

**Oral History Interview of
Alan Munde**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
June 13, 2012
Wimberley, TX**

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

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

Transcript Overview:

This interview features banjo player Alan Munde. Munde discusses teaching at South Plains College as part of their bluegrass program and working with various students during his time at the college. Munde also talks about teaching methods more specifically and the work environment at South Plains.

Length of Interview: 03:08:21

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Keywords

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Andy Wilkinson (AW):

Okay, so this is not Friday the thirteenth; it's Wednesday the thirteenth, which I'm sure in some cultures is very suspicious.

Alan Munde (AM):

Right.

AW:

The year is 2012, Andy Wilkinson and Alan Munde in beautiful suburban Wimberley.

AM:

Out in the wilderness.

AW:

Out in the wilderness. I was standing outside this morning after I got here, and just what a nice day. The rain that you've gotten has made a huge difference, because I could hear birds and insects that the last time I was here, we didn't hear very many of.

AM:

Right, right. We've had an infestation of some animal that is called a katydid, and—

AW:

And you always wonder what it was that Katy was doing, but—

AM:

Right—well, making a racket is—I mean, they're just—they're actually somewhat subdued right now, but—

AW:

Yeah, but it was almost like they were this solid background noise. I wonder if those sound guys could use it for their white noise generators.

AM:

it very well could be, I mean—

AW:

Is it the same as a cicada?

AM:

Well, now—

AW:

Are they a little smaller, or—?

AM:

We have the house sprayed because if you don't, you have scorpions and such in the house, and he said that there's a difference between cicada and a katydid.

AW:

Yeah, I think there is.

AM:

But they sound similar. When I was growing up in Norman, we had locusts, or whatever would leave the shell on the tree.

AW:

Yeah, that's a cicada.

AM:

Is that a cicada? Okay.

AW:

Yeah, and they're much louder than these, but there're not as many of them.

AM:

Right. These are—like I say—now, to me, they sound like they're all kind of down in the woods there, but prior to this, they were all over. So I think as it starts to dry out, they dry out and sort of pop or something.

AW:

Yeah, I just remember—like you growing up in Norman, me growing up in Slaton and Lubbock—the cicadas were a constant feature of the summer, especially in the afternoon. To this day, if I hear cicadas starting that drone, I get sleepy because you know, there's just so—I need one of those—you know, for when you're traveling—instead of the Niagara Falls sound, or the—cicada generator.

AM:

Right. You know, when we started talking about them, and we mentioned—you said when you're in Norman, and my mind immediately went to sleeping, I mean to when I was a kid, and I remember riding my bike just somewhere, and thinking—I was—the cicadas are humming and it's ninety-eight, or whatever it is, and I literally went and found a shady spot that had clover—

some clover in it—and went over and laid down and went to sleep. It was at a churchyard I was riding by.

AW:

We had some Adirondack chairs—now, you know Slaton, Texas is a long way from the Adirondacks, but we had a couple of white Adirondack chairs in my grandparents' backyard under a willow tree, and the cicadas, of course, just loved the willow tree, and so that was the prime sleeping spot.

AM:

It's amazing how—I hadn't thought of it, but it's so ingrained that's the sound of summer, and sound of heat, and sound of sleepy afternoons, when it's too hot to do anything else—find a cool spot—just like a dog—find a cool spot and curl up and take a nap.

AW:

I'm now inspired to go out and get a good recording of cicadas to carry around with me. New project.

AM:

You know, it would help you sleep at night, maybe, or something.

AW:

Well, last we talked, I think we had followed the Alan Munde story up to South Plains College, and had gotten you installed there, but we haven't really talked about your time at South Plains College, and so—

AM:

Oh, okay.

AW:

I will say that in preference—to begin this, that maybe since we've talked last, I've had a chance to interview John Hartin, and John mentioned three or four of you that made the program in his mind, and one of them was you, another Joe, and Joe Carr—and he said—I think I'm quoting this correctly—he said, “They made the program into what I'd been telling the people the program was,” which I thought was a singularly interesting admission.

AM:

Right, yeah. Well, John is quite a salesman, and as with salespeople, sometimes they exaggerate. But you know, his were more than exaggerations. They were sort of goals—

AW:

Yeah, visions.

AM:

—and visions of what he wanted it to be, and he always worked that way and was a really, really good person to work for because if everything was going well, he didn't tend to tip the boat—rock the boat any—he just—although he always had this line, he says, “When I think everything is going well, I just figure I don't have enough information.” But anyway, let's see. I went to—I don't know if we talked about just economics of a band and family and whatnot just got difficult, so the band—Country Gazette—had visited the school a couple times because we had heard about it through how many other people heard about it, which was through an article in *Pickin'* Magazine—or maybe *Frets*, I can't remember—I think it was called *Pickin'* at the time. So we visited the school with Joe in the band, and then after Joe left the band, we visited it again and they asked about Joe—what he was doing, and would he be interested in a job there—and I said, “I would think he would,” and in fact he was, so he had gone to the school I think in '84. Then I made it another couple years and asked if there was a job available, and I'd be interested. I don't know if there was one, but they created one—you know how we were just talking about John—I'm sure the numbers at that particular moment might not have called for another fulltime faculty, but they thought it was an opportunity not to be passed up. So I guess John went to the president and the vice president, or—mostly Nathan Tubb. I think Nathan was the—

AW:

Yeah, you know I got to do an interview with him, too.

AM:

Very good, very good. John always really, really admired Nathan because of his just native—what John might say as good common sense—that he had, and lack of bureaucratic niceties. So anyway, he convinced them that this would be a good thing to do, so they hired me. I went to work there in August of 1986.

AW:

Just in time for a new semester.

AM:

Right, right. I sort of—I actually could have gone a semester earlier—they called and asked if I would be interested in that, my recollection is, and I just couldn't make it work. I just had a few things to tie up, and we had a house, and just the move and everything—it would work better if it were after the summer, so that's when I went. I spent the summer getting ready, selling our house in Norman, and moving to Levelland. Of course, I had been there a couple of times. You know

what is interesting—kind of set me up for it—because I actually enjoyed being out there, because—one reason was way, way, way back when I worked at the OU Press—

AW:

Boxing books?

AM:

—boxing books and whatnot, and the OU Press sort of specialized—among other things—in Western stuff.

AW:

Uh-huh, still do.

AM:

Yeah—and reprints. So they had a lot of Western—you know, the vigilantes of Montana, which was sort of a contemporarily-written story, or telling of the vigilante Montana cowmen and whatever got together just to run the rustlers out on their own, and it was a contemporary story from the 1890s or whenever it was about that. So that would be one of the books—you know, and they would have reprinted it. They had several books by J. Evetts Haley, they had the Goodnight book, and they had the XIT Ranch, and they had one by another guy on the Matador Land and Cattle Company. They had one by a professor at OU on—and I forget the name—I forget the name, but it was about a New Mexican police officer, Albert Jennings Fountain or Albert Fountain Jennings—maybe that's closer to it—and so during the breaks at work, rather than going somewhere else—you had fifteen minutes—I would just sit on my desk and read whatever bit of book was in front of me. So I read the XIT book by Haley, which would kind of be Levelland and north, and so I was real familiar—and they had pictures in there of it—so I was familiar with—

AW:

You already knew the history and the country.

AM:

You know, I had sort of an intrigue about it, so when we moved out there, I got a chance to see it, so I felt somewhat comfortable being there, which, Anne didn't.

AW:

I was going to say, how did that carry—

AM:

She didn't read the same books.

AW:

She was reading *Anne of Green Gables*.

AM:

Right, right. So I was somewhat at home out there, and so when I'd take students out, I'd get to see—go up to Muleshoe and drive by the Muleshoe Wildlife Preserve and drive the whole length, practically, of the XIT Ranch. So as we'd drive along between there and going to Amarillo, rather than going over to Lubbock and going up the interstate, I'd just drive up 380 or 385—

AW:

385, yeah—great road, I love that road.

AM:

Yeah, and you'd take in—and there's a few places in it that's not plowed, and it would look just like the pictures in the book, and I'd just imagine the cowhands doing all that, and ultimately went up one time with a faculty member to the Adobe Walls—is it walls or wells?

AW:

Walls. The Second Battle of Adobe Walls, up near Borger and—

AM:

Right—and it's interesting. It's on—what is it—the Turkey Track Ranch? —which was—the foreman of that ranch for many years was Smokey Mayfield—

AW:

Oh, of the Mayfield Brothers.

AM:

Of the Mayfield Brothers, so I thought that was—

AW:

I didn't realize that Smokey was a foreman there.

AM:

Yeah—now, I say foreman—

AW:

No, he probably was.

AM:

You know, interesting, when Joe and I wrote our book, I called him foreman, because that's what he told me he was, and the lady—one of the final editors—asked if I wouldn't mind changing it to "manager" —ranch manager—because "foreman" is a gender-specific—

AW:

And they wanted—but she didn't want to make you have "foreperson."

AM:

No. So she wondered if it'd be all right to change it to manager, and I said, "No, he told me he was the foreman, and I'll go with that."

AW:

Yeah, exactly.

AM:

And also, she wanted me to change—I had a quote—and it was from a book—it was a quote by the guy that recorded Elvis—Sam—

AW:

Phillips?

AM:

—Phillips, said, "If I could find a white man that could sing like a nigger, I could make a million dollars," and she said, "You know, I found another quote that says, 'If I could find a white person who could sing like a black person, I could make a billion dollars,' could we use that?"

AW:

A billion?

AM:

Yeah, and I said, "No, let's use this," because to me, it makes it sound like "What is the problem?" Why did we ever have a problem, if this is the language they used?" It just seemed unfair to both sides.

AW:

Oh yeah. Well, I mean the fact is, it's not like you, when you use it in your book, you weren't condoning—or holding this up as a way to be—it's just a report. This is the way it was.

AM:

Right. This is the quote I found, and it was quoted in a book, but it seemed more true than a billion dollars, or a black person rather than a nigger. So it just seemed like it was a—it's like saying the Nazis should be rewarded for population control, rather than genocide. So anyway, just that—and I'm kind of off the subject—but that's why I felt—I felt somewhat comfortable out there, and didn't mind it so much. It has sort of a bad reputation for climate, but the climate is wonderful.

AW:

Yeah, I, frankly, like the climate.

AM:

Yeah. You do get heat in the summer days, but as soon as the sun goes down, man, it's as pleasant as you could get, and the mornings are just stunning.

AW:

And as I like to say, we get just enough sand every year to keep the Dallas-ites back in Dallas.

AM:

Right, to beat them back. Well, you know—and Joe quotes this, and he may have used it—this woman—West Texas resident—talking about the wind and the sand, she says “Oh yes, it scrubs the air clean.”

AW:

Yeah, that may have been my wife. My wife says that all the time. She says, “Have you ever noticed how clean it looks after a sandstorm?” I said, “Well yeah, it's just relatively” —but she's convinced that it actually cleans the—

AM:

—air—

AW:

Yeah.

AM:

Cleans the molecules. There was a judge that lived there—when I first got there, there were some—and these were a dying breed—elected Democratic politicians—and he was a county judge, and he lived out towards either just before or just after Whitharral, and I would drive by and his yard would be full of sand. Just across the road from him was a plowed field with a—and a fence. He says “Yeah, when it gets going real good, there's sparks on the fence from the

friction,” so it’s a pretty astounding part of the world. Then, you know, there’re those stories—and I’ve read them in those books I read—about the—and I heard it on a morning radio talk show, some guys were talking about this phenomenon—where you are out, away from the ranch house, and you see it in a place that it’s not.

AW:

The mirage.

AM:

Yeah. And they say it might be from ice crystals, and acting like a mirror, or—

AW:

Yeah, you know, I’ve tried to read—not try, I’ve read—but I’ve tried to understand explanations for mirages, and they all have pictures, diagrams of rays of light and images beaming—and it still doesn’t make any sense to me, but they are pretty spectacular. I have seen buildings that are done that way, but there are reports—particularly back in the turn of the last century—of entire cities appearing—you know, you’d see Amarillo or something, and I think, boy, that’s phenomenal.

AM:

Yeah. Well, so anyway, it was an intriguing—and it’s—I have read—and I can’t—William Least Heat-Moon, or whatever—is that a—?

AW:

Blue Highways?

AM:

Yeah, *Blue Highways*, and he had talked about maybe not—I don’t know where he was at this particular moment, but it could be West Texas or eastern New Mexico, or eastern Colorado, and wanted to go out a certain road and asked the locals how you get to it, or—they say, “Well, here’s how you get to it, but there’s nothing out there.” So when he went out there he wrote down everything he saw and came up with like 250 things he saw out there. So that’s kind of the way I was. They’d say there’s nothing there—until you are interested in it.

AW:

Yeah, Goodnight said in that book that you read, he said the—no, maybe it actually wasn’t in that book, maybe it was in an obscure book called *Prose and Poetry of the Livestock Industry*—

AM:

Now that’s a—

AW:

Well, it was a mug book—what they call a mug book—like I would be coming around Wimberley doing biographical sketches of famous musicians who live in Wimberley, and I would say “Alan, could we” —and so we would do a thing. That was the prose part. Now, the volume *Poetry in the Livestock Industry* was to come out, but the young man who was putting all this together died of tuberculosis—lived in Denver, died before he could do the second volume—so we don’t know, yet—

AM:

—what the poetry might have been—

AW:

Right—but Goodnight in that book said some really—that interview—said some really interesting things. One was—and this is in 1890, this is a cattleman, you know—but we tend to think about—we lump them all into one way of being—but he said if he could only educate one group of people in America, it would be the women. He was talking about higher education; they were talking about his college. He said another thing, he said “The people of the plains will have to solve the problems of the people of the east, because on the plains, a person has to see a great long distance, and when you have to see a great long distance, your mind is active, and you’re more creative,” and then he launches into this diatribe about how shiftless and no-good people are in the brush country, about how you can’t trust any of them, so he sort of undid some of his nobility, but his whole point was that when you’re out there on the plains, those 250 things that William Least Heat-Moon saw, you see them because that’s all you’ve got to see.

AM:

Right. You know Ed Marsh, who’s—you know Ed.

AW:

Yeah.

AM:

Is from Blacksburg, Virginia—which is where Virginia Tech is—and his dad was on the faculty there. One comment Ed made, he says, “You know, out here in Levelland, you don’t hear this phrase much: ‘I don’t see where you’re coming from.’” He said, “They might say ‘I don’t understand what you’re saying,’ or something, but they never use the visual thing.” So anyway, we moved out there in August of 1986, and I started working. At that particular moment, they were building what is now the building that—

AW:

—has the Tom T. Hall—

AM:

—Tom T. Hall in it, yeah.

AW:

Where were you operating up to that point?

AM:

Well, they had moved—the school, when we had visited there—which exists only as the interior of where the Waylon studio is in that hall, and then a little bit of the hall right there, you turn—if you remember, as you leave the Waylon studio, there's a hall right in front of you, you go up there, and then it starts to go up—that was the building that they were building, and that original little building is now surrounded by the new stuff. Where the office was and put us was over in what is called the creative arts building.

AW:

Which was right next door?

AM:

Which is right next door—and my office was one of the rehearsal—little rehearsal studios, which was fine for me. All you need is a couple of chairs and a music stand, at that time. So early on—and throughout my whole career there—in order to make a load, I taught guitar, also—so I would teach some guitar students, and I taught guitar and banjo—all the banjo students—and the bluegrass ensembles. I'm trying to remember where in that building we did the bluegrass ensembles. It must have been in the same facility that the band—the horn bands—met in, as they were building that other building. So I was there in that building for a semester, and it was so funny—the business—how the school was run. At that point, I'm going to say they had maybe four or five thousand enrollment—

AW:

For a whole college.

AM:

Yeah—and now it's over ten thousand. So early on, I think it was run by a small group of the administrators—the president, vice president, and the deans, and the treasurer, probably—so there were four or five, six people that just huddled and ran things. So I was given a key only to the door of my office, but not to the building.

AW:

So how could you get in?

AM:

I couldn't get in to the building, and I had to go to the business—I say the treasurer—he was called the business manager—he was the business manager, and his name was Dickson, I think—and I went to him, and he said, “Well, I'm only going to give you a key to your office because I don't know if you're going to stay,” I mean it's like, “I don't know you, so I'm not going to trust you with a key to the building,” and I mentioned it to Hartin, and he just went “God, almighty,” he thought it was just really small-minded—which it was. But that's just kind of the way it was. So if I wanted to go in—if I asked students to do anything in the evening, I had to be sure to take a key with me.

AW:

You couldn't just call the business manager and have him come down to meet you?

AM:

You know, that probably would have been the smart thing to do, and I'd have gotten a key to the building immediately. The president was a guy named Dr. Baker—Marvin Baker—and he'd been there for, I think, twenty, twenty-five years by the time I got there, and not long after I got there—maybe two years—they had a big ceremony where they burned the original bonds—

AW:

Retired them?

AM:

They had finally paid them off—retired the bonds and had a big burning, and sort of was a big moment, so that was pretty cool in a lot of ways. So when I got there, that's what I taught—and there were maybe two or three—maybe had two ensembles, bluegrass ensembles. Interestingly enough, one of them was all women except for one guy, so there were two female fiddle players, a lady mandolin player, a lady bass player, and then a guy played the banjo. Jim Addison was his name—I remember that because I took them out on a trip—and Anne went with me—and we were sitting at—we went to Seminole. I even remember we went to Seminole and played. Afterwards we'd buy them pizza—you know, dinner—and took them to Pizza Hut, and we're sitting at one table and all the kids are at another table, and Jim Addison turns to me and said, “Mr. Munde, is pepperoni a meat or a vegetable?” And I said “You mean like a pepperoni squash?” and he turned around and said, “See, I told you it was a vegetable.”

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AW:

Oh, that's great.

AM:

He was very young.

AW:

And hadn't been off the farm long.

AM:

Right. No, he was from around San Angelo. But also in that first group was a guy named Toby McWilliams. Did you ever know Toby?

AW:

Yeah. Gosh, it's been a long time.

AM:

Yeah. Well Toby is the son of a lady who worked there when I got there, and was still working there when I left. I think her husband had—Toby's father was still alive when I was there, and went through the nursing program and became a nurse, but then died of some something. But Toby was a real wonderful player, and a great, great, great, great student, and a really nice guy, and I was really fortunate to have him, and he went on to get a PhD in guitar there at Texas Tech.

AW:

Yeah. That's right. I remember.

AM:

—and played bass with—what was that—Maurice—no, it wasn't Maurice Anderson—who was a trumpet player that led a band that played in Lubbock a little?

AW:

Oh, yeah it was Anderson, it was—

AM:

Tom Anderson?

AW:

Tommy.

AM:

Tommy Anderson had a band—

AW:

Who also ran the surveying company.

AM:

Is that what he did? I never knew what he did. But what was the name of his band? It still may be going.

AW:

I don't—

AM:

But he died, I believe.

AW:

Yeah, he died and I don't think the band, per say, is still going, but they—and they were pretty good—they were a good band.

AM:

Yeah, yeah. They had a piano—a black guy, I think, that played piano—

AW:

No, they had a black guy that played drums with them, James Price.

AM:

Oh, that was it, okay, maybe that was it.

AW:

And then they had—who's the black horn player from Lubbock that went to Tech and then went out to the west coast and was very famous? —played with them for a while, and—I don't know, they had—

AM:

Yeah, anyway, Toby played with them for all the years he was at Texas Tech as a bass player—he played bass with them. So he was a very talented kid, and really good student, and he got his degree in classical guitar—bachelor's, master's, PhD—but I gave him his first classical guitar lesson just to get him started, because he was eighteen, going to South Plains College there. But he had already played and taken lessons from John, because John had owned a music store downtown—

AW:

John Hartin?

AM:

Yeah, John Hartin—and taken lessons from John, so he was a—and they gave him to me because I was new, and they knew he was good, and it was just like “Here’s somebody easy.” So that was my first semester.

AW:

Well how—you’d taught lessons, though, before, right?

AM:

Privately, you know, just in my home and whatnot—

AW:

And most of that very early in your career, because you were on the road so much—

AM:

Right, right. I did not—it was all very early, when I was in college I taught at Slim Richey’s—Mike Richey’s Guitar Center—there at Norman, and taught banjo and guitar, but nothing very—I had absolutely no training at all, I mean just throw you in there and do it.

AW:

Yeah, that didn’t bother John Hartin, though, did it?

AM:

Oh no. You mean that I didn’t—

AW:

That you hadn’t—right

AM:

Oh no, well none of them had. Nobody hired—other than Ed—was trained.

AW:

You know, one time he tried to hire me to teach voice, and I said, “John, I’m just a vocalist by default. I write songs and someone has to sing them. I don’t know anything about voice,” and he says—and this is John Hartin—he says, “Well, you’ll figure it out.” I thought, This is scary, you know?

AM:

Yeah. Well, he had a lot of faith, because that’s how he did it. He didn’t—

AW:

That's exactly right.

AM:

He didn't know how to play banjo, but he probably taught it some, or mandolin—and—

AW:

No, in fact he told me in his interview, he said, "I taught all the stringed instruments. I didn't know how to play many of them, but I knew chords and I had a chord chart, so I understood how it went together."

AM:

Sure, and he just assumed everybody was smart enough to figure that part out.

AW:

Yeah. How did you go about—just tell me—how did you go about creating a syllabus or a schedule for your classes at the beginning? How did you approach that?

AM:

Well, it was real simple. I just used whatever ones they had. I've always—and it's the way I play music, you know, "How do you play music?" "Well, I learned G, C, and D." "Where did you learn that?" "Well, I learned it from watching somebody else, and I noticed they used it a lot." Well, I did the same thing with the syllabus. I got everybody's syllabus and looked at it, and just made mine as close to that—except I changed guitar to banjo, or fiddle to banjo—or if it said "bowing exercises," I put "roll exercises," and I kind of—and I did look at them just to get my syllabus, but I also looked at them just to see how they kind of broke up what they were doing and developed approaches sort of based on that. I knew in formal music training they had exercises, and I had taken lessons, myself, and I saw how they sort of built—you know, you learn one thing, and the—what are the important things about doing this? You have to have your pick direction in guitar correct, and you're fingering correct, and then you have timing, and all that sort of stuff—so I tried to follow in the other disciplines' way of organizing it, and by the end of the—I was there twenty years, or twenty-one years, I don't know—I had figured it out pretty well where I had a method and whatnot.

AW:

Well, let me ask this. There's also—there's a big—and this is something that's interesting to me because I have to deal with this in my class—but there's a big difference between the work you do as a professional musician playing—and even training someone that you're working with, or being a mentor to someone in your band or in your group versus assigning a grade that goes on a

college transcript. How did you bridge that real world with this sort of artificial world of the university?

AM:

Very much so, yeah. Well, it's interesting. We would have faculty meetings, and I won't say every time, but many of them were on that very same subject, and my hero in the whole thing—or two, there's two of them—Ed, who is very, very, incredibly thoughtful, and he came through a music program as a violin player, so he knew how that worked—and then Tim McCasland, who had no idea how it worked and made it up as he went along—and they were in conflict to a certain extent, but not totally.

AW:

The two of them?

AM:

Right—and I don't mean that they would argue.

AW:

But they had different—

AM:

—different approaches—and Tim's was this, which cuts right to the nitty gritty of it, is—his was, he figured if they sucked fifty percent less than they would have without his help, they get an "A."

AW:

I like that approach.

AM:

You know, and you think about it—

AW:

Well, you were just talking about Toby—most of us are not as self-satisfied at the end of a semester with him—because he was already good to start with—as we are with the person who comes in and, like you said, sucks really big time, but you get them up to mediocre, and you go, "Both of us have done a great job." So if we're talking about a relative measurement, that's something.

AM:

Right. So that was, in a sense, I took Tim's approach for the private grade. Then we had another—a departmental thing, also, and I'll explain—

AW:

Yeah, that's kind of confusing.

AM:

It took a long time to get to this point, so what I'm describing—and I may have it wrong; you should interview Ed, because Ed has—he's the one that sort of figured it out, made it work—is that the private lesson grade is what I put down in my book was solely based on where they were and how hard they worked—even if they worked hard and didn't get it, I would do the "They sucked fifty percent less than they would have otherwise." If they didn't work at all, then they didn't—you know, the grade went down. It was easy to a certain extent, because the ones that didn't work also were the ones that didn't show up for lessons, and there was a stated policy of three absences—after three absences, your grade goes down one letter grade, and each absence after that is one letter grade. So if you miss five—and we only had one lesson a week for each—a class for a private lesson was one lesson. They could take two lessons, but they were two separate classes. So if they missed five lessons out of fourteen—or however many are in a semester—

AW:

Yeah, it's usually somewhere around fourteen—fourteen weeks.

AM:

—you could justify an "F."

AW:

Yeah, I've found in my own class that attendance may be the single most accurate descriptor of a person's—at least application—not their talent or anything else.

AM:

Right, exactly. You can't do this without showing up.

AW:

Yeah, and if you show up, you're probably going to do okay.

AM:

Yeah, it'll be a—yeah, you'll—and you put in some time and show some progress—you know, if I could judge—and I know this is highly subjective, but they made a genuine effort, for me

they'd get an "A." I think most of the faculty, although some not, and it varied. It varied a great deal. Now, this other thing—when we moved from the academic side to the technical side of the college, things changed.

AW:

You mean when your department program moved, organizationally, from—

AM:

The academic side to the technical side—and who sort of engineered that—I mean Hartin was primary in doing it.

AW:

Why did they—what was the advantage or the objective of—?

AM:

Well, it's real interesting—to me it is—is that we got a lot, a lot of students who were very, very interested in learning how to play, but very, very, very few that were interested in the degree. So what it looked like to the administration who had to answer to the legislature was—

AW:

—was that your graduation rate was too low.

AM:

Yes. We had many, many enrollees and very few completers. The problem was—on the academic side was not that they didn't do the music things, but they didn't do the academic things. So they would come in and—

AW:

They weren't there to take English.

AM:

No—or history, or math, or any of that. So they would wind up unrolling almost totally in the music classes with the idea "Well, I'll do the academic stuff later," meaning never. So it would have—we would have been snuffed out, I think, eventually with that. So by moving to the technical side, now we didn't have those academic requirements, and we could set up the curriculum—and I told John as we were doing the process, I said, "You know, if the curriculum looked like this, I don't think we would have any problem with completers. If it was picking, more picking, talking about picking, the history of picking, recording yourself while you pick, the business of picking, they would see no—they would do it all." In fact, I think that's what's been the case. So you have to organize it—and I've learned this and saw it in action through Ed

and John—is the art of administration is the art of making what you already do look like what they want.

AW:

Well put.

AM:

Yeah. So some of the issues that came when we switched to the technical side is the technical side has a whole different governing group in Austin, I guess it would be, and they've had things in place for a long time, and keep regenerating new things. For instance, if you're in welding, they came up with this idea of a capstone experience, which is after two years of welding, you had to weld this piece—

AW:

—build a bridge, or—

AM:

Yeah, something—well for us, every semester since I was there—and it actually started with, I think, the bluegrass—in the bluegrass part of it—we would have a bluegrass fest at the end of each semester. That's all. There was no others—and as the program grew, and the other elements of the program grew, the country bunch wanted to have a country night also—and so it grew from bluegrass fest, which was at the end of the semester, every ensemble would perform a thirty-minute set in front of an invited audience—or advertised and invited people to come.

AW:

Yeah, I've been to those.

AM:

Oh yeah. And so then it grew to country fest, rock fest—I forget—rhythm and blues fest, gospel praise and worship fest—so it was a whole week—extended week—of these events at the end of the semester. So you go “Capstone experience.”

AW:

I guess that's what I do with my songwriting students when they have to play their song at the end of the semester.

AM:

Right, it's a capstone.

AW:

It's not a test, it's not an exam, it's—

AM:

Right, it's just this final experience, and all you do is check the box. You don't grade it, you just check "They've had their capstone experience," and you have to file it in a file somewhere that gathers dust until somebody sues you, and you have to go open it up, and—

AW:

Yeah, get the dust out.

AM:

Yeah, "He had a capstone experience. It says right here." Then, all along, every little other requirement they had, you looked at what you were already doing, and see if it fit their requirement—and who did this administratively was Ed Marsh. It was wonderful. He did a really, really excellent job, I thought, of taking what we were doing and meshing it with the administrative requirements of the technical division. In fact, it helped us a lot, because in the technical side—and I don't remember how this works; you'd have to ask Ed—there was the actual time you sat with your student, one hour—let's say it's one hour—but as in what they would do in the technical side—and I use welding because that's what Ed would always refer to, because he took some welding classes—if your class was—you know, over there they would do a welding class that was like all morning, and so the instructor would be there and set you on your way, and then you would weld away. But he wasn't—the instructor wasn't—there with you, he might be sitting in his office doing paperwork or something, and come back and check your welding—you know, "You did good," or "You missed this spot," or "You should do this or do that." So he got sort of a load assignment that was sort of an actual load, but then also the time the student worked on their own was also added into the instructor's load.

AW:

So let me see if I understand this correctly. The welding teacher, who has only bits and pieces of all morning can therefore have a larger group of students than if they have to be intensively with that student more.

AM:

Right. But how we did it was we had a private lesson—and I'm making these numbers up—but if you got a one-hour load for the—which, we didn't—we got two-thirds of an hour load for every one-hour, and that was because in English—one-hour load for an English teacher was twenty-five students, where one hour for us was only one student, so we were much more expensive.

AW:

Yeah, that's why they wanted me to—and still want me to teach songwriting at Texas Tech, because I can add—

AM:

A class.

AW:

—a class, whereas the oboe teacher can only have one student.

AM:

Right, exactly. So music programs are expensive, faculty-wise—I mean, just load-wise—but what Ed found was that for the one hour that we taught, we also got credit for—I'll say another one-hour workshop time—or I forget what it's called—lab time, so that it actually worked to our benefit because of the way they figured loads. So in a sense it helped, moving that over there. But anyway, that came two or three years—or maybe ten years—after I was there. Once again, you'd have to ask Ed; I don't remember when it was. But anyway, so I taught there on the academic side, and we had a—our dean of the—we were in what we called the fine arts, so we were in the same department with the art department, the traditional music—horn—program, so we were all together—and I kind of enjoyed that, being in—knowing those other faculty members, because when we got separated from that, all that—

AW:

Then you were with the welding teacher.

AM:

Right, so-to-speak—and our chairperson was a guy named Donn Stroud, and he was an art guy—and you see those mosaics—Levelland is called the mosaic city or something like that. We do have mosaics on the library downtown, and on a wall at the hospital, and a wall at the university there, at the theater I think—

AW:

Yeah, I was going to say, right there at the theater.

AM:

Well Don did those. Don was—and he maybe had some help—did those three. I think he did all three of them, but I'm not sure. Now there's another mosaic on a wall that's on a newer building, and it was done by somebody else. But Don had been there a long time at South Plains College, and he was of the old school of—he'd say "We've got some new guidelines to adhere to," then he would roll his eyes—you know, "Can you believe?" And he kind of insulated us from it in

that, you know, “I’ll fill these out, but y’all need to be thinking about this stuff,” so it was of the older school of—and it was just starting to change—and maybe had been changing all along. Some of the older administrators told me they used to do enrollment on index cards, and then after enrollment, they would go over and sit at the Dairy Queen and lay them out on tables—so they could have a drink—and they would lay out the enrollment just on these cards on tables—and I kind of have a sense of it because I did my ensembles the same way for a while—would write out all the information on cards and pin them up on a board, and kind of shift them around.

AW:

Yeah, that’s storyboarding. That’s how they do movies.

AM:

Still do them. So Don Stroud was real nice, and he was a good instructor in the sense of, for me, as I watched him, he retired and within a year or two was dead. So I knew, the retirement, you need to take it earlier than you think you do—and I saw that with several faculty in other departments. They would retire—go a long time, retire, and then in a year or two they’re dead. I thought, Well, I don’t want to do that—but he was a very, very nice man—I liked him—and easy to work with and whatnot. So they eventually finished our building, we moved over there, John Hartin had his office, and Joe and I were right across the hall, and Ed was down at the end. They had built a new—the Tom T. Hall facility had—and that was—I got there in ’86, so by January of ’87, I think, the building was finished and we moved in. I don’t know if they started the program immediately, but they had an audio—a video production program that went with the studio, and hired, I believe, Pat McCutcheon as the first—I don’t know if he was the very first instructor, but he was very, very soon. He might not have been first. There may have been somebody else, but I don’t remember who it was. So the faculty—the music—the faculty was, at first, John Hartin, then Tim McCasland was his first hire, then Ed Marsh was John’s second hire, and then when they got the sound program, there were others—musicians—in there that taught. There was a keyboard guy that was there and gone before I got there, and—I never thought I’d forget names, but I do—played bass, and was the head of—Randy Ellis was there. So that was the faculty when I got there, was John Hartin, Tim McCasland, Ed Marsh, Randy Ellis, Joe Carr—so I would be the sixth one, and we would have faculty meetings and meet in John’s office. Basically, it had to do—faculty meetings were “Are there any problems, student-wise or scheduling-wise?” Just the nuts and bolts of the thing. But then always part of the meeting was “Where are we going?” and Hartin was always—had ideas.

AW:

That’s really interesting, because I know at the university level, a lot of faculty meetings, if you bring up “Where are we going?” you’re considered somewhat of a heretic because nobody wants to go anywhere.

AM:
Yeah.

AW:
And it seems that quite the opposite was the case at South Plains College.

AM:
Oh, God, Hartin was never ever satisfied with where we were—and I don't mean satisfied. He was satisfied with where we were, but he always wanted to go somewhere else.

AW:
Yeah. Can we stop on that?

AM:
Sure.

AW:
And let me change the batteries—I see that this battery is getting weak. We'll take it right back up.

AM:
All righty.

Break in recording

Andy Wilkinson (AW):
All right, part two of Wednesday the thirteenth. That was too long of a break; I'm not sure I know where we were.

Alan Munde (AM):
Well, we were talking about faculty meetings, and—

AW:
Oh yes, the faculty meetings and the vision and things changing—or not changing, but the promise of what could be.

AM:
Right, right—and he always was a really—John was really good in almost every way that you could be really good at managing what he did—he was real good at it. He had sort of a way

about him that—you know, basically, he talked to you until you came up with the same idea that he had.

AW:

I have a friend like that who calls me up and says, “I just want to touch base with you on this idea,” and you know that the conversation won’t be over with until you agree.

AM:

Right, right, and John could—he’s sort of a slow talker, as you—I think—and so it takes a long time. When he says, “I want to talk to you,” you go, “Oh, God, it’s going to be some length of time,” but it was always about “What can we do to interest the students more and also to get more numbers?”

AW:

Uh-huh, grow the program.

AM:

Right, it was always recruitment-oriented, but by making the program attractive and as you said, you know, he was a great promoter and had the program—selling it ten years in advance, so to speak.

AW:

Unabashed is the word I would use. He knew exactly where it was, but—

AM:

Yeah, he wanted it to—he always sold you his dream of it rather than the reality of it. He had a good dream. I think his dreams came from him being a musician and going, “What would be cool? What would be a cool thing to have if I was eighteen years old and—?”

AW:

Exactly. He said in that interview with me, he said, “I wish I would have had South Plains College.”

AM:

Oh, don’t we all?

AW:

Exactly, me too. And I thought, That’s a great way of selling this thing that doesn’t quite exist yet—I want it to be this way.

AM:

Right. So he wanted to—you know, like one of the first things is he wanted to institute an award for outstanding student, and do we need one male, female, vocalist, instrumentalist, country instrumentalist, rock, or whatever, banjo, bluegrass—so he wanted to give these awards. We figured out there were going to be called the Reel Award—R-e-e-l—and Ed sort of got roped into making them. So he would get—

AW:

Because he had taken welding.

AM:

Yeah. No, he was by far the handiest one of the bunch, and he would make this plaque that—sort of a gold-plated reel on there, and then a nameplate at the bottom. That sort of faded—Ed making the award—wound up making seven or ten of them a semester, or whatever—a year, anyway, and it just got out of hand—as most of those things did. Early on, maybe the first semester, John asked about that—Dr. Baker had the idea—and Dr. Baker was very involved in the program, and really liked it in sort of an egotistical way in that he wanted to play piano—and he loved music. John, to the day Dr. Baker retired, every Saturday morning, John would give Dr. Baker music lessons.

AW:

Really?

AM:

Yeah, and Dr. Baker loved music, and he loved the music students—he called them his kids. And because, you know, it's just not—I love English and history and all that stuff, but it's not like a warm fuzzy sort of thing, where music is—you go play—and when I was there, they had in place a thing called the Country Caravan, which was a touring program in the summers that went around to all these places. Well Dr. Baker—it was Dr. Baker's kid. He was involved in it, he came to the meetings, he helped select songs that they were going to do in his roundabout way, and he ran the spotlight, and he finagled any extra money to help the program, and had a stage—a portable stage—that folded out the side of a semi, and so he arranged for all that. I'll tell you, the first year I was there—the first summer—I was never a part of it, but I helped them—they had to bring the semi out, and the stage, and just make sure everything worked, and it was—it opened physically. You got a bunch of people and lifted it out, and it folded out—

AW:

So it wasn't automated?

AM:

No. So it folded out like this—and what it took was a lot of bodies. So I went out there and helped them let it down one time, and I'll tell you what, it was incredibly dangerous, because it took—as soon as I got it, I realized it took—and I'm not a particularly powerful human—but it took everything I had, because I felt it—

AW:

And you were one of many—

AM:

I was one of many—and we're there letting this down, and we got it down, and I just mentioned to somebody, I said, "That took everything I had. It would have crushed every one of us." If somebody had given up—

AW:

Yeah. Did they ever have injuries?

AM:

Not that I'm aware of, but ultimately they did get it fixed to where it was hinged and motorized.

AW:

Was Country Caravan Joe's responsibility?

AM:

Early on—I'm trying to think who was the director—I think John maybe was—but John is smart enough that as soon as things got to a certain point, he could pass things on and relieve him—because he was—you know, he had a lot of responsibilities besides teaching and ensembles, and then making the faculty meetings—the administrative meetings—then Dr. Baker on Saturdays—was a fulltime job. So as soon, I think, as he could he turned it over to somebody else—and I don't know if Tim was in charge of it, or Joe—I can't remember, really, the very, very, earliest, when I first got there, who was—but it may have been a group effort among John and Tim and Ed and Joe—and Randy Ellis was involved in the—he would go as the sound guy and set up the sound—and they would go, and sometimes be gone a week. They went as far as to Florida one time and maybe as far as California another time.

AW:

Yeah, I didn't realize they went that far. I knew they traveled a lot through the region.

AM:

Yeah, well they went to make some junior college convention in Florida, or—I don't remember—because I wasn't involved.

AW:

John described it as a recruiting tool, but also as a tool to let people know that South Plains College was doing its business.

AM:

Exactly. He sort of saw it as the football team without the people hating you. He said, "Your football team goes, and all the locals love your football team, but the place you go to hates you, where we took it, and they would love us." For years and years and years after the program stopped—after they stopped doing it—people would say, "Oh, I saw South Plains College group came through—used to come every year," and they did, they would play—they had places they would go every year, just all the communities—West Texas and eastern New Mexico, and sometimes they were gone—they'd leave on a Thursday and come back on Sunday night, or maybe even Monday—or sometimes it would just be run out and run back. So it was quite an operation, and I'm really glad I was never a part of it, but I've—

AW:

Being back on the road.

AM:

Yeah, because what you did as a student is you enrolled in a summer class—

AW:

And that was the—?

AM:

That was the caravan. As a faculty member, you were paid for teaching this class, but it was never equal to the time you put in it. At some point, we—Rusty Huddleston was hired, and he was maybe there—came my third or fourth year. But he immediately took over—I mean was assigned the country caravan, and that was his deal, and he would select the songs and rehearse the students and the whole thing. It was a really, really good thing. I saw the goodness of it, and I think Dr. Baker did, too. You know, the other administrators maybe didn't fully appreciate it, but I had a—there was a Dean Hunt who was head of the technical division, and I would run into him and he would say—and he would go out with these teams of accreditation—they would go to a school and review the school—spend two or three days onsite and review the school, and would accredit—report to the southern association, or whoever it is that that's called. Anyway, he would be doing one, and he would be somewhere in North Carolina, or wherever their

administrative unit was—maybe it was the southeast, or he would be in Georgia or somewhere—and he would come back, and he would say, “Oh, I was at a school in Georgia, and they’d say ‘Where are you from?’ and I would tell them South Plains College in Levelland, and they’d go ‘Oh, is that where Alan Munde is teaching banjo?’ or ‘You’re the school that has the bluegrass.’” So it worked in that way, which, that’s a really, really good way for things to work—is just to be known for something positive and good. The bluegrass part of the program, although the numbers were never that large compared with the commercial ensembles, but it got the majority of the publicity.

AW:

Exactly. In fact, most of us would say—on the outside—that the big part of the program was bluegrass, and they had, as an adjunct, a few little other things to keep people occupied. So it was the other way around?

AM:

It was actually opposite, numbers-wise.

AW:

How interesting, because that’s not the perception that we had from the outside.

AM:

Well, it bothered some of the faculty.

AW:

I bet it did.

AM:

Something was delivered to the college once, it was “Bluegrass College, Levelland, Texas,” and it made it. So that really jerked their chain that at the post office they could go “Bluegrass College, oh, that’s South Plains.” Even our faculty that didn’t teach bluegrass were sort of chaffed at country music—originally it was called Country and Bluegrass Music Program—it was originally called Country Music Program, then bluegrass was added to it, and for those that didn’t teach that, it kind of irked them a little.

AW:

So it not only irked faculty outside the program, but in the college, but also within the program.

AM:

Right—and as time went on, you know, when we were in the technical division we had to change our name, because now it all had to line up with statewide things. So other places had

commercial music, so we had to change our name to commercial music. So we became a commercial music program, rather than country and bluegrass music program, although people still referred to it as the country and bluegrass music program. No, the numbers were always larger in the country and rock and whatever else they taught, than bluegrass—but bluegrass always got the publicity because it's a much more easily-dealt-with entity that says "Oh, we teach American musical arts," so to speak, than "We teach people to go play at bars." "Our music culture comes from the finest of American musical folk traditions. This comes from the honky-tonk." And so it was—although it did get some notice and publicity, the outside world was more interested in writing about the bluegrass program.

AW:

Yeah, but the whole notion of the music program was so pervasive, though, that still, people introduce me—they'll say, "Andy teaches at the music program over in South Plains," and I always say "No, no, no, I teach at Texas Tech. I love the program over there," but they just assume that if you're a popular musician, you play and you teach, then it's at Levelland. So that is—you know, what do they say in organizations now, branding?

AM:

Yeah.

AW:

Pretty effective job that was done there.

AM:

Yeah, well see, Hartin knew that instinctively, that "Oh, they're interested in bluegrass," and he would go to bluegrass festivals—

AW:

Because he wasn't a bluegrass guy.

AM:

No, not at all, but he liked it.

AW:

Yeah, but I mean, it wasn't the thing he played.

AM:

No, no—and that was the cool thing about John, was that he liked almost everything, and there was even—just to give a sense—there were complaints about the rock bands being too loud

within the building, and he sort of said, "Well, you know, volume is part of the music." He had a real—

AW:

Yeah, even though he wasn't a rock and roll guy, he understood—

AM:

Oh no—and he probably thought it was too loud, and in the end they had to tone it down because of OSHA regulations about the workplace. But he truly tried to see everybody's point of view and understand what was going on, and try to deal with it, and if people were having problems, he would try to smooth it out and kind of at least ask "What's going on here, why are you so upset with—and is there anything we can do to alleviate this? If we move this class to another room—?" So it was interesting. He was really good, you know, he was real, real good, I think. But anyway, so there were lots of semester-to-semester things that changed, but it was all pretty much handled by John and in faculty meetings. At first, just in his office, we would just drag chairs into his office on Fridays, or sometimes—well Fridays, yeah, Friday morning or Friday afternoon, or whenever it was—and John always had an idea. One of the ideas he had was for Joe and I, he said, "You know, the building is empty in the summers. We do country caravan and we use part of it to rehearse. How about trying to do some music camps?" So we came up with an idea—oh, let me back up. There was another idea that came up—I got sidetracked. Dr. Baker came to John and said "I have five thousand dollars, how about a bluegrass festival?" and so John came to Joe and I—and maybe Ed was involved—and said "how about doing a bluegrass festival?" Well immediately, I shuddered, because it's just another thing that's got lots of barbs and things hanging all over it that you could hang up on and things to go wrong. So I said, "Well, I don't think five thousand dollars is hardly enough, but I'll look into it," so I called around and got prices of some bands I thought would be of interest—went back to him—and the killer—I mean, it killed it immediately—was when I said this, "We would have to—John, there is no way"—and there's Joe and—John and I and Joe sitting there—I said, "There is no way that you and me and Joe could physically manage this on the day of the event. We would need to involve Joe Bollinger from the maintenance department," and he said, "Well that's the end of that," and it was. It was just the end. It just—he went back to— isn't that amazing?

AW:

Yeah.

AM:

He said, "Well, that's the end of that."

AW:

Well you know, it's interesting, maintenance departments at probably every university have that same impact on—the chilling effect.

AM:

I know—isn't that stunning?

AW:

So then you knew the answer from hence forward—

AM:

How to stop anything.

AW:

How to stop anything: involve maintenance.

AM:

And you know, my experience with Joe Bollinger—I always—from that moment on—and I'd heard rumblings that he was a very stern and prickly guy, and so I always tried to do everything by the book, until one time I called up and I said, "I need a vehicle," meaning a large van. Well when I got there, it was a car, and I said, "But I'm taking students out. This isn't enough." He said "You asked for a vehicle. That's a vehicle. If you need a van, you need to ask for a van." "I've learned my lesson," you know, went away. But to the end of my time there, I was always friendly with him and tried to keep on his good side. I learned early on—especially since I had to take students out so much. Speaking of taking students out, you know the thing—and it's so funny, you know, just—and you run into it at every university—when Dr. Baker finally left and we got a new president and new vice president and a new business manager, it seemed like all in a short period of time—the vice president, mostly, had this new managerial style that he was going to pass down—and it had initials like CTC or some something, and it had to do with organizing groups, and sort of grassroots things flowing up from the bottom. We met in groups and did these things where we would pass rubber ducks around to each other, and just feel each other breathe—and just really, really the height of—and I've run into it in other organizations, and I suppose—it must work, it must work, but it's done nothing for me but just chill—I get chilled. I don't want it. So anyway, we would have these meetings—and this was when the faculty was getting fairly large—maybe ten or twelve of us—and we were supposed to—and Pat McCutcheon was our group leader, and he was part of this managerial flow—that we would—and you had to—we had delta and alpha and plus minus shit—we'd post stuff on a wall, and then we would organize—which is kind of okay, but in the end we would boil it down to "If you have an idea, tell it to me and I will send it up the chain." So here was my idea: Pat—I take students

out, and I get back in late at night, but Mr. Bollinger requires that all the paperwork be turned in the next day by eight o'clock—

AW:

In the morning?

AM:

—in the morning. So I get back at two, and I don't have a class until nine—then I've got to come down here and get it all filled out, go around and get the right number—account numbers—fill all this out and turn it all back in, in the morning, before eight—which is difficult. I said, "Is there any way we could have a drop box—a locked drop box—that I could drop the key in and then turn the paperwork in the next day, sometime?" "Okay, that's a good idea. I'll send it up the line." So two or three days later I see Pat in the hall, and I go, "Pat, did you find out anything about that idea I had about turning the keys in?" and he said, "God damn that son-of-a-bitch Bollinger," and I thought, The end. That was the end of that managerial system. It went up until it met some resistance, and then it dissipated. That was so funny to me—all of that big campus-wide push for this ground-up sort of—

AW:

Stopped with—

AM:

—immediately stopped with the maintenance guy. What used to get me is, I'd take students out—you'd have to reserve a van, so you had to be sure and do that, make sure it was going to be there—I'd call over—and you'd have to talk to Bollinger. "Mr. Bollinger? Alan Munde here. I've reserved a van. This is Wednesday. I've reserved a van for Friday, and I'm just making sure that it's on the book." "Let me check," and he would do—he was—you know, if you followed his little trails, he was okay. "Yeah, I've got you down for," and I said, "A van?" "Yes, it's a van." "Thank you very much." So everything would be fine. But I'd have to bring it back in the middle of the night, and you know how it is in West Texas in the winter—it could be howling. They had a gate—you had to lock it inside this thing, and the gate closed, and then it had a post that went down into a hole that had to go all the way down, or the hole for where the padlock wouldn't work. So I'd take it in there, and it's howling, and I have to park the van, then I've got to come back out, and I get to the gate, and it won't go in the hole all the way down, so I get over there—now I've got to get down on my hands and knees in this gravel, and there's gravel down in the hole. So my hands are just frostbitten, practically, and I've got a finger down in there that just barely gets down in there—it can pick up one little thing of gravel and get it out to where there'll be enough room for that pole to go down in there. Oh man, that—and now they don't even lock them up. They just drive them back to an area and park it, and I thought, Man, that's a huge improvement. But anyway, it was a lot of grunt work, doing that, and I wound up—when

John promoted the school groups in a sense that he never turned anybody down. When somebody would call the school for a group, the easiest one to do was the bluegrass bunch—

AW:

—because it was the smallest.

AM:

Small, didn't take a lot of equipment, wasn't—and it also—he knew that people wanted music, but they didn't want it to be too loud.

AW:

Exactly. Is it untoward of me to think that a bluegrass group, almost by definition, is already rehearsed?

AM:

Yes, right.

AW:

I mean they play all the time, and the country band, they've got to figure out who does what, and—

AM:

Right, right. Where the bluegrass bunch were small enough that they would play outside of class, and they're acoustic, so they could sit outside and do it, where if you're an electric band, you need a rehearsal space with amps and drums and a little PA for the singers to sing through—so for them to rehearse—they only got to rehearse during their class times, basically, where the bluegrassers—and they would do songs on their own, too. They do stuff on their own. So almost—not always, but many times there would be a call, and it would be, “Alan, could you call so-and-so? They want to schedule a group.” So I spent a lot of time at nights, weekends, which is what I was—and Anne wanted to get away from, so here I am, right back into it, taking groups out on weekends, and—

AW:

And of course, there's no extra pay for that.

AM:

None. None at all. It was just recruiting—you know, we were recruiting. And this is in addition to the Country Caravan, so I spent a lot of evenings, and I even, one time, wrote it all out for John, just to say, “John, this is too much.” I wrote out all the dates, and there were like ten or fifteen a semester. Well, there's only fourteen weekends, and it's just—was—caused problems.

He came up with some other solutions, but none of them seemed to work out. It always came back to me to take groups out. Finally, I just—as time went on, I just started turning them down, and I think the school program got so big, and it sort of evolved beyond that to where now, if the president called, or the vice president, and wanted something at a Rotary thing, we'd go do that a lot. So those were difficult times, and for me—and it took me a while to get comfortable with this. Up to that point I was a professional musician playing in a professional band playing onstage with other professionals, and I would take these students out, and sometimes it would be embarrassing for me. I can remember, I took a group out and there was somebody videotaping it. On the videotape this voice comes in that says, "This makes me want to curse," and it was me.

AW:

Yeah, I was about to say, was it you?

AM:

Yeah, it was me.

AW:

Well, you know, I've had this question in mind to ask ever since we started talking about teaching this morning, and this is the perfect time to ask it. One of the things that we always talk about in music is that when you're playing with somebody, try always to play with someone better than you are, because it makes you better. It lifts you up. Here, you're doing—by definition—the complete opposite. You're the one that they're playing with who's better, but they're substantially lower. It's not like they bring new ideas to the table; these are all—you're having to teach them. Did you have to—because I never saw your playing diminish. We did a lot of gigs together, and I heard you play, and et cetera, et cetera. Did you have to do anything extra to keep from being dragged down into the same pit?

AM:

Well, I think they won at some point. I did, I felt diminished.

AW:

Really?

AM:

Yeah, and I'm not sure I've ever recovered. It just was so—to sit there day in and day out—now, I should back up and say there was some students who were really, really good and very, very talented—or what we would—their skills are what we refer to as talent. All of the others were people that loved it and wanted to do it, and I don't mean to degrade what they were up to, because they were all trying very hard for the most part. One thing I did learn from doing that was that as a recruiting tool, even having students in bands that weren't top-notch—what it did, I

think, is people would watch my groups play and go “Well I can do that,” or “I could be a part of that,” rather than taking some super-duper group out there—

AW:

—and people look at it and go—say “I could never do that.”

AM:

Yeah, and people going “Oh, I shouldn’t even try to enroll in that school because they’re all so very, very good,” and I had some groups that were that way. Early on I had Chris Vandertuin and Nathan Dennis and Jason Jones—you know Jason.

AW:

Yeah, I know Chris and Jason.

AM:

Another student, whose name I forget, was a bass player and they were an ensemble and were very, very good. Dave and Dawn—

AW:

Yeah, I was just about to say, Dave and Dawn—

AM:

—were very, very good. Jed Hughs was very good, the Clark Family were very good—Ben Clark and Kate and Penny Clark, and they played—one cool thing is they played in many of the country and other Irish ensembles. There were students that came for bluegrass and also participated in those other ensembles, which helped them a great deal—and there were many others. So they weren’t all like that, but there were a lot of retired folks who came and for one reason or another, they wanted to be involved in the—to go out and play, too, so I’d take them out and play.

AW:

Well, and also, your Camp Bluegrass—because we’d kind of gotten sidetracked—

AM:

Right, right, we did.

AW:

Because we started talking about the maintenance department.

AM:
Right.

AW:
But I know when I got to go out a time or two to Camp Bluegrass, I was really impressed with the quality of people who were—of the playing that I heard.

AM:
Right, right. Oh, you get some really good folks at that—and I should mention, that was John's idea to do the camp. Our original idea was to have two of them, and one of them was to be bluegrass-specific, and the other one he identified as—and rightfully so, but it turned out to be too difficult to get into—was a camp for seniors, you know, just the—he thought there were a lot of people retiring and were looking, maybe, to—they played music in their youth and trying to revive it, or never played music and trying to get into it. So he thought that would be good, you know—

AW:
Well, and you had some older people that came to the Camp Bluegrass, too.

AM:
Oh yeah, it always had that element about it, but he wanted sort of the RV crowd is what he was looking for, and we looked into RV magazines and advertising, but the advertising was so expensive in those magazines, where bluegrass—we wound up just doing bluegrass. We started in 1986 or '87—I think it was '87—and had fifteen students, and it was Joe and I, and then we hired Roland White and Gene Wooten and Chris Vandertuin—and I can't remember who the faculty was, but it went real well. Then for—it grew and grew and grew every year until it was—is what it is now, and we've had as many as a hundred and fifty, I think. But if we get around a hundred, that's doing well—eighty to a hundred is a good number. We do banjo and guitar, mandolin, fiddle, bass, dobro, and vocals—you know, we just made it up as we went along. Early on, we tried to do everybody that we had classes, but then everybody got a private lesson—and maybe even two private lessons during the week. Well that turned out to be—as the enrollment went up—just impossible. So we had to—first thing we dropped was the private lessons. And then also, we would have a student concert at the end of the week, and Tim—I mean Pat McCutcheon would come in and videotape them—this was back in the day of VHS—and then Paula Carr worked for John Hartin's Texas Music and Video as the copy person, so we would make copies and send to everybody. Well, when you have twenty people, twenty-five people, that's not too bad. She would make them, I'd pack them up and send them out. But as there got to be fifty, and seventy-five, and then Pat got tired of doing that, so he didn't want to do it anymore, so we had to drop that. We also would organize students into ensembles, which is an incredibly stupid thing for us to have done. I do camps, and people say, "Oh, I can't imagine a

camp that doesn't organize into ensembles and then give instruction, because that's what it's really all about." Well, that's what it's really all about, but it's also where all the problems are. In a week—if you organize on Tuesday—

AW:

Well it takes you a week to know who should be fitting with whom.

AM:

Exactly.

AW:

You know, because you've got to have a certain—if they're all klutzes, they'll never fly, but—

AM:

Yeah, right. It was such a dreadful nightmare in the end, we had to drop that too, because we ran into things like—you know, you get adults to come in—and let's just pretend they're all successful at whatever their world is—and put five of them, any five of them together.

Somebody is going to want to be in charge.

AW:

In fact, all five.

AM:

All five of them—and somebody is going to resent it, and that's exactly what happened. We would have fights—I mean, not fights—but I'd be walking down the hall, and there'd be somebody out in the hall. I'd go "Aren't you in an ensemble?" "No, I left. I couldn't do that," and I said, "Well, come on, I'll try to find you another spot." "No, no, I don't want" —so it got to be that. My favorite one that I always tell is, there was an ensemble that we put together at the camp, and had a guy that was a psychiatrist from LA or San Francisco, played banjo—good banjo player—and then in the ensemble was this psychologist, bass player—and then two or three other people. So they're playing a song, and I'm walking through to get some extra chairs. They're just practicing by themselves, and I hear—in the middle of some song—the psychologist says, "We're rushing, we're rushing." The psychiatrist says, "It's not my fault, it's not my fault," and I said, "Ah, ah, get me out of here." I thought, If those guys can't work it out, we're lost, and I thought, Well, that's got to be that, so we dropped doing that. Early on, I would bring my barbeque grill from the house, buy a bunch of really good sausage—I love the German Central Texas sausage, and would gather some up in my travels for this event—and I would take it over to the dorm and set up my little barbeque—just a little stupid barbeque grill—and we'd have sausage and Anne would make potato salad, and Joe would make something, and Paula would make something, and we'd feed the people and have a little cookout. Well, when there's fifteen

or twenty, or even thirty, you can manage it, but boy, when it got up, going, I thought, Well, we've got to drop that, too, and so we had the food service just service outdoors. One year we had a guy that's a world-class—I don't know what you—outdoor barbeque—he was from Louisiana, so he did a lot of Cajun-style food. He drug his trailer to the camp and fed everybody—brought the food, brought everything—shrimp, potatoes, chicken, the whole bit—it was stunning. He is a—you know, I'd asked a friend who knew him, "Is he going to come back to camp?" "No, he's usually—he's so busy judging in the summers that he can't make it." He judges these food cooking contests that draw thousands of people, so he's a big time—so we had a guy like that one year. It's been real interesting, all the people that you draw at camp. Anne would say—which, I quote her—"You advertise for crazies, you get crazies." It's "Come, learn to play bluegrass," and you get those kind of people.

AW:

So you shouldn't be surprised.

AM:

Yes, exactly. It's gone smoothly the last few years. We've kind of figured things out. Early on, we—like Hartin—Hartin would bend over backwards to get people to come. Well, we learned that when you do that, you get people that you have to bend over backwards for a long time at the camp—and I always pointed out this—we would—the first day, Monday, at noon—you walk out of the building just to go to lunch and there's a woman sitting on the curb, crying because her class is too hard, and you go "This is so wrong. She's got the really wrong attitude," and then you get a letter from them—I always say it's typewritten—and it's written from the very top corner of the left side, solid all the way down to the very bottom corner with what's wrong with your camp. And you just look at it, you wad it up, and you throw it away, because—you know, you throw out the high scores and the low scores, and you take the ones in the middle. Joe has developed a real good sense of it. If they call on the phone to find out something—"Now I'm wheelchair-bound, and I need to know this, and I have to have this and that," or "I play bass but I don't want to bring mine because I'm flying. Can I rent one?" or—

AW:

Meaning "Will you loan me one?"

AM:

Right. Well, Joe has developed this "You know, possibly this isn't the right camp for you. You know, Mark O'Connor has a camp that you might try." So he's—and we had one woman that complained so much the first or second day—I'm going, "What do you do, what do you do, what do you do?" So I said—we had a meeting with her, Joe and Paula, and I, and this woman and her mother—

AW:

And her mother?

AM:

Her mother. And I said “Well, I’ll tell you what. We’ll just your money back and you can leave,” and the mistake I made was I said, “You can either leave or stay, I don’t care. We don’t care. If you’re not happy, here’s your money back.” Well she stayed.

AW:

So she got free camp and still complained.

AM:

She got camp free—well, she quit complaining, which was what I was most interested in. Joe has learned that—first of all, if they fill out the thing and show up, they’re probably okay, but if they call and have issues, you know that they’re going to get there and have issues. “Now, I’m a vegetarian, and I also walk with a cane, and I play autoharp, and I noticed you don’t have any autoharp instruction. Could I sit in on the guitar class?” “Maybe this isn’t the right camp for you.”

AW:

“There’s a good autoharp camp down in—”

AM:

Right, although the cafeteria does deal—they have a vegetarian—if people say, “I want some vegetarian selections,” they’re really good about it. The campus is set up with all the—

AW:

—wheelchair access—

AM:

—wheelchair, you know, meets all the federal requirements of—

AW:

It’s not the fact that they’re vegetarian or wheelchair-bound, it’s that they call up and—

AM:

Yeah, “Now, I’ll need somebody to drive me from—” “Oh, this isn’t the camp for you.” We had also young people, and we found out that they’re problems, too.

AW:

You mean young like—?

AM:

—eight or nine—

AW:

—yeah, not housebroken.

AM:

Yeah, and I think we sort of have a cutoff at fourteen or something like that, unless they're parents not only come but sit in class—yeah, part of the class—because they can be real disruptive, just in their—one of my favorite students I had—I won't say "favorite" because I liked him, but I always remember him—is, I'd say "Paul, I notice on your mandolin solos, they all do the same thing. They start up high and you play down low, then you start low and you play up high. There's no sort of melodic development between there, you know, that goes up a little bit and then down and then—there's no variety," and then there would be this: (sigh) —and I'd want to slap him. "What am I doing here? What are you doing here?" Early on, we got more students—or it seemed like I got them—who wanted confirmation, rather than instruction.

AW:

Try teaching a songwriting class—not only confirmation, but sympathy for the plight that they have in life, which they express in their song.

AM:

Yeah. I remember a guy—and I didn't like him, because he had power—and he was the guy that booked McCabe's out in Santa Monica. McCabe's was a good place to play and be seen and whatnot, but he was in charge of it, and he had been in the band that brought Linda Ronstadt to LA. I think it was called The Stone Ponies.

AW:

Yeah.

AM:

Every once in a while—and he fancied himself singer/songwriter—but mostly he managed the store and booked the concert part of it. It was a good—they had good stuff there, had really good stuff there and you'd want to be in with it, but if he didn't like you or didn't think you were the right kind for his venue, you had a hard time. Well, I went to something that had an act that I really did want to see, and they had an opening act that maybe couldn't make it or cancelled or something, so Bobby—this guy—did the show. He got up there and just, song after song, I mean

it went like this “In 1967 I was in the Peace Corps in India, and got a letter from my girlfriend, saying that she didn’t” —whatever it was—and he just—it’s embarrassing. It was embarrassing. I’m sitting there, “Oh, God, I don’t think I want to know this about you,” and he went into more detail, “and I wrote this song,” and I thought, No, you don’t write songs that are that personal. You write songs that are personal but universal, and yours is just personal, and it’s embarrassing. I don’t want to know that about you. “Oh, and then I wet the bed,” or “My mother would—my father would tie me in bed,” or—and it’s “Oh, God, please don’t tell me these things,” so yeah. They want you to just go, “Oh God, that was so good. That was really good.”

AW:

And I’ll bet there are lots of other bed-wetters who’d love to love to hear this song.

AM:

Yeah, right. I should have said that. “I’m sorry you still do, but” —so they want—you know, these students would come—early on it seemed like I had more than later on, and I did notice—you know, they talk about generational differences—and I did notice differences in sort of chunks of students. Early on, I got a lot of those “Just confirm that I’m doing the right thing,” but as time passed, it would be people that were different, so I thought, There is something to this whole Generation X, Y and that stuff. They do have different things about them, but at some point they got better. I don’t think it got worse. I think the students got better in the sense of “I don’t know how to play, you know how to play, show me and I’ll try my best to do it,” so I enjoyed that.

AW:

Was that maybe the dying off of the sixties?

AM:

Oh, yeah.

AW:

Our generation

AM:

Yeah, that sort of self—I did run into one student that I always like to talk about, because I think they still exist, but he came from a very wealthy family and lived in Aspen, and I think had gone to one of these high schools where it’s—you go in and “What would you like to study? What are you interested in?” And he would go do that—which is kind of cool. I guess it works—

AW:

They ought to all be that way.

AM:

Yeah—but he got into mandolin playing because he saw Sam Bush, and he got a mandolin and started playing, and in fact he had the energy part of it in the right hand. He had that really good. I was real—he'd only been playing a short while, and he wanted to come to school. But he did not take instruction at all, at all, at all, at all—and he would—I'd say, "You know, there's this scale. When you play in the key of A there's this organized group of notes that match that key. They belong to that key. Can you play those notes?" And he couldn't. He could kind of peck around and ultimately find some that might work. So on his solos—I just call it "finger flopping." He would get his pick going and just flop it around.

AW:

Hoping that something would land there that would—

AM:

Exactly. You know, it was like—I remember seeing on—

AW:

Like two people playing the same neck—

AM:

Right. Well, it was like a lot of—you know, the movie—what was the movie where Steve Martin and Lily Tomlin shared a body? It was like right down the middle. He had a gig to play—because he played guitar—and his left hand was him, but his right hand was her. He would say "Okay, strum now," "No, no, now, now, no not now," and it was sort of like that. I saw on—Martin Mull had a little TV show called "Fernwood 2 Night," and he had a guy on there who he was interviewing, he says "I understand that you're running for mayor of Long Beach," or some of LA's towns there, and he says, "I'm not actually running. I'm more like flowing." Well that's how this kid was. He was like just flowing towards making music. So everything was how it felt, he'd say, "That felt good. That didn't feel good." So we did finish some song, and he had taken some erratic solo, and I said "Well, your solo could have been a little more organized," and he says "But it felt good," and I said, "Well, okay. In the key of C and you end your solo on a C-sharp, that makes the people—people the world over—feel bad," and he was just big-eyed—

AW:

Like "How's that possible?"

AM:

Yeah, how—"But it felt so good!" and I'm with him, you know, I'm with him to a certain extent. I'd like for it to feel good, too, but there's an organization to music that he was sort of missing out on. He left after one semester and went on to—

AW:

Chef school, or clown college?

AM:

Well, I think he went on and, with his parents' money, he opened a studio and got into some kind of music that was formless, I bet.

AW:

Yeah, that felt good.

AM:

That felt good to him, anyway. He wonders why it didn't feel good to the masses and didn't make money. So anyway, but you get a large variety, but you get a lot of really good ones, too, and a lot of very, very nice people, and people that I'm still friends with to this day. Louie and Kathy came to school, and I still see them and hang out with them, and I talked to Dave and Dawn for the first time not—

AW:

I haven't heard from them in a long time. Are they still playing?

AM:

They play some, I think. They're both nurses now.

AW:

Yeah, I knew that they'd—last I knew, I say—they had achieved that, and I guess that would cut back on their playing.

AM:

Right, and they have adopted a Chinese child—

AW:

Yeah—little girl, I bet.

AM:

I think it's a little girl, yeah.

AW:

Yes, my sister and her husband adopted a little Chinese girl because that's—

AM:

That's what they get rid of.

AW:

Yeah.

AM:

That's what they shuck.

AW:

I don't know about Dave and Dawn's, but my sister's little girl is sharp as a whip and a delight.

AM:

Oh, I'm sure. Well, Dave and Dawn are both pretty that way, and I'm sure the kid is, too. Any part of the nature part of nature—I mean of nurturing and nature, the nurturing part is probably real good.

AW:

Let me ask—

AM:

Please do, I'm tired of rambling on.

AW:

No, this has not been rambling. This has been very good—a question that's—well, one question on my mind is, if it's getting very hot, I need to get my guitar out of the van before too long. It was cloudy and cool when I got here, but we might ought to take a moment here. But before we do that, I wonder how many people go through programs like this—because I'm thinking about my own experience, twelve years of teaching songwriting—and have I produced—I, you know, this is being very egocentric—but has my instruction ever produced a songwriter that's really of note? And the answer for me is “No, it hasn't done that.” Is that just because that's so idiosyncratic or because the real people who are really good are people like Alan Munde, who learned that on their own very early, and they learned it in their own way, and they don't go to programs like this? So have you had the kind of student come through that you can say “This is a success story?”

AM:

Oh yeah, definitely. One of them that comes—I mean the ones that could play when they got there, I think we helped get better quicker than they would on their own. The ones—I think everybody got helped, because everybody, I think that I dealt with anyway, played better than

they did when they got there. Now, how much better is the issue, I suppose, but I think everybody was helped by it. There was one in particular—and I'll say his name if I can—Chris Elliot—and Chris was from Houston—is from Houston—and came, and he was eighteen or nineteen, and he came with a guitar and a harmonica and a harmonica holder, and his idea of bluegrass was “Heart of Gold” by Neil Young—and we did it. He wanted to do it, and he did it well. It was real clear that he was a talented kid. He figured everything out he had just by doing it, and I think somewhere in his family, there were people who liked bluegrass, and so he knew about bluegrass and banjos. So he got interested, said, “I want to learn to play the banjo,” and he went from nothing to a great deal in two or three semesters. He went from never have played it to where he could play very well—I mean startlingly well. He's in a band up around Denver, and teaches, and has like thirty students or so, and is a huge success in my mind for that young man. Truly—you know this as a teacher—you really can't teach anything. You just help people kind of understand, and they can teach themselves—because you can't move their fingers. You can't think their thoughts. You can only sort of show them how you did it, kind of. Here's how I move my fingers when I play.

AW:

Well, and also you can see what they're doing well and what they're doing poorly, and you can point out the difference, because the other thing I've noticed—especially in songwriting, maybe more so than instrumental learning—is that people confuse the two. They think that they didn't do something very well in a song, when it was actually—the core thing was the best thing about it—and so they will throw that out trying to save something that is not good. I don't know if that describes instrumental playing—maybe the guy that felt good was trying to save something—feeling good—at the expense of—

AM:

—sounding good—sounding like he was good—or making me feel good. Yeah. I'm sure you're—yeah, that's right. You know, a lot of the instrumental thing is you know—you play—is just getting your technique squared away and then rehearsing it.

AW:

Yeah, knowing where one is.

AM:

Yeah—just—I mean really, the nuts and bolts of it. On banjo-playing, a lot of it—as you might guess—both right and left hand is fingering, and it's just getting it squared away and then rehearsing that—and then making it sound good, and then what do you play—I mean, there's lots of issues. So it's a real sort of a revelatory process—you know, you reveal things to them and they take it and they either do it or don't. It's not up to me, I can't—they're not going to do it because they're going to get an A or a B. They're going to do it because they want to or not. I

would always accuse students—I'd show them something, I'd say, "Do it like this. Do it this way, or do this or that," and they would come back in with something else, and I would—I told them, I said, "You know what, it looks like to me is that, when I say something to you, you don't believe me. You think I'm lying or that I don't know—and I'm not lying, but I might not know—but I'm telling you, you have to trust me and my experience, and that I'm not lying, and I'm not heading you in wrong directions. There are other ways to do this, but this way is one of the successful ways. There's other successful ways, but this is one of them, so you need to do that." You want to take a break?

AW:

Sure.

AM:

She wants you to hit the "Stop" button.

AW:

Yeah, I will hit the stop button.

Kitty Ledbetter:

Oh, I don't—I was just going to offer—

Break in recording

Alan Munde (AM):

Tell Kitty we should put a boxing glove on his nose, because it's—

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

Then he could—you could hire him out to train the kangaroos at the circus.

AM:

Yeah.

Kitty Ledbetter (KL):

I'll let you snack on this, in case you want to.

AW:

Oh, thank you. Thank you. Part the third on the thirteenth of June—and we have Penny, is it? The new dog?

AM:

Yeah, she'll calm down.

AW:

She's cute. Yeah, she's calmed already. So, we talked a little bit after we shut the machine off about this whole idea of when you go from being a professional—and I would suppose not only a musician, but maybe a painter or a sculptor or a dancer or a writer, and you take on the job of teaching other people to do that, that there's a frequent complaint that taking on that teaching job reduces your ability to be the same level of professional that you were once, and my question to you when we had the tape machine off was, is that simply the same reduction you would get if you took a fulltime job at the bank, and you weren't teaching—it wasn't your banjo playing, it was just the time and energy that you had to devote to it? The other side of that is, is it being around people of lesser ability that doesn't keep you—lets you be less sharp, and then that gets to be a habit or whatever?

AM:

Right. Well, you know, as I think about it, I think it's—you know, when you're—when I was trying to make a living playing music, and you'd be on the road for two weeks at a time, or three weeks, and you're playing fairly regularly in sort of this crucible of performance—you know you're in performance mode every night, there's a certain level of energy and spunk or whatever you want to—that you put into it that, you know, is—you try to rise to every night, and then there's also the—as you rehearse things, or you're going to record, especially, there's always the thinking of ideas and trying to come up with little different ways to do things, and to add to the literature or the music in some sort of tiny way in your playing, so you have that—I'll use the word “demand,” but it's not a demand. It's just that you put on yourself as trying to keep up and keep the level of performance up and keep the level of creativity on your end up enough to where you're of interest. Then you take all that away and it goes to zero almost, then it's hard to replace that with anything—there's hardly anything that replaces it. Then you're there with your banjo in your hand all day long, but you're doing just little tiny pieces of things, “Now do this, try this, or finger it like this,” or I play guitar with them and rehearse them some, and I'll play guitar over and over again as they practice their piece—you know, you just get removed from that—I would think it's not as much as being a banker, where you don't have your instrument involved in anything, I would suppose. Although, if you got completely removed from it, maybe your creative stuff would—

AW:

Or when you got back with it that evening, you would be back to—

AM:

Right, you would have more thoughts going on that just coming out of a one-hour lesson or

whatever. So it—I think over time, I think I lost a bit, but I always tried, you know, in the summers to have a group and get gigs and have things lined up so there was always that to look forward to, and even while I was at the school, I tried to record some just to keep interest up. Joe and I—when I first got there, Joe and I recorded a thing which we ultimately called *Texas Fiddle Favorites for Mandolin and Banjo*, and at the time it was just a cassette, it never was a CD, and then we peddled it to Mel Bay, and they issued it along with the written music—tablature—they had “Texas Fiddle Favorites for Banjo” and “Texas Fiddle Favorites for Mandolin” book, but it was the same CD on both of them. That was real good for me because it was a lot of—that kind of melodic exact playing is a real challenge, and just to get through it was—you know, and we did it in the summer. We would record it there at the school when the studio wasn’t being used, and we had a—were shown how to get it all up—Stuart Moody, who came into the sound production program after Randy Ellis—and in addition to Randy Ellis—he would come over and set it up for us and then leave, and Joe would push the “Record” button and we’d play, and then back it up and listen to it, and then talk about what we wanted to do. Basically, Joe was the recording engineer in the sense that he pushed the button and did stuff, so it was—those sorts of things help keep you—your creative juices and your muscles stirred up, and then also I tried to do a—rather than Country Gazette, a thing called The Alan Munde Gazette, trying to say that it’s similar but different.

AW:

But County Gazette wasn’t still functioning?

AM:

No, it sort of—you know, when I decided to come to the school, basically it was just Roland and I and whoever else we could gather up to play with us, and Roland said, “Well I can’t—if you’re going to go do school, I can’t wait for you, and I’ve been offered this job with the Nashville Bluegrass Band,” so he went with the Nashville Bluegrass Band, so I went to the college. I had some very talented students who were interested in playing, so I got them together, and that was The Alan Munde Gazette. It was Dawn Watson and Chris Vandertuin and Steve Garner. I thought it was real good.

AW:

Did you do more than one album with them?

AM:

No, just one with them. Then Chris left and Dave Hardy came in, but we never recorded. Well, I’ll back that up. We did record, but I gave up before it came out as an Alan Munde Gazette. Those things that we recorded did—I used, ultimately on this album of my own called *Old Bones*. I had a CD, and basically it was just sort of stuff I gathered from several different

locations and put it out. I like it a lot. I like all the music on there, and I like the music with Dave and Dawn and Steve real well. I like it just fine.

AW:

Now where is Steve Garner now? I haven't heard—

AM:

Steve is in Durant, Oklahoma, I think, and is a—he had a master's degree in biology or something, and ultimately, I think, got a teaching certificate and is teaching biology up there in Oklahoma. I haven't seen him in a long time.

AW:

I sure always liked him.

AM:

I like Steve just fine—funny guy, good musician—you know, they all had more faith in the group than I did. I tried to tell them, I said—I think I tried to say, you know, that we shouldn't use the name Country Gazette, but they talked me into using it because they thought that it would be more sellable than a brand new thing, but I proved them wrong. Anyway, so I would try to that additionally to kind of keep going, and then Joe and I recorded a couple of albums for, at the time, Flying Fish, and one of them was *Windy Days and Dusty Skies*, and the other one was *Welcome to West Texas*.

AW:

Uh-huh, and two albums I really like.

AM:

Oh yeah, I love them. Joe is such a good—for me, my taste, he's a good songwriter—and he wrote that "Windy Days and Dusty Skies" I thought was great, and it was real sort of—I don't know what you call it—if you know the song, it's about a West Texas young couple that get married and they live in a mobile home or something, and everything is fine. She leaves the window open one night and the wind comes through and sort of tells her of other—there's other worlds out there—and so she got sort of lost to the wind, so to speak, and she heard the sounds of Dallas in the wind, or whatever, and left. I always liked it, it's really good, it's really good—and we recorded a couple, two or three songs that Ed Marsh wrote that I thought were real interesting and fun to play, and then just some old, older songs—and recorded one of yours. Is it "Wildflower Moon," or—it's been—

AW:

Well, you know, there's "Wildflower Moon," but I think—what else—yeah, it's a waltz—which,

I told you when I wrote the song, I said, "What is the fiddle tune this is based off of?" I heard the "Molly Rose Waltz," and I talked to fiddle players all over the planet, and no one knew it. Several years ago—maybe three years ago—I was doing an interview with Junior Daugherty—fiddle player—

AM:
—fiddle player—

AW:
—and he said, "Hum this tune you're looking for," and so I hummed it, and he was, "Oh, that's the 'Molly Rose Waltz,'" and I said, "I thought so!" Where did he find it—and he knew all about it. So if I could record that—ever put that on an album again, I can at least now get the pedigree of that melody. But at least I was relieved to find out it wasn't a known author; it was a traditional melody, so I feel better about that.

AM:
Yeah, I'm sure. Yeah.

AW:
I didn't want to be stealing someone else's melody—and actually it was just that duh, duh, duh, part—the other part that I added to it, he said, "Oh, I like that part. That wasn't part of the song."

AM:
So you did—it wasn't totally a rip off. Well good.

AW:
It would have been a total rip off, except my memory was poor—I could only remember the one part of it.

AM:
Yeah, you'd have ripped it all off if you could have remembered it.

AW:
Exactly—if I could remember it.

AM:
So anyway, back to the initial question—is, I tried to keep involved in enough things to keep my playing somewhat going, but end the end, I think from where I was before to where I came out, I think—if I made some progress, it wasn't as much as I would have, otherwise, just because you spend so much time doing other things than the intensity of being in a group and having gigs.

AW:

Yeah—plus, I've noticed—and I think part of this is age for me—just is how much energy I have at the end of the day.

AM:

That's true, too, very much so.

AW:

I create when I have energy, but not when I don't.

AM:

Well, when I started at the school, I was forty—so I had made it forty years before I had to get a job.

AW:

Well, it's not quite the same as getting a job. It's still a different—it's not like going to work for the bank.

AM:

No, no.

AW:

Well what—why did you leave? You're still viable, you still play, your fingers are all working, and—

AM:

What I did was—once again, going back to me witnessing the people who worked their full commitment, you know, to sixty-five, or however long they made it, and then being—Don Stroud did it; he made it, retired, and in two years he was dead. Another gentleman who was in the—taught government, and I can't remember his name—he, I don't even think, made a year after his retirement, and I just thought, You know, I don't want to do that. They have a formula for when you can retire, which is—

AW:

—the rule of eighty?

AM:

Yeah, the rule of eighty, which is your age and your years of service equal eighty, and so I started when I was forty and I worked twenty years, until I was sixty, and so I had twenty years in and I was sixty years old, so that's the rule of eighty—and Kitty and I were married then,

living apart, she down here in Wimberley, me up in Levelland—and I wanted to not do that anymore, plus I wanted enough time left that I could still have yet another career, so to speak, for however it works out. So as soon as I got my rule of eighty and I could retire, and I got my medical insurance, and I spilt. It wasn't because of the program or the school or anything like that, it was just because I felt like twenty years—for some people, that's not very long. Ed's been there probably thirty-five years by now.

AW:

I was going to say, yeah, he's still there.

AM:

And he's still there, and Joe has been there two years longer than I, so he's been there twenty-seven or twenty-eight years now. So it's not anything related to the school, although I'm glad I'm not sitting in front of a student today and—I always tell people—they ask me what I did, and said “I did a lot of this: Put your first finger on the first fret of the first string. No, that's your second finger. No, that's the third string. No, that's the fourth fret,” so I'm glad I'm not doing that so much anymore, but I miss sort of the regularity of it—just to have a thing and people waiting on you—I don't mean waiting like a waiter, but they're expecting you to show up and teach and do classes, and “Let's try this; let's try that.” There was a lot of—you know, a lot comes from teaching—as they say, if you want to learn something, teach it—and so I really sort of have gotten a lot better as a teacher and an understander of what is going on when I play, anyway, and why my fingers go down where they do and how to explain it to somebody else and share that, and it's served me well in these—since I've retired, it's allowed me to do more of these banjo camps, because a lot of them happen when some part of the school year is on and I can't get away, and I do them, and I've gotten to where I'm pretty good at it. I think I've got it to where I can tell you how I do it in a really understandable way, but you still have to move your fingers and do it, but I can give them clues and stuff like that, and insights—and I will say shortcuts, but it's still a lot of work for people to do. It's so interesting, you teach at school, you work really hard to develop your ability to play, you figure out how to share with people a really understandable way that you do it, and something that they could recreate if they can rehearse their fingers. So you get all that, and you spend two or three days laying it all out step-by-step—“Do this, do these kinds of things, then do this thing, then put these two together and you get this thing, now do it,” and you get to the end of the week, and there was a lady at one of these that's a psychiatrist, and I thought, Well, if anyone will get the idea of process, it would be a psychiatrist, you know, somebody that has spent all those years studying, and she came up afterwards—I thought she would appreciate how I had laid it all out—and she says, “I know I need to do all this stuff that you talked about and do this and do this and do this, but isn't there like a shortcut for when I put my fingers down like this and I want to do this?” and I went, “Gah! Yes, these three days was the shortcut.” She wanted like even shorter, shorter, shorter, shorter shortcut.

AW:

Yeah, my favorite is the people who nod their heads and agree that there's no formula for songwriting, and then the first question out of the bag is "What's the formula?" They don't exactly put it that way, but—

AM:

That's what the question ultimately is. "Isn't there like a template I could just plug in words?"

AW:

Yeah, just copy that and do this.

AM:

Sure, just copy the greatest song you've ever known, and then for every word, switch out a—put in your word, and that's the template.

AW:

Here's a dictionary, there's a template.

AM:

Right—here's the alphabet.

AW:

Yeah, here's the raw materials. Yeah, pretty intriguing. Well, let's see—what else about the—oh, one other question that occurred to me—again, those of us outside your program had this sense that it was unique, worldwide, that it was unique in a good way, and that it was a very sort of a special enterprise and I think some of it comes from not only the caliber of the people that were teaching there, but also the students that came out of there, and then this John Hartin, who you said was always—had big ideas and so forth—and it was—it seemed to be, to me at least, looking from the outside as one of these—like the court of Camelot—this little bright, shining moment where things are really going well. Whether or not that's true, did you—those of you in the school—have any sense of this, like, "We're really doing something special or unique here?"

AM:

Well, I thought so, because if you look around the world of education, there's hardly any place that did what we did. Now, there was a school that was in—and still is going—in east Tennessee, at—I think it's called—East Tennessee State—and do you know, now, Berklee has bluegrass—the Berklee School of Music, and I visited there.

AW:

How did—they would have looked down their noses at that for a long, long time.

AM:

Oh, definitely. Well, you know what, this is ironic—and I won't mention names—but we had people on—once again—that even on our faculty there was a schism between the bluegrass end and then the real popular music—you know, rock and roll—

AW:

Oh, I thought you were going to say between yours and the fine arts.

AM:

Well, that was an even greater one, but even within our department, there were some—and I—really, that's kind of unfair. As I'm sitting here thinking, there was one who—and he was in some position of power at some point, and it kind of was uneasy, but I don't think he felt that we were deserving of much of anything. He would always push for the Berklee model, about note reading and just this and that and the other—I don't know if he found the irony in it, but I did—is that not only did Berklee add bluegrass to their curriculum, but the guy who taught it was a former SPC student.

AW:

Really?

AM:

Yeah—from before I got there.

AW:

What was his name?

AM:

His name is Dave Hollander, and he was actually a bass player, but he also played banjo. So anyway, I thought that was ironic that this guy in our program wanted us to be more like Berklee, when in fact—

AW:

Berklee wanted to be more like you.

AM:

Berklee adopted what we were doing with a former student of the bluegrass program, so there was a bit of irony there. But their program is part of a larger program called Roots Music, it's a roots music program, so they also have Irish and this other stuff within their thing, and apparently they got a grant from some anonymous donor of some fairly good-sized amount of money to bring in guests to spend two- or three-day residencies at the school. I've been there,

and other banjo players of some renown have been there, and it's an incredible school. But, it was interesting, in talking with Dave, they have some of the same sort of administrative problems that we had at the school, which is, you know, if you enroll in an English class, the only thing you care about as a student is, is it at the right time? Where, if you're organizing an ensemble for five, six, seven people, you need a bass player, a drummer, a guitar player—or whatever it is you need for your ensemble, and people just enroll and then you have to shuffle them around. Well, administratively, because they're dealing with money and the state and all that, it all has to line up on the pieces of paper, and so we were constantly doing add/drop slips to get the ensemble shuffled around. Well, they have the same problem—where we got ours taken care of in a week, it takes them two weeks because, you know, it's a whole school of ensembles—just every program—they have over four thousand music students.

AW:
At Berklee?

AM:
At Berklee.

AW:
Oh, gosh, that's much larger than I thought it was.

AM:
Oh yeah, it's pretty astounding, isn't it?

AW:
Yeah, because you have this idea that it's this little, tiny, elite—the crème de la crème—everybody knows everybody—my goodness. Four thousand.

AM:
Well, they do within the little nodules of programs in there. You do jazz, one thing, this roots music is another thing, they have a world music, and I'm sure they have vocal stuff, and just the whole thing. So it's a pretty amazing place, and the building they're in, their main building, the older one—and they have others, but the original one was a converted bank—a large bank, and it's like a rabbit warren of—to get from one side to the other, you go down some stairs, down a hall to another stairway, up to another floor that goes somewhere up some more stairs—and you can't get from one place to another place without having first gone some other place. It's stunning, and I thought, Man, I hope there's no emergency while I'm here, because I'll never get out. I had no earthly idea where I was in that building—and some of them, it took an entry card to go from one way to the other. I should say, they bought another building down the street that is similar—it's a converted business building—but they're building next to them, I think, a

seventeen-story facility, and they've got a branch in Barcelona, Spain, one in Helsinki, and they're putting one in Beijing. It's pretty incredible, isn't it?

AW:
Yeah.

AM:
Sounds like John Hartin got ahold of them.

AW:
Yeah—with money.

AM:
With money—John Hartin with money—oh my God. But, Dave Hollander said there is a dark side—he said he worked there for eighteen years part time before he ever got on full time. He said it was real hard as a full time—

AW:
Well, and Boston is not the kind of town where you can survive on a part time job.

AM:
Not really. It's just real tough. So anyway, within our program I thought that was ironic that they wanted to do that—but I always thought it was special. I didn't sort of flaunt it or anything, but I was one of the few banjo players in the world that had a job as a banjo player with insurance and a pension—and it wasn't much. Neither of them are much, but they're more than nothing. And most of the—a lot of the bluegrass world—I mean, the old joke is “What do you call a musician without a wife or a girlfriend? Homeless,” and so most of the musicians I know that play that have insurance, it's because the wife has it at her job. So I felt special in that sense, but also special that, you know, there weren't many places to go that you could do that—like I say, East Tennessee State had a program that was very successful, and in large part because of its location. It's just surrounded by where bluegrass comes from. The big issue for us was just the location, but that was unchangeable, so you just dealt with it. When I went through orientation—as a new faculty member I had to go to classes—and Dr. Baker taught one of them—sort of rambled on, but it was real interesting, and he said something that was—I remember and repeat—he said, “Nothing is where it's supposed to be. If you looked at the state of Texas, all of the colleges would be in the east, because that's where the people are. There's no reason for Texas Tech to be where it is, or South Plains College to be where it is, other than somebody organized enough political clout to make it happen.”

AW:

Yeah, Texas Tech is a direct result of a state secession convention—not the state seceding, but West Texas seceding from the state. That's exactly it—

AM:

That's what they bought them off with.

AW:

Well, the governor took a train to Sweetwater, where they were having it, and said, "Well, what—

AM:

—what's wrong?"

AW:

And they said "Well one thing is we haven't gotten that college that you promised." They had West Texas State Normal College, which was a two-year college, at Canyon, that later became—and they said, "Okay, we'll create—" and that led to Texas Tech, but you're exactly right. It wasn't going to happen until somebody forced it.

AM:

Exactly. So that—our program should have been at North Carolina State, or University of North Carolina, or Virginia, or Duke, or something—and can you imagine any of them doing that? None. So why is it in West Texas? Because that's where they thought of to do it—and that's where they did it. Not that you shoot the finger at everybody else, but it's—people always scratch their head, why isn't it in Dallas or somewhere? Because Nathan Tubb was in South Plains College, and he's the one that thought of it. You didn't.

AW:

Same argument we make about our music archive; why is it not at University of Texas? Well, because they didn't do it.

AM:

Exactly. That's exactly it. It's like folk art you see sometimes. I saw a guy on TV, and he was talking about his particular art, and somebody says, "Yeah, but couldn't anybody do it?" and he says, "Yeah, but they don't. I do." So that's why that music program is at South Plains College, is because the people who thought about it and could make it happen were there. They weren't in—and the people that could have made it happen somewhere else didn't. The end. There's no big mystery to it at all. Hearing Dr. Baker talk about why things are where they are, I thought, Man, that makes—it was real—I never had a reason to think about it before, but it's real clear.

So any time I see something that's sort of out-of-pocket, you know, or an oddity, you can just—you know somebody there wanted to do it and made it happen.

AW:

Well, and not only that, I think that the corollary to that is that everything is where it ought to be. When I was in the investment banking business—

AM:

That's a good one; I'm going to have to remember that. I like that.

AW:

I had to fly everywhere—I was in the air five days a week sometimes, but always four. When I took that position with the company—which was a national company—they said “Well, you may have to move from Lubbock to Dallas,” and I said, “Why?” and they said “Because of your travel,” and my reply was, “Well, you don't pay me enough to do that,” for one thing, and the other was “Well let's just see.” So at the end of the first year we compared budgets. My travel budget was no different than anyone else's, because when you stop to think about it, if you're traveling, you're always going somewhere else, so it really doesn't matter where you start from. You're still traveling. So there is a very real sense in which—Levelland? Why not? You can say—the other thing is, while it's not in the center of bluegrass, when you get to Levelland, what else do you have to do but play your bluegrass?

AM:

That's true.

AW:

And there is something about that oasis mentality—here's these people coming for this specific thing.

AM:

Right, right, and I think the students sort of gathered—huddled up in ways they might not have if they were in a big place. I had a—early on—had several wads of students that would live together and play music together and whatnot. We even had a softball team for a while. I loved that—had a great time. So it was a good experience, and I liked Levelland just fine. It has—truly, I don't speak Spanish hardly at all—I know a few words—but I truly loved having them around. I think it made the community real cool. I was raised Catholic, and I did not go to the Catholic—in my adult life, and would not, but I did admire the Catholic Church in Levelland, because it was the only church that didn't have a Hispanic version and an English-speaking—Anglo version. It tried its best, and as a result it had problems, but—I mean, I don't know what they were. I think it was just a lot of difference in what one saw that one should be doing for the

church and different things—and I couldn't even go any farther than that. I knew—my daughter chose to be Catholic, and the woman who directed—was her mentor—

AW:

Was Anne Catholic?

AM:

No. People would ask us—from the Catholic Church—“How did you get Rachel to do that?” and Anne would say, “Oh, it was real simple. We forbade her. We forbade her to go to the Catholic Church.”

AW:

Works every time.

AM:

Yeah. But the woman who was her mentor as she joined the church just related to me that it was real difficult because it was mixed, but that they were working on it, and I just admire them for that. But I liked—in the mornings I would go in to whatever restaurant, or wherever I would go eat, and there would always be Hispanics in there, and they looked great, I loved the way they—and they were all workers. There was no aristocracy that I was aware of. The eateries, several of them were owned by Hispanic-speaking families—the Tienda—is that the name of a family name? I think it is—and then Cruz was another family. They were always very, very friendly and warm and loved the music when you brought it in there—and loved your business, of course. It was just—I really, really liked that, what they brought to just the sensibility of it. You know, that's very—I don't know—for me, I may be ignoring all the terrible issues that are there, but whatever it was there, it wasn't—they seemed happy. I shouldn't say happy—and not exactly satisfied or content, but they seemed comfortable with their life, and I felt comfortable in mine, and we just felt comfortable together—and I loved the food, and I loved every—and I still don't know how they do this—out there, anyway—I mean, you go to El Chico and you pay \$12.95 or whatever for a plate of enchiladas, and you go out to there and you pay \$4.95 for a plate of enchiladas.

AW:

And not only that, the \$4.95 plate of enchiladas are a lot better.

AM:

Oh, man—and the \$12.95 is way too much—way, way too much—where, out there they have—and it's just really—they just—I don't know. I just liked it. I liked being around. I don't speak Spanish, and I'm sure I'm the less of—less rich for doing that, and should have, but I thought,

Well, I'll let them have their little mysteries. They can have their seeming superiority and speak Spanish and English, and I'll just be the ignorant one here. But I like that.

AW:

A quick anecdote that you might enjoy. My father-in-law, who wound up being the chief of police in Lubbock, and was that for many years, started there as a young patrolman right after the Second World War at a time when they only had two patrol cars—most everybody walked a beat—and he got a chance to ride with this older policeman, who drove the car, and my father-in-law got to be the young rookie assigned to him. So the first rattle out of the bag, the guy says, "I'm going to take you to the part of town where they have the smartest people," so my father-in-law says—you know, thinking, What does he mean by that? So he drives over to the barrio, and they're driving down the street, and—of course, in the one squad car the city has—or two, whatever—little kids following along and yelling and squealing at them and having a great time down the dusty roads in the poor part of town, so my father-in-law says, "What did you mean, you're taking me to the place where they have the most intelligent people?" He says, "Well just look. These little kids, four, five, six years old, they can already speak Spanish," and he was serious. I've often thought about that, you know. In one sense, he's right—not in the way that he meant it—but we think, They're not speaking our language, they can't—all this "Speak English or you don't get to be a citizen" rule, and we think, Well, they're not smart because they don't speak our language.

AM:

Yeah, it's so goofy. I was standing in line—and I don't want to take up too much time just telling a story, but it's so illustrative of this point—and in front of me was a younger Hispanic woman. Behind me was an older Hispanic woman—and they found out they had gone to the same high school in Lockhart. The older lady had graduated like in 1950, and the younger one just had graduated. The older lady was talking, said, "Oh yeah, I was in the first class"—and it may have been '54 or '55—"first class that they allowed the Hispanics into the high school"—she says it was an all-white high school—and she said, "There were five of us. It was very difficult, and they wouldn't mingle with us," and one thing and another, and said, "When we would eat lunch, we would go sit out by this tree out in the playground and bring our sack lunch. They would make fun of us because in their sack lunches, what the white kids brought were sandwiches on white bread. What we had were tacos," and I just laughed, and I said, "Well who won that battle? They don't have bologna Mayo." I thought, My God, and that's the truth. Everything we want to squeeze out winds up winning just on the weight of how smart it is and how good it is. It's like Ray Charles—it's like music—who won that battle? It's—"They would make fun of us because we had tacos," and I thought, Wow, and now it's, "Let's go out for lunch. Let's go over to Taco Mayo or Taco bell or whatever." It's so—you know, and to this day, I can't understand why—and I'll use the word "Anglos"—are so resistant to every other culture—these rednecks that hate

France and want to call them “Liberty fries,” I’m just—I’m going, “My God, we are—you talk about the white bread of the world. We are it.”

AW:

Well you know, people say that French people are the same way in France. I don’t know; I’ve not been there.

AM:

I’ve not noticed it.

AW:

But I’ve never even been there to notice it. Liberty fries, that was the funniest thing.

AM:

Yeah. But anyway, back to school in Levelland. I enjoyed it, and I only left because I wanted to have another career, and I wanted to be with Kitty here in Wimberley.

AW:

Yeah. All good reasons.

AM:

All excellent reasons. Also, did you want to talk about the book?

AW:

Do we have time?

AM:

I don’t know. We have twenty-five minutes.

AW:

Sure. Is that—I know we’ve got about twenty-five minutes. Is that enough time to talk about the book?

AM:

I don’t know. I’ve never talked about it before.

AW:

I’d actually like to wait on that, and the reason is I think it’s a stellar achievement. I think it’s a very big deal, and I would like to spend some time about it because not only how it came about,

but how the two of you went through picking things. I know you did kind of what you could, but there's still—I think it's one of those that people are going to be using for a long, long time—

AM:

I hope so.

AW:

—as like the core reference piece for that music.

AM:

You know, when it came out it won an award, but it never got real good reviews.

AW:

Well everybody says, “Well it doesn't do this,” or “it doesn't that,” which is—anybody who's tried to write a piece like that should know that you can't do all that.

AM:

Well, I got—the one that was so disappointing—and in a way, it didn't disappoint me a lot because neither Joe nor I are trained historians, and we don't know—didn't know anything about how you—like Kitty was talking about—how you make a statement and then you present proof. So we never really had a thesis—or we were going to prove this or this or this—it was just more observational.

AW:

Yeah, but you know, that's incredibly important stuff. I just finished reading a book called *The Tower and the Bridge*, which is about the art of structural engineering—the Eiffel tower, skyscrapers, London bridge, etcetera—and not that I'm an architect or a structural engineer, but a friend of mine at the university recommended the book. It was his major professor when he was in graduate school that had written it. There were some really interesting things in it about art—but one of the most interesting was that the principle structural engineers—the most successful—the ones who built these structures that we still hold up as models—were, almost to a person, people who believed that theory followed, not preceded, and that you built a bridge or a tower successfully by trial and error, by knowing your business, by being involved in construction as well as design, and having a more hands-on approach to it, and having some basic principles that governed—one of them was economy, which I thought was very interesting—that not only is the least-expensive design the most beautiful, but the most beautiful designs turn out to be the least expensive in these kinds of works. Then I think about—you know, you and I have talked about music—the spaces in music and how—and we have a different economy, other than dollars and cents, in a piece of music, but it's still the idea of economy and how it requires that the thing satisfy—be the simplest solution to the issue, which is kind of where the beauty comes in. But

the notion that the theory is something that people do who aren't doing the job, and they do it afterwards. So here's your book, which is exactly like one of these bridges or towers. Two working musicians who have a sense of history about the music—and about the music they play—make these observations, which create this book that has all this incredible wealth of data. I'm always going back and having to look stuff up in it. Is there a central theme to it? Well, I don't really know. I've never really thought about it because it's never seemed important to me, that it be there. It's—the information is laid out there, so I think in that sense, the people who say “Well, what is—what operative—historical movement are you patterning this on?” and that sort of thing, that's a complete mistake.

AM:

Yeah, well I'm glad it is. The review that sort of pointed it out—there was one in the *Journal of Country Music*—you know, the hall of fame—and it was rather scathing of how we missed this and missed this and missed this—and I got to thinking, “Well you should've written it.”

AW:

Yeah, like the folk art guy.

AM:

Yeah. I should've written him back and says “I noticed you didn't write this book. What's your hang up?” Also there was a review out of Austin here, and it said—which, I thought this was ironic for me, and I hope I'm—this is almost heresy and I hope nobody hears this—is, when we got to Jimmy Dale Gilmore and Butch Hancock and Joe Ely, they said we took the most exciting music and made it dull, and I wanted to say, “No, we took the dull music and made it as dull as it really is,” you know, because I'm not a big fan of those guys. I've—personally, they're fine, and anybody that has a career in music is doing good, but to make a big deal of it in some way that I think—for me, it doesn't pan out as well. The biggest thing of Joe Ely that I can figure out that happened is Lloyd Maines and—what's the guitar player's name?

AW:

Jesse Taylor?

AM:

Jesse Taylor. For me, see, I'm the picker guy—that he got those two guys together in a band, to me that's his big accomplishment.

AW:

Well, but even if you really admire those three—as I do—that doesn't have anything to do with the criticism these people leveled, because the fact is when you did this book—and I do remember this part of the theme—is that the two of you said, “We got up this far and we really

quit, because what we're trying to do is look at what led up to this," and you have this chapter on singer/songwriters, and "this is kind of where we've left it." That makes perfect sense to me—not only that—people forget that there were people much bigger than them in the past. I think a person you probably didn't deal hardly at all with—I don't remember—Mac Davis.

AM:

Hardly—just barely a mention.

AW:

And if you take any kind of commercial analysis, he's far and away the most important musician ever to come out of our part of the state—and maybe out of the state.

AM:

And a pretty bright guy.

AW:

Dwarfs Buddy Holly when you talk about commercial success—dwarfs Jimmy Dale, Butch, and Joe. There's just no comparison, yet would you find the people in Austin—the Chronicle or the American Statesmen—saying "Well, Mac Davis, he's more—"

AM:

Yeah, nobody said—

AW:

Nobody complained about that because he was not the musician du jour.

AM:

Yeah, and he left—not that all of them didn't leave—but you know, there were others. Tanya Tucker is from—

AW:

And her sister, Lacosta?

AM:

Yeah.

AW:

From Seminole?

AM:

Yeah, and the Gatlin Brothers—

AW:

Uh-huh, Odessa.

AM:

Yeah, and there may have been others that we just left out because in a way we weren't interested in them because they already have publicists—and we couldn't get to them, anyway. You know the most interesting—and this is—I can repeat this—for me, the guy I interviewed that was the most interesting career—not interesting musically, but interesting career—was Billy Walker. To me, he was the most interesting because when I interviewed him—first of all he was very, very nice—but as he starts to tell the story, he is the story of country music in West Texas after the war, because he—as a kid he was almost orphaned. His dad had put him and his kids in an orphanage because the mother had died and he couldn't handle them all, but he lived with a relative or something in Whiteface and would hitchhike—he hitchhiked everywhere. This is the amazing—just thirteen or whatever he was with his guitar to Clovis to an uncle and stayed with him and won a little contest on the radio, and the award for winning the contest was you got a fifteen-minute radio show. So he would hitchhike every week to Clovis to do this radio show. He learned to play guitar from going to see Bob Wills and talking with Eldon Shamblin—and you go “Right there, that's—talk about—

AW:

That's royalty.

AM:

Yeah, exactly.

AW:

That's connecting you with the sun god.

AM:

Right. And then he went down and lived in Abilene—hitchhiked down to Abilene, got a job in a band down there, played—and described playing at a schoolhouse that had electricity that was driven by a generator that was hooked up—they would take a wheel off of a tractor and put the belt on the axle, or some rig put on a pulley, and the tractor would turn the generator that generated the electricity for the dance. Then he was on a—is it KFYO? When it first started, he was on the radio in Lubbock. I think it was KFYO.

AW:

I think KFYO was the first station in Lubbock.

AM:

Okay, then he was on that. He was part of a tour that came—a train tour that would come through there called the Hadacol Special or something [**Hadacol Goodwill Caravan**]—and he said he was on there with Bing Crosby—and apparently they would get on the train and go to Wichita Falls and get off and do a performance, so it was some kind of deal like that, which was real cool. Then he had a career—had a Western swing band there in Lubbock, I think—or maybe it was later—then he went to the Big D Jamboree, he was on that, had stories about that—he went to the Louisiana Hayride, was there when Elvis was there. Elvis was on—the first tour he did through West Texas was on Billy Walker's show.

AW:

The understudy to Billy Walker.

AM:

Yeah, and then he went from there to the Ozark Jubilee, and from there he went to Nashville to the Grand Ole Opry. Now God damn if that's not it.

AW:

Yeah—and you know how he died.

AM:

In a car wreck, coming back from a gig.

AW:

Yeah—I mean—

AM:

He even died right—died—

AW:

And he was in his—how old was he? He was old, because that's just been recently—couple years ago.

AM:

Yeah, no, he had—you know, he never was a big star—I mean like a big, big star—but he had a career, and he was at every important spot after the war—you know, Bob Wills was on KFYO,

Big D Jamboree, Louisiana Hayride, Ozark Jubilee, and the Grand Ole Opry—now, by God, if that doesn't carry some weight—he was the most interesting of the ones I got to interview.

AW:

Well, but you uncovered people like—slap me because I can't remember her name—the woman that sang sort of rockabilly—

AM:

Yeah, Charline Arthur.

AW:

Yeah. She was a big deal in the fifties, and at a time when women weren't a big deal in music.

AM:

I know.

AW:

Does anybody talk about—including me, I can't even remember the name, but I remember the story—what remarkable stuff.

AM:

I know—well, and I never—she was dead by the time we wrote the book, and I only—I can't even remember where I found the little interview that I wrote from it, and I had a record that she had a couple of songs on, and they were just sort of raucous-y rockabilly kind of stuff. She was saying that she wore pantsuits when women were wearing dresses, and that—my favorite line is, “I was shaking that thing onstage before Elvis.”

AW:

Yeah, I remember that. You used that in the book.

AM:

And I wondered, “What thing is it you're shaking, that Elvis is shaking, also?” So—I mean, she was a pretty riotous gal, and I think was a precursor to like 18019200971801920097Wanda Jackson, and—I should interview Wanda Jackson about that, see if she'd ever heard of Charline Arthur, because she recorded in Nashville under the direction of Chet Atkins.

AW:

Charline did?

AM:

Yeah. So she had a—close to getting it going, but she was pretty cool.

AW:

You know, and I was just out at—last night at Tracy Hancock's—you know, they were having a memorial party for her and her mother, of course, Charlene Hancock—I wonder if Charlene was named for Charline Arthur?

AM:

Well, you might ask and see if there's any connection.

AW:

I don't know, because her—Charlene Hancock's mother was musical—their whole family was musical.

AM:

Okay, now who is it that died?

AW:

Traci—her middle daughter. Conni, Traci, and—

AM:

What did she die of?

AW:

She'd had ovarian cancer for a couple years—got better, got worse—

AM:

Yeah—well Joe interviewed Charlene—

AW:

—Condray Hancock—

AM:

Yeah, and she went through the same things you hear of other people—you know, the woman traveling with a bunch of guys, and "You shouldn't be doing that," you know, and—so it was—you know, my favorite picture in that book, there was a character—and I can't remember if his name was actually "Balch," but he went by the name of Ace Ball.

AW:

I met him.

AM:

Did you?

AW:

Yeah, and I lost track of him—had lost track of him by the time I got this job, and didn't know how to come by him because he was always so nice.

AM:

Yeah, Joe interviewed him, I think.

AW:

He's just such a nice guy, and he's sort of like—when I was first starting, he was still living in Lubbock, or nearby—Littlefield or something—but he sort of took me under his wing, and was telling me he'd been a DJ, and he'd done this—so when I got this job, I thought, I want to track down Ace Ball—couldn't find him. Jimmy Blakely—I was down at Jimmy Blakely's house, and I mentioned—you know, we were talking about—you know his family had the Palm Room—and they all play music, and his sister was in rock and roll with The Planets later on in the seventies and early eighties. So I was doing an interview with Jimmy Blakely, and I mentioned Ace Ball, and he said, "Ace Ball? Are you kidding? He just died," and I said, "What do you mean?" Turns out his—Jimmy Blakely's wife was kin to Ace Ball's wife, Dorothy Balch—Dorothy Ball—who also had a singing career, and they were up in Pueblo, so I went up and I did a long interview with her.

AM:

Oh cool.

AW:

Yeah, so I got her interviewed, but—and Ace died because he was coming from a performance—he wasn't getting hired to play anymore, so he would go around and play at old folks' homes—and he was coming down a stairway, out of this old folks' home in the winter, slipped, fell, and hit his head and went into a coma and died. So like Billy Walker, there he was—

AM:

Died with his boots on, so to speak.

AW:

—his gig—but I remember thinking—you know, that's one of those, I think, Oh man, I would sure like to have talked to him, because he was one of those that was—crossover guys—where they were disk jockeys and musicians. Waylon Jennings is an example. Yeah, Ace Ball.

AM:

Yeah. Well, there's a picture of him in there, and they wanted us to trim—they wanted to trim the pictures down, and I said, "No, this is—it's sort of the male version of country music in West Texas," but it's him standing with his guitar as a kid, in a cutoff tee shirt, and just really tanned on a road, and on one side of the road is a barn, on the other side is a cotton patch, and a little house back in the back, and I said, "That—

AW:

How old is he?

AM:

Oh, maybe fifteen, sixteen, something like that.

AW:

Okay. We got a photo from Dorothy of her when she was a little girl, six or seven—little cotton dress, barefooted, out on the farm with this guitar around her neck that was as big as she was. We need to put those two pictures together because it—you know, you look at that, and here's—and it's an old—

AM:

Marriage made in heaven.

AW:

Yeah, it's an old cheap archtop that she's got, you know, and she can just barely get her arms around it.

AM:

Well his is not—it's a funky little flattop—but it's like this is where all these people came from. They came from that farmhouse down at the end of the road, down between the barn and the cotton field. To me it was like the perfect little photograph.

AW:

Yeah, you don't want to trim that down—and Billy Walker, yeah, exactly. Yeah, we forget so quickly who was what at a given time. People forget in contemporary times Jay Boy Adams.

AM:

Yeah, see I only know the name.

AW:

For what was changing in country music, he was a big, big thing for a short while, and probably didn't continue to be big because he inherited a business from his father and tried to play music and do the business.

AM:

Yeah, men did that. Hmm. Yeah, it's a lot of interesting stories, but that's another time.

AW:

Yeah, well I'd like to talk more about the book—

AM:

Yeah, definitely.

AW:

—and also the play, *Two Swell Guys from Texas*

AM:

Yeah.

AW:

I still think it's a great idea, and Joe's idea for an Elijah Cox play, I think that's a great idea, too.

AM:

Yeah, the black fiddle player.

AW:

Yeah. My favorite part was that Joe always wondered, "I wonder if I could play him?"

AM:

A black fiddle player?

AW:

Yeah.

AM:

Probably not.

AW:

Probably not. All right, well we'll put a stop to it and adjourn until the next one. Thank you, again.

AM:

Oh, you're more than welcome.

End of interview



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