

**Oral History Interview of
Cary Banks**

**Interviewed by: Curtis Peoples
October 11, 2017
Lubbock, Texas**

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

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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 Cary Banks as he discusses his musical career playing guitar for various band. In this interview, Cary recounts teaching himself how to read music and describes meeting various other artists.

Length of Interview: 01:14:08

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Curtis Peoples (CP):

Just kind of probably—let me find a good place to sit, come move the piano bench over here, or the chair. Actually, the chair would be easier. I'm sure I got this closer to you than me. I always like to preface these with, this is Curtis Peoples with Cary Banks at his house in Lubbock, Texas. Today is October 11, 2017. And beginning oral history series about the music career and life of Mr. Cary Banks. So, thank you for letting me into your home.

Cary Banks (CB):

Well, you're certainly welcome anytime. Thank you for including me in your project here.

CP:

This is for the crossroads music archive at Texas Tech University, and our main focus is West Texas music but we collect music from all over Texas in the integrated Southwest but I really like to collect as much as I can from local area musicians. I know a lot people out there like to collect the big names, you got your Rock and roll hall of fames and you got all that kind of stuff, and that's important but there's so many musicians in this area, it's just like part of our social fabric. You know it is, growing up everybody—it's like everybody I've ever known, does a little something with music. Most people do anyway. So, let's kind of start about where did you come from, where were you born?

CB:

Big Spring, Texas. And grew up Church of Christ and so didn't know it but I was by osmosis developing an ear for music and harmonies and despite growing up in a small, rural, Church of Christ, acapella singing is still one of my favorite ways of singing. My great grandfather, according to family history and myth, was part of the drum and bugle corps in the Texas Confederacy back in the day. There doesn't seem any other musicians of note between him and me on my dad's side. And none on my mom's side, which all her folks came from the eastern edge New Mexico, around the Clovis area. But I always love music, loved Elvis. Grew up, of course, singing in the church choir.

CP:

What were your parents' names?

CB:

James and Doris Banks. My dad was a mechanic and antique car restorer and dealer back in the day. We grew up in Big Spring, Texas. When I was just starting high school, we moved out to a little place just outside of Big Spring called Sand Springs, Texas. And lived on the little caliche road there that eventually got paved. And when they paved it, they needed a name, so now it's called Banks Road. But I went to a little high school, just a little bit further east of there called Coahoma High School. Where the football coach and my government teacher was Spike Dikes.

CP:

Really? Can you spell Coahoma?

CB:

Yes. C-o-a-h-o-m-a. And I was in the band there. I had picked up the guitar a little bit earlier, you know it started in that one fateful Sunday evening in February 1964 when these four guys from England appeared on the Ed Sullivan show and everything in my life changed.

CP:

About how old were you at that time?

CB:

Fourteen.

CP:

Fourteen. So you were born in—when is your birthday?

CB:

Nineteen-fifty. I picked up the guitar, took a couple of lessons and then put my own Rock group together and later in October 19—October, I guess it was Halloween—October 1965 I had my first professional gig. Group called the Summits. We played before the midnight horror show on Halloween and we made five bucks each.

CP:

And where was this?

CB:

This was at the Ritz Theater in downtown Big Spring, Texas.

CP:

That sounds like a big deal.

CB:

That was a big deal, yeah. And you know we did a couple of Stones songs and some Beatles and Bob Dylan, maybe, something.

CP:

No music up until this point.

CB:

No. Other than church, I just—actually I took a couple of lessons early on but the guy didn't know any Rock and roll, and so I just started my own band. Basically taught myself.

CP:

What was your first guitar?

CB:

My first guitar was a little classical Sears thing that—I had that then my mom and dad bought me a Silvertone and my little brother a classical guitar for Christmas. And a Silvertone was impossible to play. It was big bodied F-hole. Silverstone acoustic guitar that the strings were about two inches off the frets. And so but my little brother's classical guitar was a little easier to play so I started playing that. I started mowing lawns and bought myself a Fender Telecaster that only the neck pickup worked but I traded that in and got me a little Epiphone single pickup guitar. Later on, when I started working for Anderson Music Company down in Big Spring, I bought a Moserite guitar like the Ventures used, and the Fender twin and just started playing in different bands around the area.

CP:

Now, growing up in the Church of Christ, where there's no instruments or anything, it's all acapella, that's where you I guess really get that ear training, but you're well known for having great ears. So did your parents like you playing instruments, music? What about Rock and roll?

CB:

Absolutely not. Problem was I wanted to be a rock star but the one of the biggest hurdles I had to face was being a good little Church of Christ boy. You don't, first of all, you don't play instruments, and you especially don't play instruments playing devil rock music where people dance.

CP:

Right, there's that dancing thing, too.

CB:

So yeah, that was a struggle. I think they—my dad loved music, he had a good ear too.

CP:

What did he listen to? What kind of music?

CB:

He listened to Bob Wills and whatever was on the radio. KBYG Radio in Big Spring, you'd hear Sinatra and Bob Wills and then you'd hear Rolling Stones and then Perry Como and then the Beatles. It was just a mix of everything.

CP:

Sort of an all four met.

CB:

All four met. But I think he liked it all. I think they could see that I had some talent, but they were just convinced—

CP:

Did they have a record player in the house or was it all radio?

CB:

Oh yeah. We had a—we didn't get a television until I was about nine. But I think I was about fourteen or fifteen maybe, right after I learned—started learning to play the guitar we were one of those families that got the big console, had the TV and the radio and the record player all on the giant console, and I loved that. Back then, when you got the new Beatles record, you were trying to learn all the licks. And you'd put it on—put the needle on the song and then you'd play a little bit until that lick came and you'd move it back and play it over and over again until the record started skipping. And then you'd put a quarter on the needle arm and so it would give it a little more weight when you got to where you had five quarters on the needle arm, it wouldn't skip anymore but of course it played about twenty-nine revolutions—

CP:

Wear the grooves out.

CB:

Wear the grooves out, and I wore out several Beatle albums and but that was my introduction into learning to be a guitar player. I'm pretty much self-taught and I had my aunt and uncle lived there in Coahoma, my aunt Myrtle. And I'd go over their house and visit. And they had an old upright piano. And so I kind of had taught myself, through learning guitar and singing some in the school choir where the notes were, I thought, If there's a C and E and a G and a C on my left hand on the guitar, I think that's a middle C right there. So I would just kind of transfer what I knew from the guitar over to the piano so I just plunk around on her piano when I go over there. One day, she said, "You want that piano?" I said, "Well yeah." She said, "Have your dad bring the pick up over and load it up." So she gave me my first upright piano, and I just kind of—kind

of like trying to speak a second language, you sort of translate what you know from your original language over to the piano and it's quite different but—

CP:

So everything by ear, no really theory lessons or—

CB:

Everything by ear. I taught myself to read music.

CP:

Okay. And how did you do that?

CB:

I don't know.

CP:

Just picked up a theory book or?

CB:

I just picked—well I just start off with a Beatles song book. And then I had, we had a modern hymnals in Church of Christ, we also had the shake note hymnals where all the different notes of the diatomic scale have a different shape. And so I kind of figured out from there sort of this goes up, this goes down that goes up two steps, which is a third on guitar so okay I get that. So it was just kind of a process of osmosis. Just learning to read, when I started writing songs, I started doing the lead sheets, and that taught me more than anything how to read music when I started writing music or writing parts out. Back in that day, if you want to copyright a song, you sent in the sheet music, two copies of the sheet music, which meant you copied down the melody, the words, and then put the chord symbols above the treble clef line. And when people find out I could do that, I started getting hired to do lead sheets.

CP:

In Big Spring?

CB:

In Big Spring and then later on when I moved to Lubbock.

CP:

Just jumping back, a little bit, that first band of yours, the Summit, who all was in that group?

CB:

A guy named Danny Johnson, was our lead singer. He went on to become expert in early music. Like, 12th century on. And was professor at University of Texas. He graduated from Texas Tech. **Connie Bryanpay** [00:11:36] he went on to be a preacher.

CP:

You said, Danny Johnson?

CB:

Danny Johnson, yeah. He's Daniel, Dr. Daniel Johnson now. But he was in that group. **Connie Bryanpay** [00:11:48] he was, last I heard, was the Reverend Bryanpay now. Morgan Martin, who's a rancher there in Big Spring was the drummer. For a while when we first started we had a guy named, Kyle McAllister whose dad was a very well to do inventor there in Big Spring. And Kyle went on to having a—be fabulously rich himself in the real-estate business and then the oil business. And he spent a lot of time in the political arena and in the world political arena or jet setting around the world with people like Muhamad Ali. But he died recently. Yeah only Danny and I, I think maybe Morgan the drummer, played a little bit in some country bands but only Danny and I only had careers in the music business.

CP:

I'd be interested to talk to Dr. Daniel Johnson. I'm sure Angela Mariani probably knows him, she's professor at Tech, she has that early music radio show Harmonia. I bet they know each other.

CB:

He still lives in the Austin area, I'm friends with him on Facebook, so I'll get his information.

CP:

I bet I can track him down pretty quick. These days it's easy so— well it's easier than it used to be. How long did you guys play together as a group?

CB:

We played couple years off and on. Once I moved out of Big Spring to Sand Springs, I got involved with the band program there in Coahoma high school. And I formed another band, we had a little group of us that were in the band there that we sort off developed a little Tijuana brass style ensemble called the Border Brass. And we became quite popular around the area and started performing, we literally performed all over West Texas, won a big battle of the bands in Dallas, big battle of the bands concert—

CP:

What year was that?

CB:

That was in '68.

CP:

So sort of that Herb Alpert kind of—

CB:

Very much Herb Alpert. And we sort off morphed into a—we started doing more—like we would do a, our own little arrangement of *The Good, The Bad, The Ugly* theme. And we would take rock songs and make our little own arrangements of it. And it was good little group.

CP:

And you said the band there in Sand Springs, what were you playing in the band at school?

CB:

I was playing drums in high school band.

CP:

Like snare?

CB:

Snare drum, bass drum. And then the little group that we had, the Border Brass group, I played guitar and then we—the lead trumpeter in the band, his dad was superintendent of schools. And so when we convinced in our little group needed a marimba, a full sized marimba, so he bought us a marimba. And so I started learning to play the marimba there and other percussion related instruments.

CP:

Who was the trumpet player?

CB:

His name is Andy Wilson. His dad was superintendent of schools but we had a good little group, and travelled around. Two trumpets, trombone, and the trombonist was actually the bet musician in the whole band his name was David Crawford. He was fabulous piano player, good drummer, good trombone player, played trombone and marimba in our little group. And then we had—

CP:

So were you gigging with the marimba?

CB:

Yeah, we'd load it up on the school van and take it with us. [Laughs]

CP:

So how long was this band together?

CB:

Sixty-seven and sixty-eight.

CP:

And won the battle of the bands—are there any recordings that you guys made at that time or—

CB:

I think there's some made but I don't know where they ended up. Same way with the Summits we had a guy that had one of those old record lathe machines that recorded us and made a little acetated two or three songs that we did. It's somewhere in somebody's garage, I'm sure that. I didn't really start recording until I moved to Lubbock and I started working for Ray Gent. When I moved. I moved to Lubbock in '68 to go to school in LCC [**Lubbock Christian College**] stayed there a couple of semesters, moved away, came back in the early '70s.

CP:

What were you studying in LCC?

CB:

Music. I was on the Dean's list there. At LCC, every morning, there's a thirty-minute segment of the morning that's devoted to chapel, that you're required to attend. And virtually every day, or at least once a week at chapel, the Dean would get up or the president would say, the following students report to the Dean's office. Cary Banks. I'd done something or I was not really happy there. I didn't do really well, other than hangout in the music hall. And the piano rooms. That's where I spent most of my time.

CP:

Did you play music with anybody else there or try to form any groups?

CB:

We kind of—couple of us kicked around a little bit but it was kind of frowned on.

CP:

I remember there was a group called the Colors.

CB:

The Colors, yeah I knew the guys in the Colors. First and second generation of the Colors. They were fabulous. I hung around them a lot. The second generation of the colors were a group of guys and girls from LCC, and a young singer named Joanne Park. Who later became Joanne Williams. Steve Williams' wife. Fabulous singer. She and Steven were married, after their, almost immediately after their second child was born, she developed and started showing symptoms of MS [Multiple Sclerosis]. And went down quickly within couple of years, she was in wheelchair bound and spent the last part of their life down in Austin in hospice care basically. She was a fabulous singer, part of the Colors, there's some records of them around somewhere.

CP:

I've got one or two.

CB:

One of the records she sang on.

CP:

I have to look at the, I can't remember the guy's name that gave us that, but he went to LCU [Lubbock Christian University]. He was—he, I think went onto perform up with Nitty Gritty Dirt Band—

CB:

His name was, oh gosh, one of the lead singers was Gordon something and then the other guy you're thinking of is, I can't remember his name but really good singer, and player.

CP:

Did a lot of folk stuff. And I know that LCU had a pretty strong program and choir because I know that Mr. Mitchell had a recording service, used to record a lot of records of them. I tried to get all the masters and stuff but unfortunately somebody had—his wife had later on, I was able to talk to her, and she was dying. Somebody went in her house that was supposed to move out furniture, wound up throwing a lot of stuff away and taking advantage of her. And so I think a lot of those master tapes, everything was tossed. I tried to get ahold of the guy that had done the move for her but his number was disconnected unfortunately. There was some great stuff that was lost there.

CB:

My only musical claim to fame at LCU, the second semester I was there, I was in a men's group, they don't really have fraternities, it's a men's social organization, called the Koinonia.

CP:

How do you spell that?

CB:

K-o-i-n-o-n-i-a. Koinonia. It's a Greek word meaning fellowship. Anyway, they had just a couple of years before started this big thing called the master follies that they have every spring. And all the sororities and fraternities' organizations get together and they put on these big musical events, get judged, and then when everyone's considered the best wins that year, and it's a very coveted award.

CP:

I'm going to turn this up just a little bit here. [Interviewer fixes recorder] I just want to make sure that we—yeah. Okay sorry about that.

CB:

Okay, anyway, I was in that group, that year they decided they would act out the Beatles' "Rocky Raccoon." [Sings "Rocky Raccoon"]. Anyway, I sang the song and the group acted it out, and we won that year. So that was my only connection to LCC that anybody would have any remembrance of.

CP:

So how long were you at school before you decided to move?

CB:

Two semesters.

CP:

Two Semesters. Where'd you go after that?

CB:

Well, I tried going back to school at Howard County Junior College there in Big Spring, that didn't last too long. So I dropped out and just—the day I dropped out of school I went down to the army recruiter's office and signed up because that was 1969.

CP:

Height of the Vietnam War.

CB:

Height of the Vietnam War. And if you were poor boy from West Texas, and you didn't have a college deferment you were as good as drafted. Anyway, so I went down there and signed up, couple of weeks later, I took my physical and standing there in a room. It was cold and rainy that day, I think it was at Abilene or Sweetwater, someplace where I took my physical. But cold and rainy that day and I was with about whole other fifty other scared kids standing there, naked, and just exposed to the world and so we all went through that humiliation, and right toward the end of the inductions, the physical, they were checking me in, they checking my eyes and my ears. And the guy—the young guy that was checking my ears, he looked there and cleaned it out, and he cleaned it out some more, finally go to the doctor and said, "Come take a look at this." When I was about eighteen months old, I had caught a severe cold and it got infected into my mastoid bone. And so I'd had to have mastoid surgery but they did go in there and just remove my mastoid bone and scrape all the infection out put it back and as a result of that, my ears had gotten messed up. The fluid in my ears and over the years, I just, I never realized it, I never had any ear problems to speak of. But anyway, doctor came in and looked there and said, "Man, you got holes I and perforated eardrums, you got your fluid in your ears is dark and cloudy. You're not fit for military service." So I signed a paper and I was out of there.

CP:

Were you happy about that?

CB:

Yes, and no. It was because—yeah, I was glad, because I looked around the room there, I could see there's fifty of us guys in there and I know and there's a good percentage these guys are never going to see their twenty-first birthday. I was glad not to have to go fight somebody that I didn't know. But at that point, it's like, now what do I do? So I decided after that, well, I'll go to Nashville. Because people said, "Man, you're really good. You need to go to Nashville." And was totally unprepared to go to Nashville. So I got some pretty early lessons, early on a friend of mine and I went up there, we written a few songs and we thought we were like really good.

CP:

So you went up by yourself?

CB:

No, with a friend from Big Springs.

CP:

And who was this?

CB:

A guy named Steve Holly. Who had just gotten married to his wife Judy, and Judy's brother was playing drums for JDC Riley. Harper Valley PDA girl. And there was—so we had us an in up there.

CP:

With Shelby Singleton and those guys there.

CB:

So we went up there and there was also at that time, right before that, there was a guy named Ben Hall. In and the Circle Four Ramblers. That had this TV show on a Saturday afternoon country show, and they had a really good guitar player and a steel guitar player named Weldon Myrick. Well, they had just had a couple of years earlier moved to Big Spring to Nashville. There was a very famous doctor there in Big Spring, Dr. Malone, who was a music lover, he had the Malone, and Hogan and clinic in Big Spring and he was a big music aficionado and he basically bank rolled Ben Hall and his wife all those people to go up to Nashville and put a studio in.

CP:

They had a great studio in Big Springs.

CB:

He did have a great studio in Big Spring but he just basically moved that to Nashville so we got through the connection of Steve Holly's brother-in-law. We got to go and tour the facilities there and it was like—they were real—ben was real nice to us. But he was—you could tell he was like, I learned pretty quickly what they tell you in Nashville, which is, "Thank you very next."

CP:

I've never heard of that. I like it. "Thank you very next."

CB:

Thank you very next.

CP:

Wow. So you were recording at Ben's studio?

CB:

No, we stayed around for a little while and then went off—

CP:

Afterwards, the Shelby Singleton bought your—

CB:

I've never met Shelby, I went in his studio but he wasn't there and—

CP:

I knew at that time there was a woman name Margaret Louis and Iris Smith who were working there also known as Grace Tennessee. And Margaret's originally from Levelland and they were writing songs for Jeannie C. Riley for the song "Country Girl," which was a big hit and some other stuff. So they had been about that same time too, she had just got from California not a lot of people know Margaret from Levelland. I'm trying to tell people more about her because she's got a lot of great songs, she's got a lot of—she has great songs, she wrote that song, "Heard My Soul Shake" that Delaney and Bonnie [Bramlett] did and "Reconsider Me" was another song, just a bunch of stuff.

CB:

There's another guy that was somehow hooked up with Shelby Singleton there named Royce Clark from Whitharral. Royce Clark. He was one of those guys that just sort of hung around and I think he was maybe, custodian or aguy that ran the tapes or something there at Plantation Studio when Jeannie C. cut that song. They were so high on that song and Shelby Singleton, as I understand, called in every favor he ever had accumulated because he wanted that song out as quickly as—

CP:

"Harper Valley PTA"?

CB:

Yeah. And then somebody said, "I think we need a B-side." They hadn't even thought about that for the single. And somebody said, "Anybody got a song?" And Royce Clarke said, "I got a song," and it was, I don't remember the song. But he got the flip side of "Harper Valley PTA." Royce Clark, he went on to have a bit part in "Coalminer's Daughter" and he would—he hung around and was—I saw him in videos, country music videos over the years. I think he's passed on now, but he was originally from Whitharral.

CP:

Okay, I have to look him up. It's just amazing how the little connections of—

CB:

Little connections, yeah.

CP:

Especially from West Texas.

CB:

My connection in Big Spring, the only—I only knew one professional musician and that was Hoyle Nicks. And I knew Hoyle because his son Jody went to school with me. In fact, I even—almost all this stuff we're talking about is going in my book. Jody finagled me an auction with Hoyle Nicks and the West Texas Cowboys.

CP:

When was this?

CB:

This was when I was in high school. One Saturday morning—there wasn't a chance I could be in a band. I think Jody just wanted to show his dad that he had some guy that was a rock guitar player that was his friend. So yeah I went and tried out with him a little bit.

CP:

Was Jody into a little bit of Rock and roll at that time too?

CB:

Well no, Jody was playing drums for his dad at the time. So we went up there and got set up, they were kind of rehearsing one Saturday morning and Hoyle said, "Well play something." So I—"Johnny be Good" or something and played every lick I knew and okay, he says, "Play this with us some western swing song." I had no idea about western swing and all different chord formations. When you play that Eldon Shamblin moving chord style, I'd never played it before, so I kind of slopped my way into a couple of songs and Hoyle said, "Well, you bend them wires pretty good, son. But you got to learn them chords." And it was like, a lightbulb went on in my head and from that day until today, I've just been in hammered with the guitar and the piano. The guitar and the different chords, in fact I read an interview with Eldon Shamblin this one time in guitar player magazine. And the interviewer asking, "How many guitar forma—how many chords are there on the guitar?" And Eldon said, "About five thousand." And the interview said, "How many of them do you know?" And Eldon said, "About five thousand."

CP:

People don't realize that country music or western swing, there's a lot going on there, chords wise, I remember growing up playing Rock and roll, this is great, and leads, you'd hear these lead guitar players and stuff. And then like when I get out at South Plains College and you start learning some country music from Hardin and Alan Munde and all those guys, and you're like, "Whoa. What's all of this?" [Laughter] Diminished chords and augmented chords and it's quite complicated somehow—

CB:

Bob Wills was doing basically, Count Basie and Duke Ellington music with fiddles. And jazz essentially.

CP:

Yeah. It was Jazz. So when you go to Nashville '69, did you stay there for a little while?

CB:

No, not long at all. Just a couple of months. And then headed back home broke and, disillusioned and wound up coming back to Lubbock, that's when I started working for Rey Gent and had a little group there called The Stan Bank Production. It was me and another guy that I'd gone to LCC with named Vance Stansell and we had another guitar player, a friend of mine named Mike Reynolds, then we got this young red-headed kid that was in a rock band to join our band and his name was Robin Griffin. And Robin and I wrote a song or two together and then Van and I wrote some songs, and I had through our other guitar player made a connection with Bud Andrews, and Bud had listened to the songs I had written. He listened to our band some of the demos we'd done. Just a little house recorder. And he took us over to Norman Petty's and did four song demo over there.

CP:

What year was this?

CB:

This was '71. Yeah, 1971.

CP:

What was the name of the band?

CB:

Stan Bank. Stan Bank Production. Stansell and Banks.

CP:

Do you have copies of this?

CB:

Somewhere.

CP:

Because I'm working with this guy named Shawn Dagy who has digitized all of Petty's Masters and I was wondering if it's part of that.

CB:

All I have is some old reels of the stuff, and I don't know if they're even still workable.

CP:

They're playable, it's a moth of them.

CB:

Okay, I'll look and see if I can come up with something.

CP:

I got about eight different machines, I bet we could get something off of those. And I found a lot of times these older tapes are better sometimes than the later stuff. Of course, you got to bake a lot of tapes and stuff now from the '70s and '80s. So what kind of music were you guys playing in—

CB:

We were kind of a little bit ahead of the game, we were doing country rock-ish stuff, polkalish, and later—couple of years later, we heard the Eagles come out and it was kind of what we were doing. But it was very country influenced.

CP:

So sort of that, California Country sounds and you got that cosmic stuff happening down in Austin. Murphy and those guys started to come. So you right in there with that? And you said Griffin was what? Playing guitar?

CB:

Playing Drums, and singing, he's a great drummer. But he-- we actually—

CP:

Really? I didn't know he was.

CB:

Yeah, he was a great drummer. In fact, he played drums in the first couple of bands I ever heard. But in our little group, he played drums and then sang a couple songs on the demo, and we were all just green, we didn't know anything. We thought—we were recording in Norman Petty's studio, and Bud of course, had direct connections with New York and Nashville MCA Records through his work with Jerry Clower. He and Big Ed were the first ones to discover Jerry Clower and get him on record. In fact, the first couple of Jerry Clower Records were on Lemon Records. Designed just like that Beatles apple, only it was a lemon. And Bud had produced way back in the '60s, Willie and the Red Rubber Band. Willie Redden. Which included Willie and—

CP:

Lanny Fiel.

CB:

Lanny Fiel.

CP:

His brother.

CB:

Rick Fiel. Yeah they-

CP:

What were the name of the songs that you did in Petty Studios?

CB:

One of them was called "Albuquerque Calling." The one that Robin and I wrote that he sang was called "Don't Get Involved." Robin kept in his set in various bands that he played in for years did that song.

CP:

I'm going to be talking to Robin pretty soon. It'd be interesting to.

CB:

We were just too dumb to know anything. I did—I was very impressed with Norman. I got to work with Norman a couple of different times. He was very gentle soft-spoken guy and interestingly, soon as we started, got in the session, he started hooking up stuff, of course he had his slacks, a dress shirt and a cardigan sweater and then he took his shoes off. He kept his shoes off the entire session. Since then, most of time I've been in the studio I have my shoes off. Just—it's comfortable.

CP:

Did he say what—is it just for the comfort or was it something—

CB:

Just for the comfort, the only time I don't have my shoes off is when I'm playing the piano because you got to have shoes on to use the pedal. But that was an interesting—

CP:

Was this at the original studio location or he built the new one by then?

CB:

He built the new theater, had the big gold chains hanging from the walls. He went on in there, a bunch of punks going, "Holy crap, this is like for real."

CP:

Did you press any records from that or did you just do the recordings?

CB:

Did the recordings. Bud set it off, got us a publishing deal with some big New York publisher, and then nothing ever came of it. Of course, the band broke up. The old joke is the quickest way to break up a band is either get photos made or do a demo.

CP:

That's kind of interesting you say that because I was playing with Mark Murray, and we were recording at the Jungle Studios trying to do an album in 1997, and one day he showed up and Norman decided to close the studio and the band broke up. Soon after that. And I went to Texas Tech and said, "Well you know, I think Kevin Powell moved off to Dallas, my band's breaking up, I'm going to go to Texas Tech and get a history degree," and one of my first classes, this guy starts talking about the Vietnam Archive and after class, "What's a Vietnam Archive?" I ran and became a volunteer twenty years ago. That was twenty years ago in the summer. And so this month, October 31st was when I was officially hired as a student assistant on Halloween twenty years ago, it's amazing from that studio closing, band breaks up and I become archivist. There it is twenty years later.

CB:

Yes, it's amazing when you look back on things and see all the different threads that run through your life and different people that you meet and how it's all connected. We really are six degrees of separation.

CP:

I think it's even less than that. Especially around here, I remember being in my grandmother's house and she had this old cassette and my great grandfather playing fiddle music. He'd been a fiddler. I had never met him, he passed away before I was born. And so I got interested, so goes, Yes, with granny Bartow Riley recorded that." I finally tracked Bartow down in Childress, and it took me years just to get an interview with him, and even longer but I finally got his tape collection, And now I've got—and when I got that tape collection, there's at least eighteen tracks with great grandfather playing on there and Bartow said, "Your great-grandfather always played the best—" which one was it? "Sally Goodin" because I always like the way he played "Sally Goodin." And then you got this tape collection here, you got Eck Robertson, [Major] Benjie Franklin, Benny Thomasson, and all these people stop by and say this thing is like a trip. A

hundred and twenty tapes of incredible Texas music. It's just amazing how you get connected, but let's get back to your story. So your band breaks up after the Petty thing, did you stay in Lubbock? Or you said you're working an Jents music?

CB:

I work in Jents here a little bit. Basically, decided I'd go off to Dallas because the Dallas scene was the just the beginnings of what was, at that time, called "cosmic country." And so I moved to Dallas and was playing—hanging around the folk club like Rubaiyat, and met BW Stevenson and couple of the other—Ray Wylie Hubbard, first saw him there, tried to get into that scene, didn't have much luck, was still trying to pitch songs, just kind of hung around Dallas for a couple years. Dabbling in music working a day job and nothing much came of that, so I wound up moving to couple of different places, wound up back in Lubbock working for gents again and started playing with the guy that I knew of from Big Spring but had never really hung around much, Johnny James. He was living in Lubbock then and he and one of the guys that I was Born in Brass with Tim Wittington had moved to Lubbock and was working on his English degree, and they had a little band together and we started playing. The first couple of gigs I did with them, they had a really good drummer named Steve Medder. But then Steve not long after that moved to Austin, and Johnny started playing drums. And Johnny was fabulous musician, good singer, his mom and dad Jowett James and his dad Bowes James, they—his dad played fiddle his mom played piano, they had played with John Lee Wills, Bob's brother over the years, and different western swing people. And they had sort of migrated back in Lubbock too and they were playing around. And then Johnny and I started this band and played, and played around Lubbock quite a while. Then I, during that period, I was kind of still working with Bud Andrews and Big Ed writing songs and stuff. They had, of course buy that time, Jerry Clower had left them and signed with a big major talent agency but they discovered this guy named Jerry Jordan, from Brownfield the artist. He and his brother, and their wives had this little music ministry, he and his brother Bruce had been healed, faith healed whenever he had polio. And so that was their—it was their testimony, their witness. And they went run little churches to give a witness but Jerry had come across this old retired Methodist minister who had written this—what he thought was a funny thing called "A Phone Call from God." And he gave—he was dying ministerwise, and he said, "Jerry just take this and do what you want to with it." Jerry said, "I looked at it and kind of read it over and listened to the tape, and it wasn't very funny." He said one time they were at a little church and they gave the testimony, did their four songs and the guy said, "Got to fill up another in a minutes," he said I didn't have anything but I had to have that little A Phone Call from God written out on paper. He said somebody said, "Just do that phone call thing." He said, "Oh, that's not funny. We're already bombing." But anyway, I did it and he said, "I was real nervous and so I was stuttering real bad, the more I stuttered the more people laughed. Next thing you know he said that became part of our act. And then next thing you know, they recorded it, they started selling it at churches on album, before they knew it they sold ten thousand copies. And well Bud heard about this and so he got with Jerry, he and Big Ed

got with Jerry and they decided let's go in and see if we can get you MCA Records. Well next thing you know, here it is on MCA Records. It was number one comedy, number one on the country charts, and number two on the pop charts, number one on the gospel charts. Within just a few months. Well, of course, I travelled with Jerry because they were doing all these old showcases for Fairbuyers and stuff and then churches, after he recorded his second album, because his MCA wanted a second album. And of course, he didn't really have anything but they decided for a follow up they would do a comedy record, where Jerry, the character on the phone call from God, talks to god on the CB. That was during the big CB craze, and so he's trucking along there. Well they did the follow up on that and jerry decided he wanted to put a song on the album, and so I had written a little song, a little love song that I played for Bud and Bud played it for Jerry and said, "I like it let's do it." So next thing you know in the studio, and I'm on the phone with an album.

CP:

Where were you recording these?

CB:

At Don's

CP:

At Don Caldwell's?

CB:

Yeah, at Don Caldwell's. After that—

CP:

What was the name of the song?

CB:

Called, "I Can't Sing a Love Song." The one that you found and recorded the album, they put the album out, Jerry started doing some promotion and travel. I travelled about six weeks with him and his family, during that time. While I was on the road with Jerry, I met some other entertainers doing the Fair Circuit thing and met one particular group, brother and sister team, young kids, fifteen and sixteen years old called Tim and Monica. And they did sort of a patterned show like *Donny and Marie* who were really popular at the time and their mom was their piano player. Anyway, she heard me play with Jerry, and said, "Would you play with us and rest of the tour that we're doing with the Fair buyers?" I said "Sure, that's no problem." I played with them and they offered me a job in their band, and so I had to come back to Lubbock then I moved to Nashville again to work with them, but mostly to write songs and try to get my songs pitched up there. I had a little credibility having a major level cut, which as my dad would say, "That and an

dollar and a half would get you a cup of coffee.” So what time I wasn’t working which is most of the time I was in Nashville, I was on the road with Tim and Monica. I mean we went every in Vegas and all over the country but I try to—

CP:

Did you cut records with them?

CB:

We recorded some songs, but we never put it out. After a few months with them, starving to death in Nashville, and not getting anywhere with publishers, it was one of those, “Leave a tape, we’ll get back to you. Thank you very next.” All that stuff, I moved back to Lubbock, broke, totally broke. And I had become friends over the years with Jack Tyson, and right about the time when I moved back to Lubbock, Jack left—he was working with Gents and started his own music store called Jack T’s Music World and he hired me to work with him there at his music store. And then he, and Johnny James and I formed the Free Whiskey band.

CP:

I remember seeing—

CB:

And we actually recorded an 8-track tape there at Don’s. We paid for the recording time by swapping out with Don for equipment from the store. So we recorded, Lloyd played on a couple of the songs with us.

CP:

So Free Whiskey was you, and Jack, and you said James?

CB:

Johnny James.

CP:

Johnny James.

CB:

And then later, we got Steve Williams to join the band.

CP:

Country band?

CB:

Country Rock. We actually won a Rock and roll contest here in Lubbock sponsored by—was it Miller or Budweiser? One of those things. They had a rock concert contest, and it was funny because we were just barely under the age of cut-off, Jack was twenty-nine, and I was like twenty-eight at that time, and the cut-off age was thirty to be in the rock contest. So we won and got to go to the Battle of the Bands in Dallas that was sponsored by I want to say Polydor Records maybe? Anyway, but we beat out—the second place in that rock concert was, I think their name was—it was some kind of industrial name, but the guitar player was John Spraight, and the lead singer was Donnie Allison.

CP:

So at that time—

CB:

This would've been 1978. And they were just—

CP:

Right before they were the Nelsons.

CB:

Long before they were the Nelson's. Anyway, they were all upset that these old guys had won the concert.

CP:

Next time I see John I'm going to ask him about that. He'll probably laugh about it.

CB:

He may not even remember it but—

CP:

Man, that guy remembers everything. And he must know a gazillion songs. It just amazes me, his mind. Was this like at one of the night clubs or something?

CB:

That was actually—the contest, municipal auditorium, I think. It's a big deal yeah. K triple L was one of the sponsors and then whatever the rock station was then were one of the sponsors. There was, oh, half a dozen bands, I just remember us and then Donnie and John, I don't who else was in that band at the time. But—

CP:

So you get to go to Dallas?

CB:

Got to go to Dallas. The guy there—a band from Amarillo actually won, but one of the A&R [artists and repertoire] guys from Polydor came to us backstage to our set and said, “Man, I really like your stuff, kind of on the country side for us, but send me more stuff.” And so, I spent the next several weeks putting together stuff to send to him. Meanwhile, I was working for Jack at his music store and just about to get married. And so within this phase of about three or four weeks, I was planning a wedding, store went bankrupt, the band broke up, and just everything kind of just came to a crashing halt there. I was left—we had already started on working on the second album, Free Whiskey album where I have no idea where that master tape is. It was ten or eleven songs, original songs that we had written and—

CP:

I'll look. I've got the archives so I'll look through there and see if I can pick it. May never know if it's in there.

CB:

I thought I had a reel to reel just a rough mix of it and I thought I had a cassette mix of it, but in all my search, I can't find it anywhere. But it was some—I was—John shopping the band and we had some couple of people interested, but by the time we got it all together before we even had it mixed the band broke up.

CP:

A shame. So, I guess, you got married though.

CB:

Got married. Kicked around with a bunch of different bands. At that point, it was like—

CP:

This was 1979?

CB:

Nineteen seventy-nine, That was, “Have guitar will travel.” The only real steady thing I had was being part of the West Texas Opry, which was basically the Maines Brothers as the Opry band. But we talk about a successful production. We did roughly four of those a year in the municipal auditorium, packed every time. It was great, we had people like Johnny Ray Watson and Tommy Anderson was one of the big sells there. Basically it was people that recorded at Caldwell's. If you recorded at Caldwell's, if Lloyd thought you were good enough, you got to be on the show.

CP:

So he sort of the musical director?

CB:

Oh yes. Yes. And it was a tight ship too. I remember the first couple of ones we did there, **CK Busey** [00:54:13] was running sound, and Lloyd said, "Man we do it Saturday morning rehearsal." Sound check and rehearsal for the show and he said, "We got to have monitors talking by ten o'clock." Well, 11:30, and he's still not—but the second or third show we did, Lloyd and Don with CK said, "Okay we got to have monitors talking at ten o'clock. It costs you a dollar per minute." Those weren't working. By the next show, man [snaps] we had one or two by ten o'clock. [Laughs] But it was great, just really good talented people, recording Johnny Ray Watson, Terry Sue was recording back then, and a bunch of other groups were making really good records there. A lot of gospel, a lot of country, but the shows were just fabulous we literally sold out every show at the Municipal Auditorium.

CP:

What were you playing guitar or piano?

CB:

But I was playing mostly guitar then. Randy was playing piano mostly. I played some piano then but I didn't really start as an official piano player until I started with the Maines brothers in 1983. And I played with them off and on from '78 to '83. Different on the Opry's and I travelled with them every now and then and play. Sometimes—first time they played Billy Bob's, Randy couldn't make it so I went and played guitar and piano with them. And when they got ready to—after that, I guess after the *Panhandle Dancer* album, they were really ready to take it to the next level and Lloyd had been pitching to some people. Several people in Nashville were interested in the group and the rest of the group was ready to go, and Randy just decided he was—that oil field gig he had was a lot more stable than riding in a motor home up and down the highway. So they asked me to come and play. It was interesting at that point, guitar had always been my first primary instrument, so I thought in guitar, and would think in guitar and translate to piano, and it took me about two years to begin to start thinking in piano.

CP:

So this is 1983 you joined the Maines Brothers?

CB:

Nineteen eighty-three. Yeah. That Spring we signed with Mercury. That summer we started recording the first album and the first single came out in I want to say maybe October of that year.

CP:

Which album was this?

CB:

That's the *High Rollin'* album.

CP:

I don't remember listening to that one too much.

CB:

It had "Little Broken Pieces," "Louisiana Ana," "You are a Miracle." In fact, if I can find this for you.

CP:

Let me change out batteries really quick here.

CB:

Find this here. [Pause in Recording]

CP:

Here we go.

CB:

We got a little mention here in the *High Rollin'* album.

CP:

Oh yeah. People Magazine.

CB:

People Magazine, yeah. We were all of these, we were all in Mercury at the same time. The two biggest acts were, of course, Stafford Brothers and Kathy Mattea. And that's where all the budget—

CP:

Which issue is this?

CB:

This is '84.

CP:

June 11th, 1984. With Belushi on the cover? Wow.

CB:

Yeah. It was like a mixed blessing because down here, they chose some witty material too, like “Louisiana Ana” their ballads, such as “You are a Miracle” get a trickily but they’re good time bunch. [Laughter]

CP:

That’s a pretty good review, I guess. It’s people magazine. Have you been doing any session work before then?

CB:

I played in—the first recordings that I ever did at Caldwell’s in the early seventies with Bud Andrews was helping me, I’d go down and do my original song demos the first couple of demos I did down there was when he had a two track machine, no carpet on the floor, egg cartons on the wall. And I remember the first session, I was down there about halfway through the first song Don said, “Man you can’t tap your foot,” because [taps foot]. And one session, I remember he was trying to get separation between a guitar and a voice and so Bud had a big piece of cardboard that he put right between my voice here the microphone, and guitar here. So I couldn’t see what I was playing. I went through the 2-track machine, the 4-track machine, the 8-track machine, the 16-track machine that was a lemon. And then eventually to the twenty-four.

CP:

And you talk that 16-track machine that you mention, you always hear, “It was a lemon.”

CB:

And that was where we recorded our Free Whiskey—our second Free Whiskey album on that machine and that same time that Terry Allen was recording Lubbock on everything.

CP:

Yeah, Don said that Terry had to sit there with a pencil, and kind of hold the tape, because the tape head.

CB:

The 4-track machine was great and the 8-track machine was that Leon Russell had essentially lent, was a great machine. We did lots of recording on that.

CP:

I’ve got a 4-track machine. I think Kerry Ford bought it and San Angelo or out in El Paso I think’s where it wound up. Then Don got it back and I saw it sitting one of Don’s storage areas collecting dust. I said, “Oh, man. Let’s save it.” So I’ve got it back over there. It needs a lot of work.

CB:

I don't know if that's the same machine that the story about Bo Diddley. They started doing those Buddy Holly Memorial Concert things in the late seventies, right after the movie came out, right after the statue was put up. They started doing these memorial concerts and they would bring in, Roy Orbison, the Crickets, different people to come to this concert. That was before the lawyers got ahold of Maria Elena. But the first year they brought Bo Diddley in to do the concert, he would just show up and use a local band and the band that was put together was Royce—Glenn on drums. Curtis Wilkerson on bass, Bonnie Wilkerson on piano and me on guitar. And we were Bo's back up bands. It's like, "This is the coolest thing ever." But of course, he was late for sound check and then when he finally got there—the funniest things was, you know, Royce, when he got that gig, couple weeks before, he had just wood shredded like crazy on that Bo Diddley beat [Imitates the beat]. And we finally got up there and started sound checking a little bit and kicked off that song, at eight bars into it Bo said, "Wait stop, yeah drummer I don't use that beat no more. Just stay on your high hat." So we kind of started in and then Paul McCartney had—well I don't know if he had really intended to come, but supposedly had wanted to come to the concert but couldn't make it. So he called the people that got in touch with Don and said would you make a recording of the show that night and just sing it to me for my personal collection. And so we're up there sound checking and here comes a couple of guys from the studio rolling in this 4-track machine and Bo Diddley saw and said, "Oh hell no." He stopped. We did not another note because he said-- he began this long rant about all the times he'd been ripped off, pirated records and stuff. Finally, Susanne, she was a Polk then, Susanne Hanley was working with the mayor and she put the whole thing together, and finally between the mayor and Don, and Susanne and all these other people. I think maybe Larry Corbin, from Triple L finally convinced Bo that they weren't going to make any pirate records and sell anything, and so he finally agreed to it. But I don't know if it was that same 4-track machine.

CP:

I didn't know there was a recording for this show. I wonder where it is.

CB:

It went to McCartney.

CP:

The master or what if Don—

CB:

Now, that I don't know. Susanne might know. Don should know. I know that he wouldn't set foot on stage until he convinced him of that. He also would go on the stage until he had the cash in his hand.

CP:

It's kind of Chuck Berry when he came here to play. That thing was a—did you play that show?

CB:

No I didn't play on that show.

CP:

I was the amp tech. I had to take care of the amps. I remember they finally got Chuck here and they paid him that forty-five thousand dollars cash, and he finally shows up and we get him going, I think literally about twenty-eight minutes into the show, he's walking across the stage doing his thing, he's playing and the guitar came unplugged. And I'm crouch down behind the amps and stuff, and looked down at the guitar cable plugs, I was getting ready to run over and he looked at me and he looked back down at that guitar cable and then he just walked off-stage. That was it. Done.

CB:

Well Bo was a delight. Once all that stuff got worked out, he had the audience in the palm of his hand from the first note.

CP:

I got a couple photos of him playing that show that Wayne Hatchell took, I guess he might've been helping with sounds or something, but he's got some pictures.

CB:

He played two different years there, the first year was the one that I was in. I don't know if that's the one that Wayne got some pictures of or not but it was something. That's a chapter in my book because once we finally got going and he settled down and stuff we got ready to do a song and he just walked over to me with those big old coke bottle glasses. You couldn't tell if he was looking at you, but I was like—he's said, "Guitar man, play what you want to just don't step on my vocals.", "Okay."

CP:

[Laughs] That's funny. I just heard a song, I'd never heard it before. It's Tejana Dames. They knew Bo, the Hancocks knew him. They would go to Florida, hangout at his house and there's this song called "Mall Parade" that Connie wrote on Bo Diddley's guitar sitting on this fishing pier, and I never heard that song until two days ago. And it's—you're ought to look it up, "Mall Parade," it's an interesting song about—I don't know if you've ever heard it or not. But it's got all this little kind of jingle bells. It's about going the mall, and it's really interesting, but wrote it on Bo Diddley's guitar. Bo Diddley's got connections to Lubbock. So tell me a little bit about this book you're writing.

CB:

For several years, people have enjoyed just hearing me tell all these road stories, we all got them. Terri Hendrix and a couple of other people kept hounding me, "Man you need to write a book about all these stories." I'm like, "Everybody writes a book." But it kind of all came together—

CP:

Everybody wants to write a book.

CB:

Everybody wants to write, yeah. But I don't know if I sent you the story, but several years ago, my wife's cousin, Dan Jordan, a couple years older than me, our kids grew up together. They live in the Garland, Texas area. And we'd go there, that's where Carol's folks are from. And got to know them real well. Anyway, Dan, he's a real nice guy. He just got diagnosed with cancer, and within three months was dead. I mean just [snaps] whatever it was, it took him. But one of the last requests that he made was that he wanted me to sing at his funeral. He had a particular song, little Johnny Cash, June Carter song, "I'll Meet You on the Far Side Banks of Jordan." It's really cool country hymn. And that he had told the widow to ask Carol if I'd do that. And so went up to Dallas where the funeral was, and it was a really very uplifting funeral. My wife talked a little bit during the service, Dan's mom talked and some of his friends and told stories, and the last thing on the funeral service was me singing the song. So I went up there and sang the song and after the service, everybody's kind of milling around, standing in line getting ready to go to the after funeral meal there at the church. And his widow, Pat, came up to me and said, "Dan would be so happy that you did this. It was great. People have come up to me just one after the other telling me what a wonderful positive service, uplifting service this was, and they all saying, and 'that last song was so perfect, and that guy singing up there, he was really good. He was almost like a professional.'"

CP:

[Laughs] Almost like a professional.

CB:

That's been the family joke ever since then. So that's the title of the book. *Almost Like a Professional*.

CP:

That's a great title. I like it. So how far along are you on the book?

CB:

Ninety percent through writing. It's just a series of little vignettes, one to two page vignettes like that. One of the longest parts of it is a little section called, "It's a Family Affair." And that is all

the different West Texas families, musical families that I've worked with. And what an incredible impact they have made on the musical world, just these handful of families, the Maines, the Moyers, the Caldwells, the Hancocks, the Blakeleys, the Brownlows. They all have multi-generational families who play music. So that's all—that's a big part of it as well.

CP:

So do you have a publishing deal yet?

CB:

Probably just going to do it self-publish.

CP:

Have you thought maybe Tech Press?

CB:

Maybe, yeah. Jerry Stoddard is going to be my editor. And so yeah it's almost all finished now, the next part is the editing and the putting it together, and then deciding if or how many pictures to include. I got—

CP:

That's where it can really drive up cost sometimes, is with pictures. So got to be—got to pick the best of the best.

CB:

There's Maines Brothers—I need to have there's Maines Brothers pictures in there, couple of other things maybe, just some family photos with—

CP:

If you're interested, I could reach out, Tech Press under the library now and we got the shelf where we sell all the books in the library so you see all the stuff that's up there. There's some great stuff in there, of Michael Ventury, the Butch Hancock book is in there, and Dance Halls and stuff like that. Andy had that series that he was doing about voices in the West. I think you ought to give it a shot.

CB:

Okay. Well I'm an alumni.

CP:

It wouldn't hurt.

CB:
Yeah.

CP:
So I got to ask, we get all this research and stuff put together, would you may be interested in archiving it at Tech? And maybe have a Cary Banks collection and things like that, would love to have that there and this research material. Two hundred years down the road when people come looking for stuff that would be just a little gold mine of the stories.

CB:
Absolutely. Yeah. One of the most interesting things that I think I'm the only one—I know I'm the only one that has this copy of it. Paul Davidson took this photo out of the CMA Magazine they used to send out, to CMA members. But this is the only photo like this. An extended photo in existence, this is 1985 Fanfare Mercury Records.

CP:
I've seen this before. Where did see this before? I remember, you got Paycheck, Cash, Carl Perkins—

CB:
Jerry Lewis. I'm not sure who that kid—he was on there with us, Kathy Mattea, Johnny Paycheck, Don Fargo, Harlan Howard.

CP:
Where did I see a copy of this?

CB:
I put it up one time at one of our concerts a few years ago.

CP:
Maybe that's what it was. Might be at the Civic Center?

CB:
Civic Center.

CP:
I think that's probably what—because nobody know who that was? Okay, yeah, I remember that now. Okay. Yeah, yeah. Okay, that's where I saw it. That's great, got to get that scanned some way. I don't know. That's a big picture.

CB:

Somewhere I've got the book that it came in. It was just a periodical that somebody used to put out, and I don't know why exactly that photo was in there. But yeah that was in 1985 in Nashville at the CMA festival.

CP:

That's a big crowd.

CB:

Yeah, Paul Davidson did that. They had just gotten their big press over there, design communication opened. I asked him if he'd class project on it.

CP:

Well Cary, I was going to see maybe if right here this would be a good stopping point before we get to the Maines Brothers stuff, and then from there and then South Plains College and forth, sort of kind of break it up like that. Go ahead and maybe schedule another time to come by.

CB:

Sure. Yeah.

CP:

I got to go to Baltimore in a couple of day. I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording here for today.

[End of Recording]