

**Oral History Interview of
Bob Livingston**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
March 31, 2010
Austin, Texas**

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

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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:

In this interview, Bob Livingston discusses his career as a musician, and how he got to where he is currently. Bob explains meeting Joe Ely, growing musically, and travelling abroad to play music.

Length of Interview: 02:09:37

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Keywords

Indian Music, Terry Allen, Texas Musicians, Guitars, Texas Musicians, Compositions, Song writing process, Collaboration,

Bob Livingston (BL):

Now what do you mean, the Bob Johnson thing?

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

The Bob Johnson thing. First of all this is Andy Wilkinson, it's the thirty-first day of March, the year 2010, we're in the new, to you, lovely home of Bob Livingston in Austin. And it's just after lunch which we just finished. In the afternoon we're going to be talking, and as I was turning on the tape I mentioned we don't want to violate the Bob Johnson rule, and Bob Johnson told me this that he learned to keep the tape going whenever he was recording in the studio regardless of what he had planned, because you never knew what was going to happen. And he learned it because the very first album he did with Bob Dylan, they had this odd arrangement at Columbia Studios where the sound board and the control room, the tape machine wasn't in it. The tape machine was about four doors down the hall and they had this Union set of rules about who ran what, and so when it was time to record, you, as the engineer, would turn to the person next to you, who was employed by the studio and say, "Start the tape." They would go to the door and tell the guy, "Start the tape," and that guy would tell a guy down the hall, "Start the tape," and that guy would say to Joe in the room with the machine, "Start the tape," and then the tape would start. This arcane system that they had since the, probably the thirties. And so in this first album, this is what Bob Johnston told me, he said, "Dylan and the group were in there playing and Dylan says to Bob Johnson, 'Did you get that?' And Johnston said, 'No, the tape's not rolling,'" and Dylan evidently threw a fit so Johnston turns around and says, "Okay, how does this work?" And they led him through, okay this person tells that person, tells that person. So he goes down to finally finds Joe and he says, "Okay Joe, when they tell you that what do you do?" And he says, "I hit this button." And Johnson says, "Well how long is the wire for that button?" And this guy says, "Oh it's pretty long," And so he in contravention to all the Union rules, drug Joe and his chair and his button all the way down to the recording booth [Laughter] so that he could turn right around to him and say, "Touch the button," and it would start recording. So from then on, he would keep the tape rolling and there's a famous line in that album where he says—

BL:

"Is it rolling, Bob?"

AW:

"Is it rolling, Bob?" And that's exactly where that comes from. Cool, huh?

BL:

That is cool. And you know Abbey Road, that was a similar situation when you read those—like that book, Geoff Emerick's book *Here, There and Everywhere?*

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
It's a great book and he was the engineer on all the Beatles stuff and it was like lab coats in a room four rooms away, you know, all the tape recorders were kept in another place.

AW:
Yeah, like they might catch a disease from the popular musicians who were—

BL:
Yeah. And you know Jerry Jeff was—when we cut—it was the album, *Collectibles*, he didn't have so much trouble with it for the first two, because the first two were so unconventional. The first one that I was on was just called *Jerry Jeff*, we called it the *Brown Album* and it had "L.A. Freeway," a lot of it was recorded in Austin, a lot of it was recorded in L.A. I mean in New York—

AW:
Is this the recording that you talked about—one of the first interviews we did where they had the giant tub of sangria? And the recording machine in the middle and you couldn't listen to playbacks until the next day or something?

BL:
Couldn't listen to the playbacks so, you know, it was real immediate, it was right there, very unconventional. At Luckenbach, they had the world's best—I mean there was two major mobile recording units in the country at that time. Dale Ashby and Father was the name of this one, and they brought it all the way to set it up in the—right outside the dance hall in Luckenbach. And I don't remember so much because it seemed like the producer told them to roll that tape at all times, but when we did *Collectibles* we went into a studio where that studio by then had become it was called Pecan Street, and that studio had by then, I believe, been named Odyssey Sound and had a board and everything in there and the engineer was new, he was a greenhorn to Jerry Jeff at least and Jerry sat down and just started playing. It's like he walks in the room, sits down, picks up a guitar, and starts playing, and the guy's just thinking he's getting sound and Jerry just threw a hissy fit when he realized what he had done was not on, and said, "From now on when I sit down in this stool, we're in record!" So I mean, consequently there are miles and miles of tuneage tape somewhere, some of which we grabbed. [Laughs]

AW:
Yeah. In the dead of the afternoon [Laughs]

BL:

In the dead of the afternoon, spirited away to Lubbock.

AW:

I don't think we've gotten all the bugs out of it yet, we've got it isolated right now.

BL:

No, I'm sure you need to you know if you can do something with that it's a miracle but—

AW:

Well since we are rolling Bob, we talked a little over lunch about a couple things that we ought to do this afternoon, and one of them, I think is really, really important, just generally speaking to what we're doing at the archive but also which I think is a key element to you, your career and also to how what you've done has impacted other people, and that is you mentioned this story about how you met Ely, and how this one woman walked into a room, right? Into a club—

BL:

Um-hm.

AW:

And it changed everything. Now, tell us this story.

BL:

Well, we're going to talk more to my brother tomorrow, but my brother was really one of my first influences because he was a musician, and he taught. And he taught me some chords and I played, I played the ukulele, and this, that, and the other, but I first met Joe Ely—I can't remember even the year, but it's got to be 1968, something like that. And I was going to Texas Tech, and see, he was two or three years—he was a couple years older than me at least, so that was a—

AW:

Um-hm, he and I graduated from Monterey in '66.

BL:

Okay, '66 then.

AW:

But I think he is a year older than I am just in age, because he started late or something like that

BL:

Right, right. Well okay, there you go and so I never knew him and had only heard about him and maybe seen him from a distance but I had some reason to go to his house and when I went there—

AW:

Now was this the house on 14th Street where everybody—

BL:

Maybe 20th something or 14th or—

AW:

Well there were a whole group of them, Jimmy, Butch, Joe, they were living in a house on 14th street, I think, that was sort of like address central for all that group of musicians.

BL:

Well and this could have been in '68?

AW:

Yeah, I'm not exactly sure what the year is, I'd have to track that down.

BL:

Well, this could have been—all right '68 because what I remember and I was telling you before this may not be true at all, but this is what I remember because I went to that house and he answered the door, and in what I remember he was naked and he had body paint on and there was some people and they were painting each other with day glow paint. It was some art project they were working on. And that is how I remember it. Sharon doesn't like me to tell that story and Joe just kind of laughs. [Laughs]

AW:

It seems hard for me to imagine, Bob, that you would invent a naked person with day glow paint on them. [Laughs]

BL:

I know it. Yes, that's hard enough. Acid wasn't there yet so. So I met him, and one thing led to another, and I went to see him play. Remember Ron's Ice Cream?

AW:

Um-hm.

BL:

Ron's Ice Cream Parlor. Well they had a basement and I made friends with this guy Ron, and he said, "Well I've got this basement down here," and I said, "Man I'd love to do a little music thing." So I called it the Attic, and it was in the basement of this place, and across the alley was another folk club, across that alley and Ely used to play there.

AW:

Yeah. That's where the Mesquite's restaurant was for a long time and Ely played just upstairs right?

BL:

Yeah. So that was there. Well, I went to see Ely and he was playing a gig at the Altura Towers. If I remember, there was some sort of bar in it or something.

AW:

Yeah, I don't remember a bar, but yeah, Altura Towers.

BL:

I swear—this is fuzzy but when I walked in, he was playing and he was sitting on his amplifier, he had that guitar that he had bought for five dollars on the beach in Venice Beach from a guy and it had seashells glued—an old Gibson J-45. Had seashells glued all over it, big seashells and he had taken the seashells off and the glue and glitter was still kind of there in the shape of those shells. He had a Barkus Berry pick up, and he plugs straight into the amp and he had a high hat. So he would sit there and he was doing, "Candy Man", "Baby Let Me Follow You Down," some Dylan songs, stuff like that, I don't think he had even written a song at this point. I'm not sure, because I don't remember his writing but I loved it and it just blew me away and I was right there and watching him. And the next day I went down and I bought me a high hat at a pawn shop. [AW laughs] And I got my brother's electric guitar and amplifier, he had a twin reverb, and all this thing was happening at the same time where I was cutting this deal to open this little club and I went down there and I was aping Joe Ely as they say in India, I was aping him, copying him. And I learned, "Candy Man", "Baby Let Me Follow You Down," and anything that he did was good enough for me. So I had that little club and I was in a fraternity, I was an SAE, and I had some crazy fraternity brothers that found out I could play and sing and so they loved it. Well they would come down usually on a Saturday night, but sometimes Friday. I was open on Friday, Saturday and then started opening Sunday. And I would play, "Proud Mary," and whatever and they would just get drunk. They would bring their own beer but I had these frozen pizzas. So it was live entertainment and live pizza and it was in the Attic but it was in the basement. Had these little stickers made up and I packed the little place you know with frat guys, mainly. And I had a girl working for me, selling the pizza, Janette Scott was her name, and she's now in the movie business here in Austin. But I started seeing Ely and I started hiring him on

Sundays, and he would come down and he took one look at the place and realized that this was just, not really his bag. So what he started doing was stacking the deck and he would bring this group of people and he would say—it would cost fifty cents to get in, but he'd say, "These are all the people that I need." He says, "This is my moral support, these are my lighting director, this is my PA," you know he's sitting on his amp, and, "These are my background singers." And he'd bring eight or ten people with him every day, just kind of stack the deck, which was fine with me. And the frat guys would be talking and singing and yelling and I would go and be the bouncer and say, "Shut up don't you realize this is great!" And so that was my Ely connection. Well one night, one day—well it has to be at night, this young woman walked in, she was going to Tech, and she came up to me after the show and she goes, "You know, I was just in Red River, New Mexico last summer, and there is a club—a friend of mine who owns a restaurant club, and he is looking for someone to come up there in the summer and play. All it is, is you get tips and room and board. But you can drive Jeep tours during the day. And I thought, Wow, what an adventure. "Well okay." So in the summer of '68 I headed out for Red River and I arrive there and played at the River View Inn it was called, and it had a little stage over in the corner right under the heater and this sign up above you that said, "Singer's survival depends on donations." Nothing has changed. [Laughter] And I played and you know, I had grown my hair as long as I could get it in Lubbock you know without getting beat up and I knew all these songs and I was right out of the box you know?

AW:

Did you still have your top hat?

BL:

No, I didn't have my top hat. [Laughter] I left it back in Lubbock. But I had a mustache I think. And I started driving these Jeep tours during the day, they paid four dollars a tour and you'd get three, four if you were lucky, but three a day. And you'd drive them up on these switchbacks and these Toyota Land Rover open air Jeeps, and you'd learn how to do it and it was just incredibly fun and you would try to—these Dallas women and their daughters would usually be the ones in the Jeep and you'd try to impress them both and wine and dine both sets at some point trying to score. And which, for me, never really worked out very well but I sure tried. [Laughter] And you learned all these tales and these jokes and you made sure that they knew that if it wasn't for your incredible expertise of driving that their very lives were forfeit, and hoping for a good tip at the end of it. So I would make like twelve to twenty dollars a day doing that and I would make, at night maybe fifteen, sometimes twenty dollars on a good night in tips. So I'm making thirty something dollars a day, no expenses and no room and board seven days a week up here in Red River, and staying across the street. Well, one day Jack Emory, who I still didn't know much and I was doing this, but I just kind of played my gig and went back and I think I was too young to get into the bars, I'm not sure, I might have been twenty—nineteen, twenty. But Jack came and told me, "Let's go down and meet the boys," So we go down to this little club called the Outpost,

and the boys were a folk trio from Dallas called Three Faces West and they had their own club and it was Rick Fowler, Wayne Kidd, and Ray Hubbard. I'd never seen them, never heard of them, but I saw their show and it blew me away. And they would do two shows, sometimes three, depending on a weekend or not, two shows a day and they had great music, great songs, funny bits, they would choose bits between them—they'd say, "Okay we're going to do 'Texas Morning' then we're going to do the Creosote bit, and then we'll do something else and we'll do this." And they had Wayne was the straight guy, he was in the middle, Hubbard was the wise ass, and Rick was also kind of the quiet, dreamy guy that occasionally would throw in the perfect punch line and I saw them and it just blew me away. And I saw what live music really needed to be like. I had seen a lot of live music you know, before back in Lubbock, but nothing that was really even that surpassed Ely as far as professionalism and stuff, I was like, "Wow, these guys have got it together, and I want to be just like them." And they wore leather pants and leather vests and bandanas and they wore Frye boots with the—

AW:
Square toe?

BL:
Square toe.

AW:
And the strap thing on the—

BL:
The strap thing. And I just thought that was the coolest thing I had ever seen and I wanted leather pants and leather vest. When I left Red River a couple years later to seek my fortune, I made sure that every little town I stopped in I looked for leather pants, leather vests, it wasn't until I got to Vegas that I was able to find them. [Laughter] And it was like 120 in the shade but I bought me some leather pants and leather vests, I was determined to be like Three Faces West. But so there I saw them that night and at the end of the show, I hung around and Jack who had a wandering eye, wandering eye means an eye out of his socket that just kind of drifted away. And so he introduced me to them and he said—and they just were looking at me, they were real kind of—what's the word? They were just sort of snippy and very self-assured guys, "Oh here's the new guy and I wonder what he's like," And he said, "Why don't you sit down on this stool Bob and play them a song."

AW:
Emory says?

BL:

Yeah, Emory says, "Sit down on this stool and play these boys a song, give 'em one of your guitars." So Rick Fowler, he had a D-18, great one, and I sat down, and he says, "Play that Early Morning Rain," Gordon Lightfoot, and I was very earnest [singing] "In the early morning rain, with dollar in my hand," you know just a folk rendition just like Gordon Lightfoot. And so I'm playing it and I kind of glance up every once in a while and they're just sort of rolling their eyes and sniggering and looking at each other and I knew that I had done something tragically un-hip, but I didn't know what it was. I just knew that this was a different league from what I'm playing in and I have done something but I don't know what it is, but I know I have to cinch [sic] and bear and get through it. So I finish the song and by the time I finish the song, a little bit after, Wayne and Rick just sort of melded away into the night but Ray stuck around, and Ray was just kind of—he comes up to me and he says, "Come over here, I want to tell you something." And I, "Okay." He goes, "I'm going to give you two pieces of advice. Number one, don't ever sit down when you sing." You know it's like engage the audience, standing up, it forces people to be more attentive to you, "Don't ever sit down when you sing. And number two, don't ever do Early Morning Rain again." [Laughter] Which I've always remembered. I never did it again until that day. And we became friends, and we started hanging out together in Red River and then I went back to school at Tech for the winter. Nineteen sixty-nine, I believe, was when the first draft lottery was held. Isn't it correct?

AW:

Oh no, because I got drafted in '68 and they'd had a lottery—

BL:

I'm telling you, we've had this conversation before.

AW:

Yeah, no I promise you I took the bus to Amarillo—

BL:

Well it could have been '68 then.

AW:

Draft physical—

BL:

We can Google it while I'm here but—

AW:

But they didn't—it depended on your age as to when you were in the lottery, I think. There were all kinds of things that went on—

BL:

Well I remember the first draft lottery that happened and that was when I left school almost the next day.

AW:

Because you got a great number.

BL:

Because I got number 309, and I was out of there. I'm trying to think, the next summer I went back to do the same thing sort of, and by that time, I was really hip, I had grown a little bit musically and I was really hip to my singing and playing. I had got number 309 and left and I went to Red River and then I go to Aspen Colorado, where my brother is playing in a club up there and he says I can get you a gig at Apres Ski, so which means the ski lift kind of come down from four to six or something like that. And I'm playing, John Denver comes in one night, which my brother had known at Tech. And so I'm playing and this guy comes in his name is Randy Fred and it turned out he was an agent from Los Angeles and he hears me play and he says, "Gah, I really think you've got a great voice and I like these songs and I think I could get you record deal." Out of the blue he tells me. I'm, "Really?" And he goes, "Yeah, look I'm going to be here, the ski season is ending and consequently my gig was ending, and I was either going to go back—this was in the Winter and I was going to go back and get in on that next semester because I didn't know what else I was going to do. I had left school for a semester, I didn't have to go back, but I just thought if nothing else happens, what am I going to do? I'm out here, my gig is now at the end. So he says, "Meet me in Los Angeles." He says, "I'll meet you Saturday morning, I'll be there at nine o'clock and I'm going to give you the keys to my house. I live in Beverly Glen, which meant nothing to me at that time. And so, there was still snow on the ground and he was going to catch in a couple more weeks of skiing somewhere. Aspen was kind of closing down, everyone was leaving, everyone was packing up. And I stayed at his house and I couldn't stay there anymore. So I had this red Pontiac Tempest, and I had it out there warming up, and nine o'clock came and went. And ten o'clock came and went. And I had met a guy and a girl who were hitchhiking, and they just said, "We'd love to go to California with you, we'll help you with some gas and stuff." And then eleven o'clock comes and goes, and it's eleven thirty and I'm just saying, "God, the guy's not going to come, and I may have to go back to Lubbock." And they went, "We'll go to Lubbock." [Laughter]. They're just like, "Wherever you're going, it's fine. We just want to go somewhere."

AW:

Can't stay here.

BL:

So, I'm five minutes from leaving. The car is warming up and, down the driveway comes barreling this Buick Riviera. And it's this guy, Randy Fred, long hair, little round glasses. And he says, "Sorry I'm late! I want you to meet me, here are my keys. When you get to L.A. call this guy, his name is Brian something-or-other, his father is the president of Universal Movies." Come to find out this guy, Randy, born in Beverly Hills, went to Beverly Hills High School, had become an agent for the IFA, International Famous Agency. Jack Pounce was one of his clients, Eddie Albert, Peggy Lipton, a woman named Jan Smithers, who we'll talk about later, a lot of people. And he had dropped out—taken a bunch of acid, dropped out of the scene, become a ski bum, but he still had all these connections. Said, "I can get you a deal, I know everybody." It was true. So I go out to L.A., and I wait for him to come for two weeks, and I kind of wander around and not knowing what to do. And finally, he gets there, and I didn't have any money and he didn't have any money. So, he gets me a gig at a chain of restaurants called "Rubin's Restaurants." All over the Southern California, Northern California, and it's a really good steakhouse with a lounge and a stage with entertainment. And the guy that ran it was himself a musician, Joey Gallow was his name. And he did "Man From La Mancha" and all this stuff, but it was playing your music and doing the lounge thing. Well I did it. And, Garden Grove, California, and I drove there, and I drove to Newport Beach. And I had these things, you would get week to week engagements, maybe a week, you know, two to three weeks. And, finally, the guy, Joe Gallows came to me and he said, "Bob, I'm having a problem with you! You expect people to listen to you. What the fuck?" And I go, "Well, you know—" He goes "Let me tell you something, the Beatles couldn't sell a record if it wasn't for booze. It's all about booze, if you can't turn booze, you're nothing to me. You got to sell that booze. You got to give them what they want, and it's songs that they know. You get, lull them, stop talking about it, you tell--talking too many stories." So I realize, this probably isn't the place for me and I call my brother, Donald. I said, "Donald, I got this gig out here and this is what the guy said," and Donald's going, "He's right, he's right." So my brother, Don, he comes out to L.A. and he becomes one of the biggest things on that circuit because he knows how to do that. When someone appears at the door that he's never met before, he'll come to the table during the break, "Hi, my name is Don Livingston. I've never seen you before.", "Well we're Betty and Joshua Smith and, we just came in here, we didn't know what—" And he goes, "Well, is there anything you'd like to hear?" "Well, do you know 'Solitary Man' by Neil Diamond?", "Well no, I don't, but I tell you what, you come back tomorrow and I'll have learned it." And, sure enough, when they appear at the lounge, "Betty, and Joshua! Come on in, good to see you. Sit down, I'm going to do that song for you you wanted last night." He had gone home and learned it, and do it for them. What are they going to do but come back every time they have the chance?

AW:

And leave a tip that night.

BL:

He knew everybody's name. And the other smart thing that he would do, they'd come up and say "Let me buy you a drink." Well, you're going to be drunker than a skunk. So, what he would do, is he'd talk to the bar tender and say "Look, when I say buy me a drink, I'm going to say 'Give me a Cuba Libre,' and you just give me Coke. And, take that two dollars and fifty cents or three dollars or however much that shot is and put it in this." And the bartender said, "Okay." So my brother's made an extra sixty, eighty dollars a night on getting drinks bought for him that he never drank. And so, he was up there playing. Well, here I am in L.A. and I'm trying to get this-- he says, "I'm going to get you a record deal," and he gets me a guy named Trugman, who's a lawyer, and they get me an audition at Capitol Records. And I walk in and the big Capitol on Hollywood and Vine, the big Capitol Records building. And I go into the studio and I'm sitting there waiting and all of a sudden this guy bursts in the door. It's the president of Capitol Records, his name is Saul Ananuchi. This Italian guy. "Okay, let's see what you got." And he just sits there, and I play him three songs, and he goes, "Sounds good to me, okay, we'll be working it out, I'll get in touch with you, blah-blah-blah-blah," and walks out the door, never see him again, and I get a record deal at Capitol.

AW:

But you didn't play "Early Morning Rain?"

BL:

I did not play "Early Morning Rain." I can't even remember what I played. I need to figure that out. But, I get this record deal and they give me \$10,000 advance.

AW:

And this is 1969?

BL:

Nineteen sixty-nine, getting into seventy.

AW:

That's a lot of money. That's a year's wages.

BL:

That's a lot of freaking money. I buy a Dotson pickup truck and a Martin guitar from Westwood Music, next door to UCLA, and I had this Martin and I got my Dotson pickup truck. And I'm driving down a—I think I might have told this story in the other—but I'm driving down this road,

and I pick up a hitchhiker. And, it turns out, he's from Germany and he's an auto mechanic. And I'm telling him my story and he's telling me his, and my life story lasted maybe two blocks. That's what I—when I tell the story now, I say not much had happened to me. And he says [in accent] “Oh, the only other Texan I know is from Dallas. He's a musician too, his name is Mike Murphey.” And, I'm getting kind of ahead of myself because, back in Red River, the songs that really affected me Mike Murphey's songs.

AW:

That Three Faces West—

BL:

That Three Faces West had done

AW:

Like “Texas Morning” and—

BL:

“Texas Morning” he had already written “Wildfire”, “Fort Worth I Love You” and, I just thought that, as good as any songs I had heard, and they were from a Texan. So, for this guy to say, Mike Murphey, it blew my mind. I gave him my number. One more of this synergistic, fortunate meeting of a person that, if I hadn't picked up that hitchhiker, where would I have been. If the girl hadn't walked into the place, I wouldn't have gone to Red River, I wouldn't have met him, I wouldn't have heard the Mike Murphey songs.

AW:

Let's back up a little bit too, because, last time—or one of the times we've talked before you told that great story about the mechanic and kind of things that happened after when you tracked down Murphey et cetera, but you said something interesting just a minute ago. You said, “After that first time you were in Red River, before you went back you had grown musically.

BL:

Yeah.

AW:

How did that happen and what do you mean?

BL:

Well, I think what has happened is at this point, I'd seen these guys play and I'd sort of learned some Murphey songs and the way I learned them were—and learned some of the songs they were playing, they wouldn't teach them to me, they made you come to the show, “No, I'm not

going to teach them.” And so I had to go to these shows, many of them, to look at their hands and kind of learn them, I can write down the lyrics. It was sort of almost teaching me. And so I learned these songs and I would start playing them and I went back to Lubbock and by that time I got a gig at the Berkshire Inn, remember that steak house?

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
And I played four or five nights a week, so I was playing a lot and I was playing those songs and writing some more and I was growing musically. Along about that same time my brother who was in various bands said to me, “We have a chance to play a gig this summer out in, I want to say Plainview, but somewhere like that, not too far away from Lubbock, and the drummer’s name was Shriver or something like that and he had been in the Rhythm Masters. And he goes, “This will be a version of the Rhythm Masters and we’ll do a trio and you play bass.” And I said, “I don’t know how to play bass,” and he goes, “You’ll learn,” so he showed me some rudimentary I V stuff and we played rock and roll or whatever and so for the first time really, I was growing as a musician that way too, and I played some—

AW:
Because having to play a different instrument, showed you how the music was connected in a different way?

BL:
And how it was put together, you know the bottom, and the drums, I had never thought that before. I was a folk singer before, suddenly I was playing rock but from a different angle. And you know this is one of those things that you don’t even think of because I’d said that when my deal fell through and his deal fell through, Murphey handed me a bass to come back, I don’t know how to play. I’d said I don’t know how to play a bass but in fact I did. We wore nehru suits I mean it was like, I was playing a bass guitar that belonged to my brother, I believe it was a Gibson and I was learning what makes a band, the different components of a band. So by the time I went back to Red River I had had all this experience playing with them

AW:
And you said you were starting to write too?

BL:
Well I had written, I had written a lot but I mean I had—one of the things that had happened that first summer is Hubbard and I wrote a song called “Life in the Pines,” and we wrote another one called, “Freeway Church of Christ.”

AW:

Yeah. Gonzos recorded that I remember.

BL:

I don't know if the Gonzos—

AW:

I know I've heard it.

BL:

[singing] "I walked in the Freeway Church of Christ, I was seeking some sweet and pure advice. I saw her singing in the choir, her body set my soul on fire. Her voice rang out, 'My God to Thee,' I joined in and I sang the harmony. I knew it was that she had stolen my heart when our eyes met I breathed, 'How Great Thou Art.'" [Laughs]

AW:

You know I know I've seen that—

BL:

Hubbard recorded it.

AW:

Hubbard recorded it? I could have sworn it was on a Gonzo record, but you know the Gonzo records because you wrote them.

BL:

Yeah I don't think it's on them, but, you know, I wish it was. I'd like to do it again, maybe I should—now that I'm making this record do that. But and then Rick and I had written a song called, "Head Full of Nothing," that Jerry Jeff ended up recording. So actually some songs that I could say were fairly decent songs were starting to come out, you know in collaboration with these Three Faces West guys. By the time I came back again, I had a little better handle on it, and then did the Aspen thing and then going out to L.A. So I was not quite so green but still pretty green and being in this Beverly Hills, he lived in Beverly Glenn, which is right—there's Benedict Canyon, there's Beverly Glenn and then there's Beverly Hills, and Beverly Glenn just snakes all the way up through those Canyons up to Mulholland Drive. The Beach Boys lived there, a lot of people. This was this guy's life, he knew them. Once we were driving around, and we stopped at a light and looked over and there's Anthony Quinn and Randy rolls down the window, "Hey Tony." "Andy," you know, it was just like, wow! And when we were driving through Beverly Hills and there's Jack Palance standing out in the front yard of his house, two story house and Randy just pulls up and he goes, "Jack," and Jack Palance comes up to the

window and he leans in and he goes, "Randy, what's happening?" And he goes, "This is my new client, Bob Livingston." And he goes, "Dr. Livingston, I presume." Which, I've heard of that tune a million times.

AW:

But it's different hearing it from Jack Palance.

BL:

Jack Palance! And all of a sudden you hear this, "Jack! What are you doing there?" and we look up and out of the second floor is this woman. She's going, "You know you're not supposed to be here. Get the fuck out of here." And he goes, "Just wait a minute. I'm just having a little problem here and, boys, I'm going to have to go take care of this, but it's good seeing you." So, we start to drive away and she's going, "Jack, you're not supposed to be here," and he goes, "Just let me in. I just want to—" and they were divorced. And Randy goes, "It's all an act." And he goes, "Just let me in, I've got something I need to discuss with you." And she goes, "All right," and she comes down and lets him in. [Laughter] But he says, "It's all an act, they're seeing each other still but the neighbors, they have to be a certain way." But I mean, that stuff was happening and then he also had—when I was sixteen, there was a Newsweek magazine and on the cover of it was the most beautiful young girl I'd ever seen. And the name of the issue was it said, "The Californians," and she's this blonde hair on the back of the motorcycle looking back at the camera and I fell in love with this woman. I fell in love with her. And suddenly, when I'm in California that girl came walking through the door and Andy was her agent, had been. Her name was Jan Smithers and she ended up being in WKRP Cincinnati, she played a prominent role in that thing, and she just recently—I just recently connected with her, she married James Brolin and had a baby, had a kid. And she was just really interesting, funny, beautiful, and here I was involved with her for awhile. Really grew from that relationship, because she'd be with Warren Beatty one day you know, and really encouraged me musically. Well when I met Murphey, it was about the same time all this was happening so it was a big year. And Murphey said—I called Murphey up—or Murphey actually called me, "Who are you, what are you doing, why are you here?" And I told him, and he says, "Come up and let's meet," and I went up to Right Wood and he goes, "You've got to move here man, this is where it's happening, out of the city and we can still do our things." I had a record deal and—you know this hayseed from Lubbock come in with a record deal, he didn't have a record deal. And it really—it was like, What? But you need to move here, well I did and I rented a place, it was an A-Frame. You'd be snowed in, in Right Wood, but you could see the Mojave down below. It was an ideal situation. And, we farmed a publishing company called The Mountain Music Farm that Roger Miller bankrolled and Marty Michat, his drummer, ran. Marty Michat was a business guy in the L.A. thing. We got to hang out with Roger Miller some.

AW:

So how did the connection to Roger Miller come about?

BL:

Well, I think Murphey knew so many people.

AW:

Because he was staff writing at that time, right?

BL:

Roger Miller had already written "King of the Road" and all that crazy stuff.

AW:

No, I mean Murphey was staff writing.

BL:

Murphey had wrote for Screen Jims, but wasn't then. He was playing in a country band called Tex. He was playing bass in a country band called Tex writing songs, but, Herb Steiner was the steel guitar player. Boomer Castleman was the lead guitar player. A guy named Stoney Burns, or, something like that. Stoney Burke, something, was the drummer. And I saw them at the Palomino in North Hollywood, and Murphey was playing the bass. So, we moved up there. Murphey's in a band. I'm thinking I'm going to make a record any day. Meanwhile, Capitol Records was going under. They got a guy named Artie Mogull to come in and clean house and fire 150 artists and all the presidents, everybody's gone. When I got my money, I went to Hawaii for a month or a month and a half, maybe even two months. I stayed over there with some friends, and got the news, don't come back, things are weird. When I got back, I still had the record deal and I was writing some more and I was really trying to concentrate on my writing. I wrote Artie Mogull, the president of Capitol. And I wrote, "I'm Bobby Livingston, a Capitol Records recording artist, or so I'm told. But I haven't heard from you guys and I've got songs. Would you come visit me up here and discover some trees with me and I'll play you all my new songs?" And it pissed the guy off so much, because I violated the sacred breach at some time between artist and management. Management is supposed to say everything to the record guy, you never talk to him. And, he thought it was a crazy letter, and so they decided to let me go. They gave me a little more money and then kicked me out the door, so I never made the record. So, at that time, I don't have a deal, Murphey has no deal. The earthquake happens of 1971. At the time, Three Faces West, Ray Rifkin, Wayne, and B. W. Stephenson, who was called Buckwheat at that time, are all living in L.A. Up off of Mulholland Drive in some Dallas comedian's house that had gone out there. So, I at least knew someone. Well, the earthquake happens and B. W., Buckwheat, is on a plane that afternoon. And we all decide, we need to get out of here. Murphey and I had gone to a fortuneteller and she said, "You need to get out of

California.” Both of us had seen her and she told both of us the same thing. And so we said, “Let’s go back.” and he said, “I’ve got some gigs back there in Colorado and California, and why don’t you play bass with me?” And that’s when I said—

AW:

And what happened to Tex?

BL:

Tex just disbanded, I guess.

AW:

When Buckwheat left.

BL:

I’m not really sure, we need to find out why Tex—but Murphey was basically—

AW:

Yeah, I just talked to Boomer the other day, and I didn’t know that Boomer was part of that band. He mentioned he was in L.A., but he didn’t tell me the details.

BL:

He was in it, he was lead guitar player and playing those pom levers. And one of the things that happened, was, I was living in Right Wood and during the day I would go down and just ride around the desert and go to these antique shops. I bought the coolest barber chair you’ve ever seen, it was covered this thick in dust and when I cleaned it off it was like brand new. Chrome, with a pump. I buy that, I buy a piano, I bought an old radio that you can tune in Moscow and all this furniture and all this stuff, and I meet this guy named Calico Cal, which is on the road to Knott’s Berry Farm. Calico Cal has this folk art exhibit. Dolls and he plays guitar and all this stuff. But he has thousands of garishly painted dolls in villages and towns that’s he’s populated this little thing. With all kinds of Airstream trailers he’s living in and house trailers and stuff. Just a character. I meet him and I said “Murphey, you need to come meet this guy.” He meets him and ends up writing, [singing] “Goodbye, old desert rat, you half crazy wildcat. You knew where it was at, what life’s all about. Success is survival, we all toughed it out.” He said, success in survival. That’s what Cal told him. And so, Murphey went on down the road and he discovered this little silver mining town called Calico. He sat down and went into the graveyard and saw these epitaphs, he said all the ghosts started talking to him. And the first part of this he wrote, [singing] “Write me down, don’t forget my name. Write me down, don’t forget my name. Mother, can you hear me? Father—” it’s like these ghosts are talking to him. Gives me chills. And, he started writing this piece that turned in called “The Battle of Calico.” And he sold it to Kenny Rodgers and it became all-consuming for him to write this. He wrote this piece, which I

thought was just an absolute work of genius. I was with him a lot when he wrote a lot of the songs in completely different circumstances but he would include them in this piece. "The Man Came Up From Town," I was there when he wrote it, who was actually a guy that looked like—it was blonde hair, blue eyes, his girlfriend was the president of the Marxist Society in Los Angeles, a black woman. And he says, [singing] "A man came up from town with a pale look in his eyes. The turquoise oceans once in them were like the dying skies. Skies over ancient deserts, where the Mojave went to sleep. And the man came up from town and the works of his words came cheap." He writes the song about this guy, but he includes it in "The Battle of Calico." So, I'm just in total awe and saying, "This guy is a genius, these are the greatest songs I've ever heard!" And I know it, and he likes me and he's willing to give me some of his time. And I was just like—I had no record deal, he's doing this, but I had this girlfriend, Jan, who comes up every once in a while. We have this group of people who are just these mountain, funky people that play music and everything. So things are kind of going on and I'm living on my money from Capitol Records. They gave me a little card that any Bank of America, I can go in to, I can get a hundred dollars, no questions asked. And I would just do it. "Give me a hundred!" I just liked the fact of being able to get a hundred dollars, there was no credit card, no check, I just had that card and I'd walk around with a couple hundred dollars and buy antiques. Finally, one day, my deal falls through. Murphey's "Battle of Calico" is a bomb. And, that's when we go back to Texas, and the earthquake happens. We all head off, so we head back to Texas, and that's when we meet Bob Johnson and the Bar.

AW:

Yeah, and we—all though, you can probably add something to it or whatever, and I can listen to it again and again, but we've heard that story before.

BL:

Did I tell you the story of how I got to be a part of it? That's what I didn't know.

AW:

About—

BL:

When he's looking at Murphey.

AW:

--Is he funky?

BL:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah, yeah you did that. That's a wonderful story, in fact, that whole story is just terrific. I guess the series of events is really, really so interesting, the way things unfolded. How did you have sense, or maybe it was a lack of sense being at that age and so-forth, how did you have sense to go with this kind of flow instead of going into panic mode, "I can't get my hundred dollars anymore and I don't have my deal and I have to go back to school or I have to get a job." How did you work your way through that?

BL:

Well, by the time—I don't know, by the time my record deal fell through and I was just living on the money—all these things happened, like, Mike Looney, my fraternity brother, tells the story that when I got the draft lottery number, he says, "We were all on career paths, we were all business majors. And Livingston was just kind of there, and when he got the number he said to us, 'If I get a good number, I'm going to leave,' and he did, and he was the first guy that we had ever known to just quit school. I mean, wow! Quit school? He was in fraternity, and everybody was four years and get their jobs and make their millions." And I left. My parents were blown away, they sent my brother looking for me, to bring me home and things like that. but I knew that—

AW:

So, instead you got him a job in L.A., right?

BL:

Yeah. [AW Laughs] But I corrupt him and bring out. And that's the thing I don't know why, I never thought of looking back, I never looked back. I never looked back. It was always like, well, this happened, well now this happening, well that fell through but what's going to happen next? Well, here's a bass, come and play with me. Well, it was just like, okay. Well I had some basic experience, obviously, from my brother, that we came back and we were the Melodious Mountain Music Brothers. I've got a great picture.

AW:

I'm going to put this on pause.

[Pause in recording]

AW:

Now we got the pictures.

BL:

So this is in front of the Rubaiyat. So it was Michael Murphey with Robert Livingston on bass and these are pictures of the Right Wood Folk Festival. There's all of us laying in the bed. Jan Smithers is laying next to me. And we're all there, Duke and Sherry and Diana, Murphey's wife, and Murphey, were all there in that bed. That's Diana, Murphey's wife. This is a, somebody drew a picture of us when we were on stage. I made this poster [laughs]. And here's the two of us out in front of the Rubaiyat that fateful day.

AW:

This is terrific, I wish I had a magnifying glass to look at the—yeah, I see Livingston because you have the light colored hair. Great.

BL:

My glasses were so freaking thick because, for some reason, we thought they were like airplane glass.

AW:

Yeah, well those were stylish then. I had a pair that were sunglasses.

BL:

Yeah, there were sunglasses and then you—

AW:

Yeah, I had a sunglass pair.

BL:

--Pulled them out too. But that was us. I wish I had that hat. And I wore overalls. Suddenly, we're on the road and we're playing, and I'm actually making a living though it was a—when we decided to settle in Austin after this whole thing happened with *Geronimo's Cadillac*, I left. I probably told you that story too, that Murphey was so intense—and he was just—and I was so intimidated on the other end. I really wasn't—that's why it's amazing—the biggest amazing thing is any of this is happening to me because I'm not really—I wasn't a bass player. I didn't know what I was doing, I did everything by intuition and by ear. I didn't know what I, IV, V was, any of that shit. I just kind of played and, you know, I would be out of tune. It was hard for me to tune that bass and I didn't know. I'd hit a wrong note and Murphey would go, "You need to get in tune." And one night on stage he goes, "You need to get that thing in tune." And he grabbed the string and he ripped the string right off, right in front of everybody. Murphey would do things like, "When you get in tune, I'll come back on stage," and leave you there. He did that to Rick Fowler once. We all have those stories. So Murphey was really intimidating to me and I think

that maybe this is when I started smoking pot too. I had smoked pot in—the reason I think I can remember this stuff so well is because I wasn't under the influence so much. I can remember a lot of these days a lot clearer than the Jerry Jeff days, this Murphey kind of stuff. Especially when I can remember details like that. We played Castle Creek. Ray Hubbard had called me up and said, “Three Faces West—Wayne is leaving.” They had formed a band and they got a drummer, a guy named Michael McGary. I don't know how they ran across him. And Wayne was leaving and he said, “Well what are you doing?” And I said, “Well, I'm playing with Murphey,” and he goes, “Well, would you consider coming and playing with me? We have all this money and we split it four ways and blah-blah-blah and all these gigs and everything.” Murphey was just paying me really dirt-cheap. Not much at all. And, these were my friends, these were people that I was an equal sort of. I was so freaked out—I've got pictures of this too. I was so blown away from the scene that when I went in—and intimidated by Three Faces West, Snappy, Patter, and I just said, “I'm not going to be another Wayne and contribute to this.” So I wouldn't talk. I would just do songs. Hubbard would make fun of me. I would sit, barefoot, long hair, and I would sit and play bass. I'd play the bass and play the parts and sing all the stuff, but then I would just go [makes motion] and Ray would go [makes motion] and there's Bob. He would make all these snide comments about me. Slowly but surely I gained confidence—self-confidence playing with them. And he had “Redneck Mother.” That's when he wrote “Redneck Mother.” He wouldn't play it. He was afraid he was going to get beat up, like in the song, but I learned it. I probably told that story.

AW:

No, I don't think so.

BL:

You know, I learned the song. This all kind of runs—is a mishmash too, but, I knew the song “Redneck Mother” and we played all these places, oh Carney, Nebraska, Broken Bow, Nebraska, Kansas City. We did all these Buckets of Blood and these Holiday Inns and everything. Ray was afraid, you couldn't do it. It was “Okie from Muskogee world.” This was the answer, and I thought this would be perfect, and he was afraid he's—that it would really piss somebody off, so he wouldn't do it when I learned it. So at some point, out on the road, Murphey calls me up and he says, “What are you doing?” and I said, “Well, I'm playing with them. I'm having a great time.” And he goes, “Bob Johnson told me I've got to get you back in the band. He says, ‘Where's Livingston? You need to get him back in the band.’ What do you think? We're going to a tour, we're going all over Kingdom Come.” And I thought, okay. Well, by that time Gary Nunn's in the band and he's playing bass.

AW:

In which band?

BL:

Murphey's band. And here's Gary Nunn. All my career, now that I'm thinking of it, has been somewhere between intimidation and blind luck and some cosmic, never looking back kind of thing. Because, here I am with Gary Nunn who had played the Fabulous Sparkles who I'm just in awe of, the greatest Rock and Roll band.

AW:

For the tape, that's when we were in high school, back in Lubbock, when we were going to separate schools together. The Sparkles, that was the band.

BL:

They were the best rock and roll in the world, they were better than the Beatles. They did all that stuff better, and Lucky Floyd and James Brown—

AW:

And they were hip. And they were funky. Before we knew what funky was they were funky.

BL:

They were a four-piece. Lucky Floyd was the drummer. Stanley Smith was the guitar player. Bobby Smith was the bass player. And, that's it, Lucky Floyd was the drummer. Well, they decided that Lucky needed to be more out front, so they got another drummer, Jimmy Merritt, and Gary Nunn on organ. They had double drums, but then Lucky could jump out in front. They played all the senior proms and all that stuff, they were great. They came down here to Texas and played. They were great. They played, not only in Lubbock, but they just played everywhere. They had a great song list and could play the shit out of all of them. So here I am at the Saxon Pub the night before I'm leaving and I'm playing—on 38 1/2 Street was the original Saxon Pub, over on the highway. Everybody played there. We played there many times with Murphey. And, Gary Nunn, unbeknownst to me, is living in Austin. He was playing in a band called Genesee [?] [01:03:28]. Laton Depending [?] [01:03:30], Gary Nunn, John Inmon, Chuck Rodgers on drums. Playing frat gigs and this, that, and the other, and Gary's just not making enough money, and he's thinking, I'm going to go back to Lubbock to go back to pharmacy school. He's literally packed up. And somebody comes and tells him about this guy, Michael Murphey, and you just need to here him, let's go out. So, we go out, Gary said he didn't know this was coming. But, for some reason, why did I know it was coming? Because, I was leaving Murphey, I told Murphey this was the last gig.

AW:

And this was before you go to Three Faces?

BL:

This is before I go to Three—I'm going off to join this band, it was called Texas Fever

AW:

Okay, I was going to ask about that. It's not Three Faces West any longer.

BL:

It's not Three Faces West any longer but they're trying to come up with a name. They call themselves Texas Fever. We try to build a better name. We're in Breckenridge, Colorado, we think, let's figure out a new name. We take two hats. We put adjectives and modifying words in one hat, and nouns and whatever kind of words in the other hat. And you come up with "The Bloody Chimney", "The Ice Water Enema," [laughter] "Tucker Boots," we thought, That's a cool name, "Tucker Boots." I ended up calling him Tucker, Tucker Boots, we pulled his name out of a hat. But, we decided on going we can't be Texas Fever.

AW:

That was probably a wise decision.

BL:

So Texas Fever was the band and I was leaving the next day to go meet them. We're playing at Castle Creek and I'm totally intimidated and freaked out of the scene. I look out and in the audience is Gary Nunn. Right there. And I'm paranoid as hell. And not only is he sitting there, but I see him like a cartoon, like a vulture sitting there on a barbed wire fence, just looking at his prey. Looking ready to swoop down. So I'm playing, nervous. And we play this stuff and Gary's just staring. And what Gary said was it was the most amazing musical thing he'd ever seen because Murphey was playing his own songs and he hadn't seen anybody do that. His own music, and his own songs, and they were so great and he was going, "God, I've got songs and I never get to play them. Wouldn't that be something to be able to do a whole set of your own material." Because it's all cover music he's playing. That night Murphey walked up and said, "I need a bass player. Bob's leaving, will you play bass for me?" And Gary on the spot goes, "Yeah." So I go off to play with Three Faces West. How long this lasted? Maybe six or eight months, something like that, but that's when Johnson calls Murphey and says, "We need to get Livingston back in this band." I go back. By that time Murphey and Gary are living together on North Lamar, 6214 North Lamar. There's this motorcycle shop and in the back you could drive down this little dirt road alley. There was this main house with a bunch of little satellite houses, it was like a compound. Gary and Murphey lived there and they built a rehearsal studio. So, I remember one of the first rehearsals, going in there, and there's Gary. Once again I'm sort of feeling, well, Gary's the bass player now and what are we going to do? And Murphey says, "Well y'all just switch around and Gary you're—" so we would switch around from piano to bass or guitar. Sometimes, Gary would play bass and I would play guitar and/or piano, vice

versa. We worked it out between us how that would work. We became really good friends. I was growing musically. Suddenly I was playing piano too. Gary and I were writing songs. I had met Jerry Jeff in Los Angeles, I might have told this on another story too. So, Murphey had taken me to see him open for Linda Ronstadt as a solo at the Troubadour as a solo. We met him and then he shows up in Red River. Came to Red River and had gotten a record deal for MCA and needed to write songs. He wrote on that old beat up guitar. It's cosmic because he walks up to the saloon and he had a guitar that was a Royce Max Stage Deluxe Gibson that had gone out of his—he had traded it for something else and he never saw it again. When he walked in the door, he saw this guitar, and he had been writing the first two—he was in the middle of writing this song, and he sees the last verse of his song. He wrote that, he wrote “Hill Country Rain”, “Charlie Dunn,” a couple more, “Salvation Army Band,” I think. He had this passle of songs, and we became friends there. Well, I go back to Austin and I had Jerry Jeff's number, heard he moved to Austin. I called him up and said, “Jerry, we're having a rehearsal at Murphey's at his studio. Come on man, you need to meet these guys.” When he walked in and poked his head in the door, it was like instant band. It was Gary, me, Michael McGary, Craig Ellis on guitar. We were getting ready to do—I believe we were ready to do—no, we were rehearsing for the tour to back up for *Geronimo's Cadillac*. Jerry Jeff said it was instant band, well, I got some songs. That's when we went to Rap Cleaners, the one on 6th Street, tape recorder. We cut half of it there, Murphey goes out on tour. We're in New York City playing the Bitter End. Jerry Jeff shows up and says, “I got a studio over here on such-a-such-a street.” And gets me and Gary to come down, and Craig, and Andy Newmark is the drummer who is a major session player. We cut “Ellie Freeway,” “Salvation Army Band,” a few songs like that.

AW:

In New York?

BL:

In New York. And Murphey is kind of going—

AW:

I was going to ask, how was Murphey's vibe during all of this?

BL:

Well, Murphey's vibe's not so great. Murphey's feeling like his band is looking somewhere else. So I think he's kind of getting a little freaked out. That's when we go back and—

AW:

So, were he and Jerry Jeff ever close?

BL:

Oh yeah. They were friends, you know? Folky friends. But, that was the great story that Murphey told about waking up and hearing “Sangria Wine” because I never in my wildest dreams thought that Murphey cared a rat's ass about me or anybody else in his band leaving him. To me, you know, we were fired. We were sent home packing, but Gary went to London with him and wrote. It's a cosmic story, it really is.

AW:

And, for the tape, this is one that came out when we were—the three of us sat down at Marble Falls, right?

BL:

Yeah. And Murphey said that, “Not only has he stolen my band, but he's stolen my music.” The way he looked at it. I never thought that Murphey was suffering at all. I thought he was just on his own trip and did he own thing. He was set. He was Michael Murphey. He had major record deal. He was set. He was doing his thing. And then, of course, what he did was, he made one more record that was sort of a nothing, but they go to Caribou Ranch Studio in Colorado and they do that *Blue Sky Night Thunder*, that has that wildfire on it, which is a killer record. Has Desert Rat on it. And I have to admit, when I heard that, I knew it was a hit. It was just so powerful. Great stuff. But, you know, suddenly—by that time, to jump ahead and backwards and weave into the other story, because, we've already got that down, but suddenly, I'm on the road with Gary Nunn, me, Craig Hillis, Kelly Dunn, who comes from California, who is Michael McGary's, who is the drummer, a friend of his. He said, “Man, we're making records down here and we're playing with all these crazy Texans that don't know shit, and I think there's room for you.” And he comes down and he has a B-3 organ, and so he joins up, and Jerry Jeff just loved it. So we got a big band and we go to Luckenbach and make that record. Gary's coming, on the tail end of London, being disillusioned, going back to pharmacy school again at Tech. He's depressed. We said, “No, come out here.” And so he did and played that song. Played that song. What would Texas music—I don't think, above a lot of songs, even a lot of Willie Nelson songs, that song—maybe it's just because I'm so close to it but—

AW:

No, you're exactly right. I mean, we were talking about this in the car on the way over. There are these pivotal moments. You know, *Geronimo's Cadillac*, the album, was a pivotal moment, musically. “Viva Terlingua” is a musical moment. And one of the things that's most musical about it is that song.

BL:

“London Homesick Blues.” And it became the theme song for Austin City Limits got disseminated all over the world, really.

AW:

Then the chumps like me who were playing in cover band had to play it at least twice a night.

BL:

Sure, everybody did. It was so slow, the way we recorded it. Because it was the second time, I told you that story, right? This was basically the second time we ever played it.

AW:

Well, and his comment, "I got to put myself back in that place." Because he was trying to remember that song.

BL:

Well, what it was was, we finished—he said, "Play that song you played for us this afternoon." My big claim to fame, and I'll say it now for all of you historians that, 150 years after this is recorded, are looking back, this is my one big claim to fame. Gary had the song, but it started out with, [singing] "It's cold over here, and I swear, I wish they'd turn the heat on." That's the first thing he wrote. So that was his first verse. When I heard the song I said, "This is great, but I think you should put that second first that says, 'When you're down on your luck and you ain't got a buck.' That should be the first verse." So he said, "Yeah, that's a good idea." So that's my big claim to fame. So he played it, that night. Jerry Jeff said, "Play that song you did." He did, but it's the first time we'd ever played it. We played the chorus over and over and over and over and over and over, so by the time it was over, the crowd went crazy, we knew the song, and that's when Jerry Jeff says, "Look, I broke a string during that song, but even so, now we know it, let's do it again right now." And Gary was so—because we had sung that song over and over, the chorus, "I want to go home—" and people were singing and singing and people were screaming and Gary was having a religious experience. [Laughter] It was like he was singing his song in front of this packed house and they were going crazy and singing along and he was in Nirvana. When it was over, to have Jerry Jeff say, "Do it again," That's when he says, "I've got to put myself back in that place." My other claim to fame, I said, "That was by Gary P. Nunn." and Jerry Jeff, to his credit, left that on the record. Here was a guy, in his band getting to do—that "London Homesick Blues" was probably—that and "Bo Jangles." Of course, it was all of them. It seemed like you were doing a greatest hits review of Jerry Jeff sometimes because people loved all that stuff. "L. A. Freeway," "Old Beat Up Guitar", "Charlie Dunn", "Taking it as it Comes", "Pick up the Tempo", "Desperado's Waiting for a Train." All the great stuff, whether he wrote or not, became his songs. Jerry Jeff was also kind of weird, he'd go, "Here's a little song we put together," and sing "Redneck Mother." Which he didn't write, but, "Here's a little song we put together." I heard him say that once. Boomer has a story about Murphey taking credit for all of "Texas Morning." He said, "Don't you ever say you wrote that without mentioning my name." I don't know if he said that in his story.

AW:

Yeah, he did, but he wasn't quite that emphatic about it. But, Boomer, doesn't say anything without a smile.

BL:

Yeah, I know it.

AW:

Well, you also mentioned today while we were having lunch about meeting Terry Allen in India and this is a great story, and I don't think we've talked about that all any of the last times we've

BL:

Let me pee and I'll come back and tell it to you

AW:

All right

BL:

You need to, too?

AW:

I'm going to put it on pause.

[Pause in recording]

AW:

Okay we've made our phone calls and various things, and we're back we're going to talk about Terry Allen and too bad that's why we roll the tape all the time but when the tape was off you were showing me great photos. I could have held them up I guess to the tape recorder and [laughter] one of them was you and Terry Allen and an engineer holding a big two-inch roll of Ampex tape, 456 tape in—

BL:

In Madras, which is now Chennai.

AW:

Or as we used to call it in the mid-sixties, "Madress", bleeding Madress

BL:

Bleeding Madress, golly. It had to bleed.

AW:

Yeah I had a bleeding Madras sport coat.

BL:

Me too.

AW:

And I thought it was the coolest thing that ever happened.

BL:

Oh, we all did, that was just the coolest thing and did it bleed though?

AW:

Well only if you washed it and we dry-cleaned it and so instead of looking like the coolest shirts that we wore they would bleed when they were washed and your mom would complain because it screwed everything up in the laundry. The jacket never had that cool look because we sent it to the dry cleaners.

BL:

It still was cool though. Why they called it Madras, because Madras [pronounces Mad-ross] did it come from India?

AW:

Yeah. Well it's just West Texas, we call it Amarillo instead of "Amar-ee-yo." [Laughter] So when you were at lunch you were telling me that was the first time you'd met Terry.

BL:

See, I had heard of Terry Allen and I was living over on Kerr Avenue in Austin. My wife and kids were living in India. I'd heard of Terry Allen various times but had never met him and everybody said you remind me of Terry or you guys would get along great, I'd heard that a few times. So, finally, one day the phone rings and it's this guy Terry Allen and he's saying, "I'm working on a project with David Burn of the Talking Heads," because he knew him from that True West and a few other things that he was involved with, and he was going to India he said. And David Burn was going to go to—he was working on a couple of tracks and he wanted to get Indian musicians and do it. Would I be interested in helping him if he got there, and when am I going to be there? And I said well, "I'm going to be there in two months or something." So I kind of just forgot all about it. Well, I got a telegram from him when I was in India and we finally—I was able to book a call. You had to book a calls to get a telephone call through. No internet, I think this was before internet, certainly before internet had reached India. I'm trying to remember what year it was, it's got to be somewhere around 1993 or something like that, '94

maybe. He said, "I'm in Madras and can you help me find some musicians, do you know anybody I could call because David is gone back and I'm just kind of left—I don't know anybody here and Jo Harvey's with me." So I knew sort of an impresario whose name was—what was his name? Something like Adondum or something. He was a promoter and a manager and a booking agent sort of fellow for musicians and things in Madras, so I somehow had this guys' name and gave it to Terry and Terry called him and he lined up some great South Indian musicians. Now there's two different styles of music, in India, at least, the Northern people play what they call Hindustani, which is sitar, it has a lot of Muslim and mogul influences, and Ravi Shankar is the most well-known satirist at least in America and he plays the sitar. The Tabla is the two little two drums, the sarod, and of course, the violin is up there too—

AW:

And the sarod is what?

BL:

The sarod is like a plectrumed instrument it has a head of some sort of skin and it has this big fret bar with a lot of strings and you play it with a plectrum.

AW:

Like a banjo and a sitar combined?

BL:

Sort of. And Ali Akbar Kahn is the world's [in accent] foremost exponent on the sarod and that is Hindustani music. The South Indian musicians play a style called Carnatic. Traditionally when India was invaded, they always invade—from Alexander the Great, to the Turks, the Moguls, to the British, they all invaded in the north. The darker skinned people, the Dravidians all moved to the south. Their traditional Hindu, they all came to the south and their style of music was the prevalent style in all of India, and it's all much older than Hindustani. Once I attended an international music symposium in Delhi, and when the man stood up to explain the difference between Hindustani and Carnatic music he said, [in accent] "Shiva came down from his mountain and he came to the Vina," and the Vina is this double gourd instrument and my son Tucker is in India right now learning it. It has a big dragon head, I could bring one out I've got one in the attic that's melting right now. I'm going to have to bring it out. But it has this big resin scallop frets, big dragon head. [In accent] "And he took that and cut it in half with his sword," and one half became the sitar. And likewise, on the drum, the two sided drum, Mridangam, he cut that and put them on the end and that became Tabla showing that Carnatic music was there way before Hindustani. So these musicians that this Adendum, or whatever his name was, I'll try to figure that out, got Terry involved with and connected him with were Carnatic style musicians. The guy played a Vina, we had Mridangam, we had a tabla player, also, and a man that I had known that I got involved with as well whose name was Vishweshwaran who played

the santoor which is like an Appalachian Hammer Dulcimer but it was a santoor. So he played and he was very traditional, very great fellow and I can't remember exactly what else was on that session. Anyway, so I come to—he calls me and he says, “Get to Madras.” Well I could have either flown, or I don't know—

AW:

Now where were you at the time?

BL:

I was in Kerala, which was probably well it was a sixteen hour train ride away because that's how long it took me to get to the train and it's more on the West coast, while Madras is on the Bay of Bengal and sort of down there at the tip. It's the West and the South coast—I mean the East and the South coast. Big city. So he says, “Come to Madras.” So I get on the train, it takes me sixteen hours to get there, I get there early in the morning, seven-thirty or something. And I go and I had made this trip before, I don't know if I told this story before, when John Inmon and I made that trip when we went on the same train to Madras to audition for the U.S. State Department to get our first shows there. So here I was making the same journey but to meet Terry Allen not knowing what to think. It's 110 degrees in the shade out there, and I'm dressed like Ramar of the Jungle, I've got my khakis on and the lightest thinnest material and wearing what they call Chappals, which are sandals, chappals. And I call him up at this hotel Kanamara, nice hotel, five star hotel, and it's Terry Allen and he says, “Meet me in the restaurant, I'll be right down.” So I go in the restaurant and I'm sitting there, and I'm at a table and there's a partition right just to the left of me and it's a partition you can't see through but goes down about to knee level and then goes on up above—all you can really see—and there's a sidewalk on the other side that's outside, and it's glass and people are walking and you can see people's feet. And I'm just kind of looking at their feet and here's someone with sandals like I'm wearing and then there's really dark brown feet and black feet, and then these feet come by, bare feet that are tattoos all over them that belong to Bedouins and I'm noticing their feet and suddenly here are these black lizard skin boots walking. [AW Laughs] And followed by a woman in capris pants with skulls and cross bones on them and I go, Okay here comes. And around the corner is Terry Allen all dressed all in black with his lizard skin boots and Jo Harvey also in black in skulls and cross bones and they are a sight. And that's my first meeting with Terry, and we had breakfast and talked and went to the studio to suss it out and met all these musicians, and told them what we wanted to do, and I was able to kind of talk to them and tell them that we're going to be playing some country and eastern music because I had done a lot of that in my State Department travels and played with a lot of Indian musicians

AW:

And so they kind of knew what your gig was, the Indian musicians?

BL:

Well they didn't know because I had never played with them before but I told them, I kind of gave them a run down of what I had done, and that really, these are Western songs but just do what you do, we want the flavor of your expertise but we're not going to be playing in seventeen or thirteen or any of these time signatures, we're just going to be playing these songs. And one of them, which I was really excited to play was, "New Delhi Freight Train," Terry Allen's song. And he had found me a Steinberger bass somewhere, you know the kind that doesn't have the tuners up on the neck—

AW:

It has them down at the bridge?

BL:

It has them down here, down on the bridge. So its this weird little bass, it's strange playing it. Cause you think you're not in the right place but it was a Steinberger bass and he had that. So we were plugged in, so I played bass, Terry played this funky piano that he had brought with him from Texas or somewhere—

AW:

It's just like a keyboard?

BL:

It was a keyboard, funky keyboard, and he played that, and I played bass, and we had Vina, Tabla, Mridangam, the Santoor, couple other instruments maybe a violin on a song. The santoor really sounded great, and it's in "New Delhi Freight Train," because it sounds like a train is—if you ever hear this cut, these four songs we cut, it was "New Delhi Freight Train", "Big Old White Boys," a song called, "Yo-ho-ho," [singing] "Yo-ho-ho Yo-ho-ho," that was the chorus. It was about a pirate or something. [Laughter] I can't remember. And I can't remember what the fourth song was, but one of the songs of course was, "Big Ole White Boys," and you know those lyrics which was so hilarious, us doing that.

AW:

So how did the Indian musicians react to a Terry Allen tune? I'm just curious.

BL:

They loved it. They just thought it was the most fun thing in the world. Because for one thing he was paying them, and probably paying them good money. He said that he had to pay them a lot more money than he usually paid anybody to play for him, but because this man, this impresario set up the deal—

AW:

He was getting a cut.

BL:

He was probably getting a cut, and look I'm going to this and it's this studio. And not only at the studio you would be right in the middle of a cut and there would be a power outage and there was no power so you'd—

AW:

[Laughs] Start over—

BL:

--Break for tea. You'd sit around for an hour and they'd bring in these big trays full of tea and you'd drink tea and talk and commiserate and get to know these guys and them get to know you, and Terry didn't realize he was paying for the tea and paying for the boy to go get the tea—

AW:

And paying for the outage. [Laughs]

BL:

And paying for the studio, and still paying you know and paying for the guys, they were still on the clock. And so, you know, but we cut these four songs and then there was something about—I can't remember this too well, but I think I missed my plane and I had to come back, or maybe it was that I forgot my ticket and Jo Harvey had the ticket. Need to talk to Terry, Terry knows the whole story and he never lets me forget about it and always that's what he likes to talk about.

AW:

Well I'll see him in about a month and I'll get him to tell me this story.

BL:

Yeah get him to tell his version of the story—

AW:

Want me to send you a copy? [Laughs]

BL:

And he'll probably make it sound like I'm a complete Bozo, which is okay. You know, it was interesting and going to eat Indian food and he would just dive right in to eat the spiciest of all but he never took off those boots, and he never got out of his black, and it was an interesting—

you know and that was my really one and only Terry Allen story except for running across him over the years.

AW:

Excuse me just a second.

[Pause in recording]

AW:

All right we're going to take a break and turn on the video.

BL:

Do you have any idea what this is?

AW:

No, I'll hold this up to the recorder but maybe I'll just turn it off.

[Pause in Recording]

AW:

[Acoustic guitar playing, tuning] All right, let me just preface the tape so that in years to come I know we've got the right one. It's the thirty-first of March, 2010. We're at Bob Livingston's house in Austin, it's about a quarter past three in the afternoon.

BL:

You know I first started making these foreign tours, of course, you know how hard it is on instruments to be on the road. And when I first went I had a Martin D28, still have it and took it to India and had it there for several tours and it just started folding up like an Autumn leaf. All the bridge came undone and the neck warped so I had to retire that—

AW:

Was that the Martin you bought with your—

BL:

Yeah I bought that guitar—

AW:

With your Capitol—

BL:

With my Capitol money, and I still have it, it's beautiful inlay work on it as well. But then John Inmon took a guild acoustic over there and left it, and I think to this day it's there somewhere and the action's probably high. And then this guitar here used to belong to Jerry Jeff and I was—and we had made an album called “Cowboy Boots and Bathing Suits” in Belize, recorded on the spot, and he played this and Lloyd played it on this record and I was sitting there picking it [strums guitar] on his front porch one night and he said, “Yeah, I'm thinking of getting rid of that guitar.” And I just said, “Jerry Jeff, I need this guitar, I need a guitar like this, it's a good strong Journeyman's guitar, nothing fancy but it sounds really good and had this strange pick up which it's a Takamine pick up that he bought the Takamine just so he could tear out the guts and had a big hole drilled and stuck this in—

AW:

Put that in the Gibson?

BL:

Put that in there and it sounds really good when you plug it in, it's a J45, it's about a 1992 or something like that, maybe '91. So he and I worked out a deal, I had a song that the pilot, Lang Bobby and I wrote called “Wanted for Love” and I had the publishing on it so Jerry says, “You know I tell you what, I'll trade you that guitar for the publishing on that song. You know Susan doesn't like to write any of those piddly-ass checks.” And I went, “Really?” And he goes, “No—” And I said, “But I'm half the song writer, so she's going to even have to write more of piddly-ass check or less of a piddly-ass check.” And he goes, “Well—” So he realized it didn't make any sense what he was saying, but he goes, “Well that's just the way it is.” And I don't think to anyone else he demands a publishing but any song that I've ever cut—that he's cut of mine, not every song, but a lot of my songs he's wanted the publishing on it and that one he did, and so I did, I traded him the publishing for this guitar. And I started taking it to India, the neck has broken four times, right here, broke in Vietnam, broke in Morocco, and then a couple of times here, and there's a bunch of cracks along here and everything it's been through it but it's still here [strums guitar] and I'm proud of it.

AW:

Sound good too.

BL:

And before I get into this I also wonder—the City of Austin, before we made our last trip we went to Africa last—we headed out in November. So through November and December we first started out in Switzerland, went to France and then flew down to Rwanda, we played in Malawi, Lesotho, and ended up in Namibia, which is bigger than Texas and Louisiana combined, and all

these African countries and had all these incredible experience and maybe I'll talk about that sometime a little more

AW:

Yeah, we sure can.

BL:

But the city council gave us this proclamation, we called it the Bob Livingston Trio, the tour, and it says, "Be it known, that whereas singer/songwriter Bob Livingston has spent his career drawing audiences of all nationalities into his performances through his songs, stories, and ingenious humor. And whereas this month Bob along with violin, cello, mandolin player and vocalist Richard Bowden and guitarist Bradley Copp, members of Livingston's multi-cultural group, Cowboys and Indians, will take part in a tour to Africa sponsored by the U.S. state department. And whereas the tour is designed to bridge cultural barriers around the world through the universal medium of music, we wish the Bob Livingston Trio much success as they take the Austin sound to Rwanda, Malawi, Lesotho, and Namibia. Now therefore, I, Lee Leffingwell, Mayor of the City of Austin, Texas do hereby proclaim the Bob Livingston Trio as Austin's International Music Ambassadors." So there we have it, we're official. [Strums guitar]

AW:

Very cool.

BL:

And I guess now we want to talk about maybe a collaboration of a song and I'm in the middle of making a record at long last, it's been six years since my last record, and it just takes me a long time, what can I say? And I met, through a mutual friend, Susan Hernden, who is a young singer/songwriter who I'm going to be co-producing an album on her here this month in April. I met her, actually, over the internet when I was in India, February, two years ago. I was there visiting my son, Tucker, and I had a gig that I was going to do, I guess I was playing the Blue Door in Oklahoma City, and I wrote Terry Ware and said, "Terry is there any other gigs you think I could get?" And so sort of, in his network, put out an email, "Bob Livingston is coming to town does anybody know—" and this Susan Hearndon, this young singer/songwriter said, "I think I could get Bob a gig." So she got me a couple of shows actually. And I went up to Oklahoma, met her, I played these shows, played the Blue Door, and then another time I came back and we decided to write a song together, and we started a song and I just kind of picked up the guitar and started singing this song and the first thing that came to my mind [strums guitar] was [sings while playing guitar] "She's an Oklahoma girl, singing songs at midnight, with a lonesome cowboy from the Lone Star State. Picking in the kitchen, da-da-da-da-da, la-la-la-da-do-do-do-la-da-do-da-dum-dum," that's as much as I had. And so, as the time went by I kept telling Susan, "We ought to do that song Oklahoma Girl," and she said, "Yeah we should."

So we both got a gig in Kansas City, and while we were up there she played her set and I played mine and we worked a little bit on it when we were in Kansas City, but then she introduced me to a really great singer/songwriter whose name is John Hadley who lives in Norman. He's written a bunch of number ones, I can't think of them, but he did. And had songs on records by George Jones, and the Dixie Chicks, and Garth Brooks had a hit with one of his songs. So I drove up—I guess it's been six months, seven months now, drove up there and we wrote five songs together, and sort of as an afterthought the last night I was there, Susan showed up after a gig pretty late at night, and I said, "Let's work on that Oklahoma Girl." So I played it for John and Susan was there and we were sitting around his fireplace, there in his living room, and we started working on it and we pretty much have it finished, or I just cut it and she's going to cut it on her album—

AW:

tell me when you say you, "Work on it," what do you mean? This is like get out sledge hammers and chisels or what? [Laughter]

BL:

Pretty much. Well I pretty much had the melody, and the first—not all of the first verse but sort of the idea, that here was you know this young girl and they're actually singing, you know it says, "She's an Oklahoma girl singing songs at midnight," so she must be a singer too, "With a lonesome cowboy from the Lone Star State. We're picking in the kitchen," so we're playing. And I had that much done, and John Hadley took over and he just said, "How are you going to get these people out of the kitchen and into the world?" So he came up with "Dancing by the porch light, down the moonlit path, and through the garden gate." So they're out into the world and then at this point I'm still just kind of chugging with chords, and I started yodeling. [Yodels] Let me start it [strums guitar and sings] "She's an Oklahoma girl singing songs at midnight with a lonesome cowboy from the Lone Star State. Picking in the kitchen, dancing by the porch light, down the moonlit path and through the garden gate," and I just thought maybe I should yodel at this point. [singing and strumming] "Yippee-yi-yo-cayay," and he said, "Out into the midnight, yodel-lo-teoo," she said, "Sky above so clear," and we had talked about the stars and things in Oklahoma that really it can only happen here, these patterns that we see this is just for us, because every once in a while there was a cold night, freezing cold, and we'd look outside and see these stars every once in a while so that got him to the song too. [Sings and strums] "The stars are in a pattern yodel-oo-oteeay, that can only happen here, yippee-ay oo-cayee, the trial shines out before us, yodel-oo-dee-oh, all around the world," and then we just wrapped it up, "Yodel-oo-yodel-ay for that lone star cowboy, yodel oo-otee yo, and that Oklahoma girl." So we had that much and it was getting really late, it was probably three-thirty in the morning by that time. We had worked on other songs too. We had a song called "Ruby" that's called "Ruby's Shoes," about a little girl that told me a story once, she took my hand and I said, "Look I'm trying to get so I can see the sunset on the Brazos, come on Ruby, we got to hurry," and she said,

“Take my hand, I know a short cut to the sun.” And I thought it was so great so I told Hadley that and in fact his granddaughter’s name is Ruby and his grandmother’s name was Ruby, so I mean it was cosmic. And so we were working on that too, and Susan was there and she tried to throw in a line here and there but we kept coming back to this “Oklahoma Girl.” So about three-thirty in the morning we were tired and about to go to bed and he said, “We’ll get it in the morning,” and I said, “God it would be great if we could just get that last verse, how hard can it be?” So Hadley just kind of—he’s standing up, the fire is here, he’s standing up and we have a stool and he has the song on it and he just reached down [hums] “We’ll try that.” And so what he wrote was [sings and strums] “She grew up in Okemah, moved on up to Tulsa, started playing guitar in a band. He blew in from Texas, walked into the roadhouse, she put down her guitar and she wrapped him around the finger of her hand. Yippee-ya-yo-cayee,” so that was our last verse, or second verse and he just [snaps] he wrote it like he was taking dictation, and it’s nothing great but it kind of tells how they met and a little bit about her. [Coughs] And so it’s a Texas swing sort of song, and I cut it and Lloyd Maines is playing steel, we got twin fiddles are going to go on it and I’m looking for a yodeler, what was her name?

AW:

Jill Jones.

BL:

Jill Jones, we don’t know for sure if she’s going to do it, but I’m looking for a girl that can sing and yodel and we could do this yodeling duet together which would be kind of unique thing I think. And so that’s kind of where I come in from my perspective, where this song came from. And we have some rejected lyrics somewhere but this is basically John Hadley’s handwriting—

AW:

He has, as my grandmother would have said, “A neat hand.”

BL:

Yes he does. And he loves to write things down and he has those books, those song books, page after page with pictures—

AW:

Yes he does. Yeah it’s like have you ever seen Terry Allen’s song books?

BL:

No? Same thing?

AW:

Yeah, it's just, they are two wonders of the universe and they should be enshrined somewhere that all of us can go look at, you know.

BL:

Oh yeah. See mine are just scattered throughout the world really. And the problem is, with me, this has happened to me three times now. I have song books, little, I like the little spirals that about that big, fit in your bag, and I lost one in Vietnam, I lost one once again somewhere in the Middle East, and I lost the third one somewhere here in America. Because I take them on the road with me and I write them down and I leave them somewhere. In the case of the one—well I was in Hanoi, and I played a college and I had my words down, I had my book there, and I walked out of the room, got into the car, realized I had missed it, walked back in, and it was gone. So somebody, [strums guitar] one of those little communist pinkos over there—[strums guitar]

AW:

Is cutting your tunes.

BL:

Are cutting my songs. [Laughter] They were great people. But, that's "Oklahoma Girl".

AW:

Yeah, well talk a little bit about what it's like to collaborate because you've been collaborating for a long time. [Guitar strumming in background] I mean you've been writing songs with people—wonderful story about "Public Domain" that you told when we were, when we didn't have the video on and you talked about writing songs with—

BL:

Gary Nunn.

AW:

--Gary Nunn and with Ray Wiley Hubbard, your first cracking out in Red River.

BL:

You know I've had some luck writing with people and some luck without. With Gary it was, we wrote a song called "Roll on Down the Road," and we were playing with Jerry Jeff and we were over at that compound, that rock compound on 6214 North Lamar, and he called it "Public Doman" he started calling that place public domain. And we were trying to write a song for Gary and when Jerry Jeff couldn't remember words to his songs sometimes, when he'd be up there singing, he might say, "Roll on down the road," that might substitute as an interchangeable lyric

with anything he might say or, “Let it roll.” So we said well, there’s our chorus [sings and strums] “I’m going to roll on down the road, let it roll. I’m going to roll on down the road let it roll. I ain’t stopping to ask myself if the getting’s worth the go. Well, I guess I got to ramble, guess I got to gamble, lord I got a gypsy’s soul.” So we wrote it about a gypsy who’s rolling on down the road, and the three or four different scenarios that this fellow found himself in too, it’s a story, and that was a good one. I wrote some songs with a guy named Reid Wood in India. Reid Barksdale Wood, we wrote fifty songs and three of them are on this new record, one of them is the song about the android, [strums tune] and one of them is called “Middle Ages Rockabilly Blues,” and I can’t remember what the third one is right now. But the thing about Reid, and really you have to check your ego at the door a lot, and accept that someone’s going to come up with a line that you may or may not agree with. With Reid he was like a machine, I would come in and I’d have a verse and a chorus and I’d say, “Well here’s the song I’m working on,” and the next day he’ll have ten verses, and I can take these ten verses and edit them, and I can say, “Well I love that line let’s use this first but what if we set it like this?” And I’d just sort would of edit what he’d do and he was totally cool with it, “That sounds good, that sounds good.” So sometimes you just have to be a good editor and sometimes someone will just throw in one line, and you have to decide, am I going to give that person credit for that one line?

AW:

Yeah but sometimes that one line is what it takes.

BL:

And I’m going to tell this story right now. Here’s a song called—that Reid and I wrote [strums guitar] that’s a resurgent country tune that goes [sings and strums guitar] “I still dream of you, you have made me see, you have shown me love to be open, pure and free. Why must I live alone after all that you have done, it’s not right to stay apart, when you’ve agreed to live in my heart.” So we had a second verse and the way—one of the lines in it says, “You’ve always been true keeping me from despair, never holding back love.” And then I put, “Always glad I was there, there was nothing left unsaid, every moment—” this is what I wrote, “There was nothing left unsaid, every moment passed was gold, then with sundown in your eyes, suddenly we said our last goodbye.” And then the bridge said, “I pray the day will come that you’ll come back the only one, and you’ll love me with all my heart, not for one moment be kept apart.” That was the line. And Hadley goes, “Till death do us part,” which I thought, “That’s pretty cool.” [Sings and strums] “I pray the day will come when you’ll be the only one and I’ll love you with all my heart, till death do us part.” And that’s the only thing that John wrote, and I was willing to give him credit and he called me and he says, “Listen, do not give me credit for that song, that’s your song, I just threw that one line in.” And frankly I forget it from time to time and sing it the old way, but when I played it on one of those radio stations, I played all three new songs, and of all three of them people liked that one because it was country, and people wrote in and they said,

“What’s that song, ‘Till Death Do Us Part?’” So I thought, that’s the name of the song you know?

AW:

[Laughs] So now it’s a line and a title.

BL:

Now it’s a line and a title, so you know, but John said, “Don’t be giving me any credit.” I’m not going to give him a second chance. [Laughter]

AW:

But tell—since we’ve got this little camera rolling, tell that story about writing the song “Public Domain.” It was always one of my—I know this sounds silly, it’s probably nobody’s favorite song on the planet but mine, but I always loved that song.

BL:

Well you know Gary and I, we were on the road with Jerry Jeff and we were at Santa Fe, and Gary won’t remember this part as much as I do, because this fellow appears in this song, but we were in the bar the LaFonda in the afternoon and there was a guy sitting over on the other side of the bar and I kept thinking, Who is he? I’ve seen him before and it turned out he was a poet by the name of Richard Brautigan who wrote, “Watermelon Sugar,” “Trout Fishing in America,” he wrote poems and—strange—one of his poems says, “A lacy leaf of lettuce fell off of my plate and on to the floor, so what?” That’s how this poem goes. We thought anyone that eloquent deserves a drink so we bought a bottle of wine and we sat down next to him and talked to him, and he ended up in the song and we were—I just was infatuated with the idea of “Public Domain,” and I started once again Texas swing [strums and sings] “I got my irons in the fire down in Texas, got me a toe hold in Tennessee. I got my foot in the door of that California store but I’m up to my ears in me. Don’t be concerned if it’s a song that sounds familiar, don’t be concerned if it all seems the same, just be concerned that your policies will kill you, and it’s all just public domain.” And so Gary and I just kind of threw back lines and wrote it real quick, maybe half an hour, twenty minutes.

AW:

And so, “Public Domain,” being the place, as well as the idea of public domain in music?

BL:

Yeah.

AW:

Now, how did Brautigan get into the song?

BL:

Well because at the end it says, [sings and strums] “I sang in that Red River Valley, yes I dabbled in that forbidden fruit, where they promised me points,” No actually that’s the second verse, [sings] “Then they slipped me skinny joints.” There’s two ways to do it, if we’re in kind of a cool, hip crowd then, “They slipped me these little bitty skinny joints, but I’ve yet to see any loot from the man in the high heeled Gucci shoes.” If it’s—Jerry Jeff cut it, he said, “They slipped me through the joints, don’t be concerned if the song sounds familiar, don’t be concerned if it all seems the same, just be concerned that your politics will kill you and it’s all just public domain.” And then we do a modulation, [strums and sings] “Uno, dos, tres,” and I remembered back when I was in Red River, so we said, [strums and sings] “I sang in that Red River Valley, I drank wine with the poets in Santa Fe,” there he was. “Well I ran with those—” okay now here we have different versions of the song. Gary Nunn was in this group in Lubbock called DeMolays. Remember? They were like a Mason group or something.

AW:

Yeah.

BL:

They had dances and everything. So he was a DeMolay, so that appears here, and I had been with this woman Jan Smithers, who was like Snow White, you know sort of this apocryphal figure. So it says, [sings and strums] “I drank wine with the poets in Santa Fe, I ran,” and Gary said, “With the snuff queens in Dallas,” which I never liked, “With the snuff queens?” And I said, [sings] “Like I ran with Snow White in L.A.” And he comes back, [sings] “And I’ve broken all my vows to DeMolay.” [Laughter] Which is such a strange verse.

AW:

It was my favorite verse though. [Laughs]

BL:

But now I sing it, [sings and strums] “I drank wine with the poets in Santa Fe, and wherever I am, I dance with the darlings in Austin or Lubbock, or Atlanta, like I ran with Snow White in L.A.” She’s there, but then I always say, “And I think I’ll go and see what’s shaking down in Bombay.” So then I go back to India, “What’s shaking in Bombay.” So I change it up a little bit. But that DeMolay line was in there, and Jerry Jeff cut it like that.

AW:

Of course, those of us that grew up with that knew right what what he was talking about.

BL:

Yeah. “I’ve broken all my vows to DeMolay.” [Laughter]

AW:

Yeah that was quite something.

BL:

Yeah, that was a—and you know once again we just, it's the tune of "Red River Valley" with a relative minor thrown in every once in a while. So it's nothing real fancy.

AW:

Well that's part of the deal though, that's public domain. [Laughs]

BL:

That's exactly what we were thinking.

AW:

Okay, now let me ask you this—

BL:

I tried to make Public Domain my publishing company and BMI said, "What's this guy trying to pull?" [Laughs]

AW:

Yeah he's going to collect a lot of royalties, a lot of mechanicals. Hey one quick question here while we're still rolling this tape. You know you hear these great stories about songwriters that get together to collaborate and then can't agree. Like John Prine has this great song about this pregnant girl sitting in the bus station, and he co-wrote it and I can't remember now, off the top of my head, who it was he co-wrote it with, but they couldn't agree on the way it would end. So they decided that they would each get credit but each one would sing their own ending. [Laughs] Okay so when you have a song like this, and you decide that you don't want to sing about snuff queens or DeMolay, how does that work with the other writers, is it an issue or does anybody care?

BL:

Well you know, I sang it that way the other night, we played the Los Gonzo Band down in Houston for a Democratic fundraiser for Bill White, and I did "Public Domain" and that's the way I sang it and Gary didn't say anything. I think when he sings it, he sings it that way, but I wasn't in DeMolay, and I didn't like the idea of snuff queens. I never could understand, Snuff queens, what's he talking about? And I think Gary was also thinking that Snow White was—he said "I ran from Snow White" and I think Snow White had to do with cocaine. And so I didn't like that, I didn't like snuff queens, I didn't like the idea of the drug image, and I didn't have anything to do with DeMolay, so I just did it that way. And I've never re-recorded it, I maybe

should, but I don't think I've ever cut it myself to do it any way I want. I don't think it would be—Murphey told me once, we had cut *Geronimo's Cadillac* in the Rendezvous record it was our twentieth anniversary of the Lost Gonzo Band, 1992. And we cut *Geronimo's Cadillac* and I had switched a couple of lines, which was, "They took ole Geronimo by storm and they ripped off the feathers from his uniform. White man, white man don't you know the Indians ain't got no place to go." The real lyrics were [singing] "White man, white man, don't you know the Indians don't got no place to go, they took old Geronimo by storm and ripped off feathers from his uniform." I think the original was like that, but I got them mixed up and when I realized I did, I apologized to him I said, "You know, I've kind of tangled your lyrics up a little bit, it makes more sense to me, and what he said was, "Bob, I don't care if you stand on your head or sing the song backwards, just as long as you do it and give me credit for it. So by the time that song goes by, I try to make them meet it anyway. Jerry Jeff has always sang "High Buckaroos" or "Sangria Wine," it's always different, he'll have at least one verse where he puts himself in the spot, and talk about where he is and make up something about that night, of course that's his own song but.

AW:

Yeah. But it points up the difference between the song as an ossified element or the song as a living element.

BL:

That's right. And a song is a living element. Listen to Dylan, Dylan sings it so different every time.

AW:

And frankly that's why some of us still like to go hear him. Listening to "Maggie's Farm" the same way after forty, nearly fifty, years would be a little tiring wouldn't it? [Laughs]

BL:

But also Dylan—I went to see him once and he started this song and it was like [strums and sings mumbles] And he was doing "Like a Rolling Stone," but it was like [strums and sings] "Once upon a time you dressed so fine. Threw the bums a dime in your prime, didn't you? People call say 'beware doll, you're bound to fall.' You thought they were all kidding you." But when he go to the chorus, "How does it feel?" Then he starts singing and he had that raspy voice the whole time, but when he would get to the—every once in a while, he could sound like the old Dylan so you knew he still had it in him.

AW:

You know I heard that when he went in to record that song it was a waltz, and wasn't it Bob Johnston that—

BL:

There's a book I've got the book.

AW:

Is that story in there?

BL:

I'm not sure. Well maybe so, yeah.

AW:

We'll look that up. And try as I might I cannot imagine this as a waltz.

BL:

[Strums and sings "Like a Rolling Stone"] "Once upon a time you dressed so fine. Threw the bums a dime in your prime, didn't you?" [Laughter] And the other story is the Al Cooper story, where he just had to get on the record—he wanted to play guitar—

AW:

Yeah and he was playing a half beat late on organ.

BL:

So he'd know [sings tune] "Once upon a time you dressed so fine." That became the signature of that song.

AW:

Yeah, cause he told him he could play organ and he really couldn't.

BL:

Never played and he didn't know the song, what a great story. But yeah, there's just so many ways.

AW:

All right I'm going to stop this right now. [Guitar strumming] Very cool, man. Now let's— [pause] let's take a little breather and let's talk about the one man show.

BL:

Okay. [Plays guitar] And by the way did you hear that Penny Pearson had a brain tumor or something?

AW:

No. If that's true I've got to call my wife and tell her.

End of Recording



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