around. And it was like the old coliseum feel. They had the bleachers and people were coming down and dancing, people staying on the floor. And it was—I mean. I'm really proud of it. Well, they called me up, I was talking to Little Joe over here, we were cracking up about something, and they said, "Leonard, they need you on stage." "Okay." So I went up there, told everybody have a good time? This is what we're about, this is what we're doing. I get off and my son, who had come in—he was living in San Antonio at the time, he comes and says, "Executive producer?" I said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, he said you were executive producer." I said, "Oh, really? Okay." So I went—my wife was there and I went and sat there with her in the stands. I said, "Well, I guess I know what the executive producer does." And she said, "What's that?" I said, "Well, he tells his wife, Honey, would you go get the parking passes, I need for you to call these people." Because she's the one who was doing everything for me. She says, "You didn't pay me a damn thing to do this!" I said, "Honey, stick with me, and I'll double that." Just stick with me. We've been married forty-six years this month.

AW:

Well, good. We hit forty-five in August, last August. So you're not that far ahead of us.

LD:

No, we're December. December 30.

AW:

Where did you meet her?

LD:

Here in school. I met her at her at a Sweet 15. She was a friend of my sister's. She's been my sweetheart and my better half all this time, you know.

AW:

Yeah, and not any woman will put up with a musician that long.

LD:

Oh gosh, and you know, she—one thing—because friends have asked me. A lot of my friends have been divorced and married again and divorced again and they say, how did you do it man? I said, "Well, she was always involved in my business." You know, Honey, I need you to send me these contracts out for me. She knew my flight reservations, my hotels. She was always involved. The other guys didn't want to say anything. Where are the guys at? They'd call my wife. And that was before cell phones.

AW:

Big difference.

LD:

Yeah. But I did—I did get to play with a lot of—I mean, all the legends. I mean, the guys who are legends now, I mean, we all played gigs with them. I was around. I was around a lot of that stuff. I've gotten—made great friends that are still friends to this day. And with these guys that were playing in the band, we were thinking the other day, What should we name the band? Well, how about the Pacemakers? Or Depends Kids, you know. Some of the guys want to name it Street People. Well, no—I think Street People ran its course. I have a picture here of the guys. My daughter took a picture of us. We had a flood here in Austin on Halloween. Our city councilman, Mike Martinez and state representative Eddie Rodriguez called me and said, "Leonard, we want to do a benefit for the flood survivors," is what—not victims. So he says, "What can you do, man?" I said, "Well, let's—" we met. We did a thing, we got a bunch of people. We've collected close to two hundred thousand dollars so far. We had a fundraiser and we had a bunch of bands. We put it together in like, three weeks to help these people out. That's kind of what I had been pretty much, and the guys were saying let's do something. All these guys played—maybe you can see here—this is Skeeter. Skeeter—I hired him with The Revolution, with The Mexican Revolution. And then me and then Tony Matamoros. Tony was with Little Joe. He and Little Joe started playing together. He played with them for thirty-some odd years. David Guzman played with another local group. Gilbert and I played together with Street People. Alex, sax player. He's been around. Gilbert plays every instrument there is and well. Mingo

played with me in Street People, and he's a drummer. Richard, we played together with the Mexican Revolution. Hector, he played with me with Street People. This is a young kid, he's twenty-one, the accordion player. That accordion, he made out of duct tape. Out of duct tape.

AW:

How cool is that?

LD:

All he had was the keys and he put it together. Made and tuned—

AW:

So what is this—did you ever decide on a name?

LD:

No, for the gig, they asked me, because I did the line-up, and I said, "I'm going to bring this group in." "What's your name?" And I said, "Surprise, Surprise." So when we played, it was like, man, all these guys playing, that's Street People again. Well, that's Surprise, Surprise. But nah, we've been throwing names around and seeing what we're going to—

AW:

So when's your next gig?

LD:

The gig that I'm—the first one, the one that we had planned on doing is the twelfth of March at our event at the MAC.

AW:

Oh, okay.

LD:

Yeah. And then right now, you know, we're working on getting into Fan Fare. We know the people. I've talked to Ruben and Little Joe and these guys, because when we did Street People—"Hey man, can you put us in there, let us open up?" "Yeah, come on." They were friends. They'd book us with them and we'd play with them. That was our—when I said I was lucky, fortunate enough to play with bands that were popular and knew these guys, so they would give us gigs. I mean, heck, we'd go down to the Valley, play with Little Joe and Roberto Pulido—they're all friends. It wasn't as hard as it was for guys that were unknown to start a band and start playing. I had done gigs with them in the past. You know, they, "Hey, Leonard, we got cancelled, can we come in?" "Yeah, man, come on in." So it was that camaraderie that we had with these big bands. Little Joe would get canceled. Sunny and the Sunliners would get canceled. We would—

everybody got canceled for some reason or another, but we were able to call each other and, “Hey, I need a gig Saturday, man. Or Friday. What’ve you got Sunday? I heard you were playing over here, can you come in? Or yeah.” It was always that kind of thing. But the gigs were always good. It wasn’t like—

AW:

Yeah. Well dance gigs are—that’s a whole other world, because you’ve got a thousand people or something out there paying something at the door to get in. Not too many concerts have a thousand people.

LD:

No, not—unless they’re the big, big guys.

AW:

That’s what I mean, but just three nights a week, you don’t have a thousand-people concerts. But you can have a thousand-people dances.

LD:

That’s right.

AW:

Well—so, *Tejano*. How would you define *Tejano* for someone listening?

LD:

We were talking about *conjunto*. Then *Tejano* was the—but *Tejano*—it was always called either, back when I was a kid, it was Mexican music. Then it was—later became Tex-Mex music. Then it became *Chicano* music. Then it became *Tejano* music. Then I hear people call it Latino music. That’s when I say, “Guatemalan? You got a Puerto Rican band playing?” You know, describe that bowl of fruit. I keep telling them, “Man, you’ve got all these different kinds of beans, pinto, limas, pork and beans, and that’s—to me—and I’ve got people that say—well, like the accordion player. He said, “Man, I never played *Tejano*. I’ve always played *conjunto*.” Well, to me Flaco Jimenez is a *Tejano*. Henry Zimmerle. I mean, all these guys are *Tejanos*. They’re just playing their own—and to me, it’s always been the same, but *conjunto* people, because I have a friend who’s—he’s president of the *Puro Conjunto Association*. He’s always saying, “How come you don’t get *conjunto* music?” “We do get *conjunto*, man. We had *Los*—I mean, Joel comes in and plays *conjunto pero*—the AT Boys, some of these other bands that are *conjuntos*. He says, “Well, but you know, he wants some groups from down in the Valley,” I said, “Well hell, bring them over man. We played with Carlos Guzman, *Los Duelos Cuatro*, all those—all those guys from Snowball and Laura Canales.”

AW:

Yeah. So is *Tejano* always in Spanish?

LD:

A friend did an interview with the Austin Statesman. And he asked me, “What is *Tejano*?” And I said, to me, it’s an attitude. You know what man, because me as a *Tejano*, I like George Strait, I like the Rolling Stones, I like Santana. I like Flaco. To me, it’s an attitude. My mother—my mother-in-law still dances “I Feel Good” with the grandkids and we get out there. And she’s ninety-two, you know. So to me, it’s a—it’s an attitude. But I go to these *Tejano* conventions and man, if you play something in English, they don’t like that.

AW:

Yeah. It is kind of odd. Although I seem to hear more a prejudice between *norteño* and *Tejano* people. I guess that’s the line.

LD:

You know, see, *norteño*, to me—and this is what I’ve always heard is—when we would go down and play in Mexico in the border towns, in Nogales and all that, *Norteño* was—they were talking about what the bands on the other side of the border were playing. They would call that *norteño*. Because they were playing along the border, but it was the northern part of Mexico. And they were playing Ramon Ayala, oh gosh, Los Johnny Jets. You’d get a lot of these groups from California, that were from Baja California, because when we played in California, it was Mexican Revolution, Freddy Martinez, Little Joe and nine bands from Mexico.

AW:

Well, what about the L.A bands like Los Lobos and folks like that? Where do they fit into that? They have their own kind of scene?

LD:

Yeah, yeah. I’ll tell you, when Los Lobos first came hit—they did a story on them on Billboard Magazine, and they did a story on Street People also. I had just recorded a tune, “Do I Ever Cross Your Mind”, that a friend of mine, Tom Wright, who had won a Grammy with Rod Stewart, and he was Pete Townshend’s best friend, you know, he was their official photographer. We did this tune by Michael Smotherman, called “Do I Ever Cross Your Mind”.

AW:

I love Smotherman.

LD:

Yeah, and I—they asked me to translate some of the song. Well, on Billboard—on *The Village Voice*, it said that my tune kicked Ray Charles' tune in the butt or something. And we were both having them pressed at the same time. Tom told me what was happening. So Los Lobos were on there, too. They did a gig, they brought them to Austin, and I played Aqua Fest [a festival that ran from 1962-1998]. Aqua Fest used to be the big, the big show here. And I was—we played the main stage several years, and Los Lobos came in and they did "La Bamba". And this friend, his name is Ray Char-lehs, Ray Charles, and he was from Seattle. At the time he said, "Leonard, I'm working with these people, they just bought the rights to Ritchie Valens' story, they'll do 'La Bamba'." Starts telling me what they were going to do. This went on. Los Lobos got the gig to do the soundtrack. They came here and the musicians were, "Man, we've been playing this shit here for thirty years, man, and hell, and then these guys come from California and play and make a hit again." I—you know, there are *rancheras* in that—they're a rock band. They're a rock band. And the *rancheras* and stuff that they do are the faster tempo (scats a quick tempo) than our *rancheras*.

AW:

Yeah, they strike me as being a lot more guitar-driven, too.

LD:

And then they had the accordion, you know—but it is rock and roll.

AW:

Yeah, but they started with the guitar and added things instead of starting with an accordion and adding a guitar. I mean, there's a difference.

LD:

But they did play—they were playing that stuff, the *rancheras* in California. They were like some of the bands—I never had played with them before, but—or at the same venue, because like I said, they always had a lot of bands. But there were a lot of bands like them that were there. And they did good.

AW:

What about some of these bands that seem to me to be kind of hard to pin down. One favorite of mine is Los Texmaniacs.

LD:

Los Texmaniacs. Max Baca.

AW:

They seem to be traditional instrumental—instrumentation, but they don't play—

LD:

—*conjunto*.

AW:

Traditional. He plays—he says like Stevie Ray—

LD:

Max plays. He plays that *bajo* and—as a matter of fact, David Farias, who was the original accordion player for the Texmaniacs, he just went back with their brothers. They used to be La Tropa F. Now they're back together, but they're Los Hermanos Farillas. They played for us at this Flood Aid concert. But yeah—Max, I mean, he plays jazz and blues and—it was like Flaco playing with the Rolling Stones, with these different—he was the instrumentation and when he did that thing with Dwight Yoakam, “Streets of Bakersfield”, you know, the accordions started coming in.

AW:

Well, Ry Cooder, too.

LD:

Ry Cooder. Now Joel is in that—

AW:

Yeah, he plays with Joe Ely a lot.

LD:

Joe Ely. And I know Joel. We're good friends. And he does this thing—for a while there, he didn't want to play *conjunto*. He didn't want to play. He was doing this other stuff, but he finds that it's a—you can play that rock and roll, it's the same notes, just not with an accordion. But yeah, you know, every place that I played at, people dance differently. Here in Texas, it's—

AW:

—in a circle.

LD:

You know, in a circle. You go to Kansas, and I remember people going—they'd go one and come back. In Chicago, it was everybody just, you know, going it was no set pattern, you know. Washington and all that—but see, you get a lot of people that were from Texas a long time ago. They were migrant workers that went and stayed up there. You know, they hadn't been back

home in twenty years and now their kids are grown up. Yeah, my dad used to tell me about back home. And they don't speak Spanish. They're kind of what I would've been if I had stayed in Milwaukee. But it's different in a lot of places, but the tunes are the same. I mean, they're—"Down in the Valley" is different. You know, *es mas taquachada*. That's what I used to see when we'd play. Roberto Pulido used to do a little thing on stage and he said, "This is the way you dance in Chicago," or "this is the way you dance in L.A." And he'd be up there on stage doing the different ways of doing it. So, you know, to me it's always been—because I've always said I'm *Chicano*. Yeah, I'm Mexican-American, but I'm *Chicano*. *Chicano* to me is a term that whenever they used to tell me, "Hey man, go back where you came from."

AW:

Say, "Well, I am."

LD:

I'm here, man. I'm seventh generation, born here, man. My great-great-great-grandfather used to fight—or when Pancho Villa would come and raid across the border, they'd fight them. They'd fight the Indians. And these are stories that my great-great-grandmother would tell us, you know, because I was fortunate enough to be like, seven years old when they died and they used to tell us the stories and we'd be sitting on the dirt floor there in Pearsall. So I got a chance to hear a lot of those things, so I knew where my family was from. But the term *Chicano* was—I've had—my mother doesn't like the term. Mom's eight-seven, she doesn't like it. But—

AW:

What does she like? What does someone of her generation—

LD:

She's always said she's Latina.

AW:

Latina.

LD:

And that was when we were in Milwaukee. And that was the first time that I heard her say that. And she's Mexican-American, I hear her say that, but she doesn't like *Chicano*. Like, I've told people, you shouldn't say that, that's a derogatory term. I'm said, (snorts). To me, it was like—when I was in Vietnam, I'd see somebody and go, "Hey, *Chicano*, where you from?" "Hey, I'm from *Califas*," or "I'm from Chicago, Oklahoma."

AW:

Cowboy—cowboy used to mean—was a term applied to somebody who had sex with cows. That's really where the term came from. You know, cowboy. That was before the Civil War. That was an incredibly derogatory term to apply to someone who worked cattle. I mean, it was just the worst thing you could say and it was only during the—in fact, one of my distant uncles is a guy named Charlie Goodnight.

LD:

Charlie, like the one from the restaurant here?

AW:

Well, yeah, except they're really not kin. Goodnight himself didn't have children. He never had children, so all of us who are kin to him are kin through, like me, are nephews or nieces or something. But his generation, the people that blazed those trails called themselves cowmen. Cattlemen and cowmen. In fact, during the Civil War when they were out working cattle, they called it cow hunting, because they didn't have fences. So the term cowboy was—you'd get in a fight if you called somebody that. 'Till the trail drive days, afterwards, and they did the same thing, they began to take on this pejorative as a badge of honor. So it's—so now, today, I hear these guys talk about cowboys, how we've always been this, and always been that. I'd say, "No, no you haven't. You used to—that would start a fight in a bar if you called somebody that."

LD:

And I have cousins down in Pearsall, those guys are cowboys, man. Those guys—you know, my aunt—they just had a reunion for the Gonzales family, which is my grandmother's sister, and she had twelve boys. No girls. And when I was a kid, we'd go out there to the ranch, and it was all these blue jeans on the clothesline and my aunt's couple of dresses. We'd run through them. And I didn't—I hadn't realized that until it was pointed out to me. Because one of the boys had a daughter, and her little dress was there too and they said, "Ah tia, "aunt" look, she's got another dress." But they were all cowboys, man. These guys, they were breaking horses and—

AW:

Did they use the term *vaquero*, "cowboy" or did they use the term cowboy?

LD:

No, cowboy.

AW:

Cowboy is what I hear, too. Except for buckaroos up in Utah or Nevada or something, they're all—

LD:

Buckaroos.

AW:

Which of course comes from *vaquero*.

LD:

Yeah, that was—but no, I had family who were *pachucos* and others who were cowboys and you know, the ones in California, they're *cholos*. Here it's the same thing, and I find that over there it's like, "Hell no, I'd rather be over here." In my family, I've got—I mean, I've got all—

AW:

Is it safe to say that *Tejano* music is a music with fewer cultural boundaries?

LD:

I think there's no boundaries. Joe Posada, have you heard of Joe Posada? Fantastic saxophone player. Plays jazz—I mean, great jazz player. He won the Latin Grammy. Not for jazz, but for *Tejano*. This other friend of mine, Gilbert Velasquez, who produces a lot of this stuff, he just won his thirteenth Grammy.

AW:

Wow. That's a stack.

LD:

He just won his thirteenth Grammy with David Lee Garza in the Latin Grammys, other than the regular Grammys. I call him because Street People was the first band that he recorded on his own, that he was given the keys to the studio for. And we were his first, his guinea pigs. I say, "Man, boy, you've learned a lot since then." But you know, we're friends. But he's, I mean, won Grammys with pretty much, most all *Tejano*, all *Tejano* acts. And he's got his little studio there in San Antonio. Nice little studio, everybody and his grandmother records there now, when in the past everybody used to record with Manny Guerra at Amen. The older guys, and then Don and Freddy in Corpus. Now, pretty much everybody's got a studio.

AW:

So cheap now to have a studio. You get a room, the equipment costs you two grand.

LD:

And I've—as a matter of fact, I'm building something over here, you know, and I've got my Pro Tools—

AW:

Santiago is recording in his house, I think. I'm not sure how fancy it is, but he wants us to come look at it.

LD:

Well, Joel Guzman. He won a Grammy, recording it there at his house, too. Yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

DS:

Couple of months ago, I was in Corpus with Beto Ramon, same thing in his house.

LD:

Right. You know, they—I mean, and it sounds so good. This guy who used to be my manager, Michael Block—Michael bought not Neil Young—Leon Russell's studio.

AW:

Oh, that was a great studio.

LD:

In Tulsa.

AW:

Turned out all kinds of incredible—

LD:

And Michael was my manager. He's the one who got me in to do these videos of Willie Nelson and you know, they were all doing them there at his studio. He's the one who I'm getting my equipment from him, microphones and stuff like that, because I had a building over there that I'm getting ready to enclose it for that purpose, be able to—I got friends and friends that have radio programs, and they have radio programs that sound bad and I say, "No man, we need to do it professionally."

AW:

Really, there's no excuse. On our iPhone, we can get 44.1 [kHz].

LD:

That's right.

AW:

The input's not so great, but you know what I mean? You really don't have an excuse anymore for having bad sound.

LD:

No. It's just learning, learning the skill.

AW:

Well, you still got to have the ears.

LD:

That, too. That too. I mean, nowadays, there's so many ways to—to—I mean, I see autocorrect being used—

AW:

Well, what I mean is like you had the idea, let's put an accordion in here. That's an ear. That's somebody who has their ear working.

LD:

Oh, okay.

AW:

And there's no equipment that tells you to put an accordion here.

LD:

Yeah. That's right.

AW:

Don't let them play this many notes, don't let them do something. That kind of stuff. That's what I mean by the ears. That's what makes the difference anymore.

LD:

No, we—you know, people have told me, because I have some two-inch tape that has been in my closet in a controlled environment since 1977, 1978—

AW:

Do you need it digitized?

LD:

I need to get it off of that—

AW:

We can do that.

LD:

Oh, okay, well—

AW:

That's one of the things we do in our archive, is we—how many tracks is it?

LD:

I've got pretty much a whole album.

AW:

No, I mean—(talking at the same time)

LD:

Oh, it was—

AW:

Sixteen?

LD:

It was twenty-four track.

AW:

Oh, it was twenty-four? Okay. Yeah, no, we have a whole building full of tape. As you well know, that stuff is deteriorating and it needs to be digitized. When we get done with the recording, which we probably ought to do, we've recorded a long time today, we'll talk a little about archiving and what are the things that we do and can do and I think that might be of interest to you.

LD:

Do you have something to play vinyl on?

AW:

Oh, yeah. We have vinyl, we have transcription disc machines, we have wire recorders. We can—they only thing, we don't do cylinders in-house, we send them— [laughter from all]
(Leonard steps out of the room)

LD:

Let me see what we have here.

AW:

Do you want to call Lupe?

DS:

Yeah I will.

AW:

Make sure he still wants to do this, because it's going to be—

DS:

Yeah, it's already seven.

AW:

It would be at least eight before we could—

DS:

Let me go ask if I can use his restroom.

AW:

Yeah, I'll have to do that before we leave. I'm going to pause this too, for just a moment.

(pause in recording)

LD:

I've got *bajo de* Keith [Ferguson]. But yeah, no, no, I knew Keith. I met him, he was with the T-Birds, and a friend of mine, Daniel Schaeffer, he's an Anglo, but Daniel plays *bajo*. Do you know Daniel?

AW:

Yeah, I know who he is.

LD:

He's a photographer. Daniel's a great friend.

AW:

And what's his wife's—significant other's name?

LD:

Well, he's not married—

AW:

Right, I know, but—

LD:

I don't know who he's with now.

AW:

I was just trying to think.

LD:

He's got a—

AW:

We got that collection because we also have Tommy and Charlene Hancock and the Hancock family. Tejano Dames, we've got all their collection there. And of course Connie and Keith you know were—

LD:

Right. And then she passed.

AW:

No it was Tracy.

No, no, it was Tracy. I'm sorry.

AW:

It turns out a girl I went to high school with was one of Keith's girlfriends.

LD:

Really?

AW:

Yeah. But we wound up getting his stuff—he'd already been gone for some time and his mom hadn't quite decided what to do. But because of Connie, having her material with us, so I went over and I've done all kinds of interviews with people about Keith and then we have photographs and you know. By the time we started doing his record collection was already gone, but we have lots of cool posters—

LD:
T-Bird?

AW:
Well, not so much T-Birds, but the people he liked. And they're all *Tejano* and *conjunto*.

LD:
Yeah, because Keith had that *bajo*. Daniel has it. Daniel has the *bajo*, and he plays it. Daniel goes out and plays different gigs. He's recorded some stuff called *Los Choferes*. See, *Los Choferes*—the Velasquez family had Roy's taxi, and Daniel's always known them and taking pictures for them and all that stuff, and I think Daniel drove cabs for them for a while. But yeah, I met Daniel—[Daniel Sánchez begins talking on the telephone in the background] I met Daniel at Third Coast Recording, so he was working with Dick Chorus, but he also had Tech-Specific Film and Video, but Daniel had his photography studio there. And Third Coast Studio was down there, they were doing *Raggedy Man*, that movie with Sissy Spacek at the time. So I got to meet him, and he speaks Spanish and you know, they found out that he'd been run off from Mexico for selling goat's milk, and he lived in a commune. But yeah, as a matter of fact, we—

AW:
How did you get to know Michael Smotherman? I came to know him through my friends, Lloyd Maines and The Maines Brothers, they recorded some Michael Smotherman albums when they were with—

LD:
Michael I met on the phone through Tom Wright. Tom's sister used to do the clothes for—remember that TV program, *Solid Gold*? They used to come out—she was the one who used to do all the clothes for them. He had sent us some tunes, because we were recording the stuff. That is what I have in that tape, Patsy Torres. What is the name of the group? The—it was a rock and roll band that was hitting at the time called—they did “Bad to the Bone”.

AW:
Oh yeah, yeah.

LD:
Golden Earring. Golden Earring. Because see, Tom, he'd be in the studio and Charlie Watts would come in.

AW:
Yeah, the “Bad to the Bone”, they also had—they had a couple of really big hits—

LD:

Well, at that time, “Bad to the Bone” was a thing that was the thing when they came in. Tom called them in, and he got an Emerson Lake—I was going to say Emerson Lake and Paco—

AW:

(laughs)

LD:

But you know, I mean, he had these musicians coming in. Pete Townshend, Stevie Ray, Jimmie Vaughan, so they were all coming into the studio. Who’s that guy? That’s Charlie Watts, man.

AW:

Growing up in our time, the Stones were my heroes.

LD:

Yeah, you know. I did “Satisfaction” and G-L-O-R—I don’t think they did “Gloria”.

AW:

Them [Jim Morrison’s band 1964-1972, 1979] did it, though.

LD:

But yeah. Those were my heroes. Those are the guys that I listen to. Then I had—you know, I’d be in the studio and they’d come in because of Tom, you know, at the time there was an album, the *Ooh La La* album. Rod Stewart.

AW:

Oh yeah. Right, right.

LD:

On the back, it says Tom Wright. Tom won a Grammy with that one. I don’t know if it was photography or what, but on the back it says, Tom, give us a call, we can’t find you, or something, words to that effect. And his stepdad, Ace, was one of the owners of the San Francisco steakhouses.

AW:

Oh yeah, where they used to have the swings.

LD:

—swings, yeah swingers.

AW:

I forgot about those places. Didn't they have one over by Love Field in Dallas?

LD:

They had—it was a high-dollar—so Ace would come in and we'd all go—we'd go eat over at San Francisco Steakhouse. I met them because when I went into, I heard the sound on the drums, and I could never hear a studio that did *Chicano* music that I could get that sound on the drum.

AW:

What was the sound that you liked? Was it something without a slap back or something with a real crisp sound, or was it a real—

LD:

No, I like the full, fat sound. I like the fat sound.

AW:

Just out of curiosity, did he mic it from way far away instead of real up close?

LD:

They were—no, they were using the big—when we were recording there, they were using the soundstage. I mean, it was a huge concrete room, you know—

AW:

What I mean is instead of close mic and everything, did they use some ambience?

LD:

Yeah, they used the ambience. Yeah.

AW:

I know. It makes such a difference, doesn't it, on the drum sound?

LD:

I went in there one day and I had heard that they had a nice recording studio, and I went in there and it was like, wow.

AW:

And where was this?

LD:

It was right here on 501 East Avenue, right before you get to Sixth Street. I went in and told the guy, Michael, he had already heard of my band, Street People. We were actually playing in Steamboat Springs here on Sixth Street, and we were the only *Chicano* band that had ever played there, because it was all the rock stuff. They heard us Aquafest or somewhere, and they called me and one of the ladies who worked there with Michael, who was a friend of Lana Nelson, who's Willie's daughter, they'd come out to our gigs, say. "Hey, you need to get these guys. So we were playing over here on—where nobody in any of our group had ever played before. And it would get good. But it wasn't in the dance halls, it was in the clubs over here on Sixth where all the action was. We wanted to get in there. He said—I told him, "I'm looking for a place to record. I'm just getting out of a recording contract over here and I'm looking for a place." He said, "Well bring your band in." I said, "When?" He said, "Whenever you want." I said, "Okay. So I called the guys, we went by a few nights later. I mean, we started recording like seven thirty in the evening when we got there, it was eight o'clock the next morning when we got out. We didn't know what time it was, no—and it was like, "Wow man, I've never recorded like that before." And I love the sound. All I could do was I brought Carlos Guzman and Manny Guerra, I said, "Man, you guys need to hear the sound here, at this studio." I had only seen a studio like that when we were in Chicago and the—who was the—one of these soul groups was recording there. They used to do *Soul Train* in the studio there. We went in with the Chi-lites. The Chi-lites were recording, they had just come out, we went in.

AW:

So you were recording all this straight up?

LD:

Yeah.

AW:

You know, try as we may, tracking and layering it, you just can't duplicate what happens straight up, can you?

LD:

No. They're the ones who taught me about getting the live performance sound. Because we'd go in there, we'd record the rhythm, and then the next day we'd go and record the horns—

AW:

I know it, yeah. And we do that because it's cheaper. It's kind of like building a house. You have the linoleum guys hit the neighborhood and hit all the houses that need linoleum, but it's just not the same as—the chemistry is not there.

LD:

No, and I saw the T-Birds record—

AW:

Was this when Keith was still—

LD:

Yeah, Keith was with them. And they did some videos there too at the studio. And then let's see. Oh, gosh. Like I say, what happened after Michael said, "I'll record you guys. You don't have to pay anything."

AW:

And this was Michael Smotherman?

LD:

Michael Block.

AW:

Oh, Michael Block.

LD:

Michael Block. So he had this team and Tom Wright was—

AW:

Spell Block.

LD:

B-L-O-C-K.

AW:

Okay.

LD:

And I think his studio in Tulsa is called The Production Block. His brother had the Production Block here, Joel. But yeah, with them, when I got in with them, it was like, "Can you do a gig with James Brown? Can you do a gig with Feliciano? Can you—" "Hell yeah. I mean, this was my dream, man." I used to pay to go hear James Brown. So my wife just found a picture—
(Stands up and walks out of the room)

AW:

You got to tell me what James Brown is like, man.

LD:

He was—I'll tell you in a minute. (inaudible sentence, away from recorder)

DS:

He was the hardest working man in show business.

AW:

That's right. I think I told you, didn't I, about trying to go see him in Lubbock? At the Fair Park? Tommy Caldwell and I, we were both sacking groceries at the Piggly Wiggly and we wanted to go hear James Brown, and they wouldn't let us in, these to black guys at the door wouldn't let us in.

LD:

My wife found this picture the other day.

AW:

Wow.

DS:

You know, I've been taking photos of stuff, but maybe we can visit again and bring a scanner and do some scans, high-quality scans, so we can—

AW:

What year is that? And where?

LD:

That was—I can't remember if it was in San Antonio or in Corpus. We did a couple of few shows together at the Majestic, at the Coliseum. But I got other pictures. I just need to find them. With James Brown. You asked what about James Brown?

AW:

Yeah, what was he like? Did you ever get a chance to even meet him?

LD:

No, let me tell you what happened. We—we were at the Fox Theatre in Atlanta. We backed up—they had come out here and heard us play, and these people were putting on this show, asked me

if we would be willing to travel. "Oh yeah, we travel all the time." So they hired us to play on this show. They also wanted us to back up some bands, so we backed up—

AW:

So you had to learn a bunch of material.

LD:

Yeah. So we backed up the Brighter Side of Darkness. Remember "Love Jones", Basketball Jones?

AW:

Yeah.

LD:

Yeah, then and this other guy, Lenny Conga and Carmen Bradford. Carmen, she was a classmate of mine at Huston-Tillotson. She was—her grandfather had Buda records and she was a backup singer with Stevie Wonder. And we had class together. She said—I told her we were doing the show and she said, "Hey well, can you back me?" "Yeah." So we went to Atlanta and we did this show. I walked in to this room after we had done a sound check, and James Brown was in there. They had these rollers, I mean, they looked like Coke cans. And they were combing his hair, and she said, the woman who was doing his hair said, "You need to get out of here!" And he said, "No, no, no, hold on a minute. Come here. You Puerto Ricans do some good music." (laughs) "We're *Chicanos*." And he said, "What's that?" And I said, "Well, you'll see." But we were in his dressing room and he was asking me where we were from, you know, because Ms. White, Lucille White was a lady from San Antonio who booked these shows. He was asking me how long I'd known her, but he talked—carried a good conversation. Feliciano is the same way. Nobody—can't get to him, and—

AW:

I just always thought James Brown would be an interesting cat to talk to.

LD:

And everybody called him Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown. He wasn't—the day I came back from Vietnam, my dad had limousines. He said, "Son, can you help me out?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I need for you to go to the airport and pick up this guy." They were playing the Cool Jazz Festival. That was July of 1969. He asked me to go pick up this guy named Hugh Masekela [trumpeter]. So I said, "Okay." So I'm there at the airport with the sign, Hugh Masekela. So I'm driving him, and I says, "What type of music you play?" And he says, "Brother, where you been?" I said, "Man, I just go back home from Vietnam today." I said my dad has a limo service. We were talking and he said, "I want you to take me to this western place." I took him to a western place here, Allens Boots.

AW:

Oh yeah, like western wear.

LD:

He bought—I remember that day—he bought over a thousand dollars' worth of kids' clothes for his son. Cowboy clothes, shirts and—and I drove him. I drove him out, they were staying at the—it was a Terrace Motor Hotel.

AW:

I remember that. I stayed at the Terrace before they tore it down.

LD:

Right.

AW:

I thought when I was a kid and stayed there—I say I was a kid, I was a teenager—I thought that was the most exotic place I'd ever been.

LD:

Well, what happened there was—who else was there? "*What goes up*"—Blood, Sweat, and Tears. Blood, Sweat, and Tears was there. Miles Davis was there. My dad drove Miles Davis that day. My musician friends were staying at the same hotel, they were in town too, but they were staying there, and it was like, "Hey Leonard, who's that guy, man?" I said, "Oh, that's Hugh Masekela." "Was that Miles Davis?" "Yeah, man." "He's driving him." They thought I was big shit. So then I was—I was—hung around with them that night, and then the next day, my dad asked me if I would drive Miles Davis to Houston. So—because he had a funeral or something. So I took him, and his assistant wasn't there. And he said, "Let's go." We didn't take him to the airport, we drove him to Houston, he said, "He'll be there." But that man. That man didn't talk to anybody.

AW:

Miles?

LD:

Miles Davis. He didn't talk and he had his—I remember this—he had this beautiful lady with him who was his engineer, and she had this outfit, it was like a hammock. I mean, nothing underneath.

AW:

It's kind of hard to drive.

LD:

Man, I tell you. But they were in the back, you know. But she was his engineer. My dad would say, "Well, I'm his producer."

AW:

And Bo-Diddley's cousin.

LD:

But I've—I should say, been at the right place at the right time a lot of places. I want to tell you a little something that happened when we were in Rome. My son was playing—

AW:

In Rome?

LD:

My son played professional baseball.

AW:

Oh, really? Who'd he play for?

LD:

Well, he played with the European League. He played here with the Texas-Louisiana League.

AW:

Did he play college ball?

LD:

He played college ball at Blinn, and then he—

AW:

What was his position?

LD:

He played short and second.

AW:

Oh, good spot. So he could hit, probably.

LD:

He could—well, yeah, he was a great defender.

AW:

That's—yeah, but man, I'll tell you—

DS:

Well, Blinn's put out so many ball players—

LD:

No, they did. They did. They had won the national championship. Cliff Gustafson was our neighbor, and my son was supposed to go to Texas. And Coach Gus used to ride his horses down our property when we lived right here off of Brody. He still lives there. His wife passed. One day he was riding down there and says, "Mr. Davila, I'm not going to be able to take Leonard." "What happened?" "Well, you need to get with him." Well, found out that some of his classes wouldn't transfer from Blinn. And we had been told—the coaches give them classes where they'll stay eligible. So you got to be careful with that. Oh, okay. I ask my son, "What's the deal, man, what are you doing?" "I don't know. I don't know what classes won't transfer." "What are you taking?" Well, he gives me all this history and stuff." I say, "What else?" "Well, I'm taking ballroom dancing." Something else with weaving, and it's like, "Oh man." So he went and played here. He got a scholarship at Concordia and played for Coach Keller. But he had Lou Gehrig's disease. The following year, it just hit him real hard.

AW:

The coach?

LD:

We already knew he had it. Yeah. So he went and played, he was able to transfer, went and played Danny Heap at Incarnate Word. And from there, this friend of his told him about Texas-Louisiana League and that they'll take him. He went for a try-out and they took him. And then this friend said, "Hey, I got a call from the European League, you want to go?" So he went and played in Europe for two years and came back and played in Albany again. But when we went to see him, Mama wanted to see where he was staying. He was gone less than a month and we were over there already. It so happens that the day—well, they were off like six days, and we had gone like for eighteen days. So we caught the Eurorail and we went to Rome. Well, we went to St. Peter's Square, the Vatican, and that day, the Pope was marrying twelve couples. And that place was—they had what they call *La Puerta Santa*, the Holy Door, they open it every two decades or something like this. And that day, there was hundreds of thousands of people there in St. Peter's Square. There were pilgrimages from all over the world. The Pope passed right by us, and my mother and my mother-in-law are just very religious people. And I say, "Who's playing? Little Joe or what?" You know, just because there was a lot of people. And I told my mother, "You

know what? If I can go between these two pillars,” there were pillars all the way around, “if I can fit through there, follow me.” I was able to get through—well, when they got through was where they have the guards that guard the Pope and all that, and all the people were over here, so we worked our way up and they were waiting for that door to open after the ceremonies. We wound up right onstage right behind the Pope. [laughs] We went all the way around. My mom went through, my mother-in-law, my wife and I. And we just bypassed everybody and come on and this guy said, “No, no, no.” So they took us up and we were standing right behind him. Somebody went and guided us up to the Holy Door, so we were like, about the first ten, fifteen people that went in. And they say that if you go through this door, your sins are forgiven, so my mother makes me go through a couple of times.

AW:

(laughs) Just to make sure.

LD:

So we got in, and when we came on through the whole tour—I mean, the doors were open and all these people trying to work their way through an archway this size. And we had gone through the tomb where they have all the Popes buried and entombed down there. We took the whole tour. Somebody took a picture, said, “Man, what’s Leonard doing up there with the Pope?” You know, but I mean, it’s just kind of the right place. I was in Vietnam, and I had gone to pick up some personal effects of one of our Marines that were killed, and we’d gone into Da Nang, and I asked my commander, I say, “Hey skipper, Bob Hope’s here. They’re in Da Nang today. Can we go see the show?” “If you can get in, sure.” We got in. And this friend of mine, he was a Jeep driver, he said—we parked the Jeep way over and he said, “I’m going to go back there, man,” I mean, it was in Da Nang. It was a lot of military people. I worked my way up here and I was standing right by the side of the stage, and they gave Bob Hope an SKS Chinese, Communist rifle and he couldn’t open up—pull the bayonet. And the bayonet on that thing, you had to pull it down and pull it out. Well, he was over there and I was—and he says, “Well, come here.” So he called me up on stage, and when I went up on stage, there was like five other guys. I don’t know if he called me or not, but there was a bunch of guys behind me and a bunch of us went on stage, and everybody was trying to fight this thing. He says, “Well, and you wonder how we’re winning this war.” You know. So he says, “Man, was that you on stage?” I say, “Yeah man, I was on stage up there with Bob Hope and Ann Margret and you know, Rosey Grier and all that. That was right after they had shot Bobby Kennedy.

AW:

Of course, I’m Methodist, but I think I’d rather have been up there with Ann Margret than anybody.

LD:

You know, and she hugged me and this kind of stuff, and it was like, "Oh man." You know and The Les Brown Orchestra. And I was into this band thing, you know, it was like, oh man. I mean, I've just been in the right place at the right time.

DS:

So you can either hang in the back, or work your way to the front, huh?

LD:

Yeah, you know, it's like—I mean, like I say, I probably—I've been blessed man, because I've experienced so many things. My kids got to meet James Brown and Feliciano and these guys because they'd be backstage with us. And Tierra, Tierra from California, they were—my daughter was in the phone booth and all the guys from Tierra were in the phone booth. "What's going on with—" "Dad, they don't—" "she's calling her friends and they were telling them, "Yeah, no, it's us." So they've experienced that kind of stuff. And that's what I like. I'm so glad that they were able to do that. But nah, my music career—right now, we say that we're in our last hurrah, all these guys, because we've all played with somebody who's somebody. You know, when we played the other day, it was something, because we didn't set up the way we set up. And I said, "You know, let's us start the gig," for that Flood Aid concert. So we started off, and I said a few words and turned around and our drummer started counting it off and I couldn't hear the beat. I couldn't hear the count-off. We couldn't hear because the monitors were not set for us. And we did about three beats and we had to stop. So I said, "Okay, that's your surprise." And the guys in the band just like the pros that they are, man, they just took off and I mean, it was like wow. And we get off stage and people, "Hey, are you guys book for New Year's?" We only had five tunes. So we got a thirty-minute set. Said, "Can we do thirty minutes?" I said, "I'll spread it out man, I'll sell tickets or something." You know, here in Austin, most everybody knows these guys. They've played with somebody. But yeah, heck, I'm getting calls already. But our first gig was supposed to be the twelfth of March. And that's going to be at the MAC.

AW:

Yeah. I'm going to try to come down for that. I'd really like to.

DS:

That would sound like fun.

LD:

Yeah. And it's right there. I mean, and it's beautiful.

AW:

I've never been inside of that. I know where it is, but I've never been inside of it.

LD:

Yeah, it's a nice place and they have—as a matter of fact, they have statues of Ruben Ramos and Alfonso and their uncles. Huge statues. Right out along the lake and they have Roy Montelongo, Pavilion—who else? Nash Hernandez. Nash Hernandez had a big eighteen-piece orchestra. And his son Ruben who played with me also is the director of the band. But they play all these big governors things, his ballroom music, you know, “Left My Heart in San Francisco”, that kind of stuff. But yeah, and they have these, it's call *Tejano Trail of Legends*. They—down the lake, on the hike and bike trail, they have these different statues.

AW:

Yeah, often when I stay in town, I used to stay down there in First and Riverside, and I go walk along there.

LD:

It's a beautiful place. At night, you can see the city's the backdrop. But those statues of Ruben, I bet you they're as tall as the ceiling. I mean, Austin's pretty good about recognizing—as a matter of fact, here at the Palmer Events center now, just the other day they had a—Narciso Carmona, who had their busts—you know, plaques there of musicians that had things to do with the, you know, the arts here in town. Now they're putting a lot of *Mexico-Americano, Chicanos* on there. Before it was Stevie Ray and you know, guys like that. But you have to be dead so many years, but they're recognizing these artists. And then there's a *Plaza Saltillo*, which is now—it's a—the Metrorail, promoting that Metrorail thing. It's a place right there in the Barrio that runs right off of I-35, and what they're supposed to be doing, they're going to be remodeling that thing. And I understand they're going to have a tile with all these musicians that—and they'll have their tiles, who they played with, and I mean, they're going way back. They have The Texas Music Museum here. Have you been there? Clay Shorkey—do you know Clay? Clay Shorkey.

AW:

No. It's a really nice idea.

LD:

And Marcelo Tafoya—do you know Marcelo?

AW:

No, I know the name.

LD:

Marcelo has one of the largest collections of *Tejano* music that—and he has—he's had it—he's got the Tejano Music Museum, but he doesn't have a building yet. But he's got all this stuff. He's had it for years in a Morgan building. The University of Texas has told him that they would archive it, but he said no because then he wouldn't have access to it.

AW:
Right.

LD:
And he—the city—here's his property line, it is right here. He had this Morgan Building right outside his fence, the street's here. And they told him that he had to move it because new ordinances and stuff. So he moved this building inside and had this other trailer that he had gotten from this organization called Southwest Keys. He had about five thousand—somebody hooked up the trailer and took off with it. And I had told him, "Marcelo, bring it out here to my place, man, you don't have to worry about—nobody's going to come back here until you get a place." "No, no, it's okay *mijo*, "son"." Marcelo's right about eighty years old.

AW:
And trailers are so easy to steal. They've got wheels on them.

LD:
Oh gosh. You know? And those guys probably didn't know what they had.

AW:
No, in fact, most of the time, they steal it for the trailer and they dump the stuff that's in it.

LD:
And it was taken from—I take it back. He had the trailer over at Southwest Keys, and they're a big organization and they had it parked out there and they took off with the trailer. But he still has a lot of this stuff there. If you need their numbers and stuff, I'll be glad to—

AW:
Well, one of the things that we'd like to ask—but I don't know that we need to record it. In fact, I'm running out of battery anyway, so I'm going to say thank you and I'm going to stop this and we'll talk just a minute.

End of interview.



© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library