

**Oral History Interview of
Cary Banks**

**Interviewed by: Curtis Peoples
October 26, 2017
Lubbock, Texas**

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

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

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Cary Banks as he recounts his time spent playing with the Maines Brothers band. In this interview, Cary describes how he got started in the band, and what it was like recording and touring with the group.

Length of Interview: 01:15:36

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Curtis Peoples (CP):

Make sure my phone is turned off so that it won't start ringing here. All right it's Thursday, October twenty-sixth a little after 11:00 a.m.. Part two with Cary Banks in his house in Lubbock, Texas about his career in music. I'm Curtis Peoples here with Cary Banks. Last we left off, we kind of got through all of your early Big Spring stuff into Lubbock, just getting into your Maines Brothers career I believe is where we left off. Tell us a little bit how you met up with the Maines boys there.

Cary Banks (CB):

Well, through my association with Bud Andrews and Big Ed Wilks, the local producers who produced comedy records by the iconic Jerry Clower and then produced comedy record that was number one gospel in country album by Jerry Jordan called a *Phone Call from God*. And all that was done down at Caldwell Studios. I had started recording demos down at Caldwell Studios there on Avenue Q back in the early seventies. And of course through Don, I met Lloyd and through the years, would do demos down there. I got where I was called to play in some recording sessions, I could read music, so I got a few sessions that required somebody be able to read standard notation. And of course, I learned how to do line arrangements for various instruments, learned how to do Nashville numbered charts, and I could play guitar and a little piano too, so that was my association with Lloyd. And I was working with Jack Tyson at his music store and Jack, and Johnny, and I, and Steve Williams had a band called the Free Whiskey Band. We did all of our recording down there. And just over the years, met the whole Maines family and I became the guitarist in the West Texas Opry stage band, that was produced by Caldwell Studio and Lloyd, of course, was the main musical director of that. Very successful event, we would pack out the Municipal Auditorium at least four times a year, great shows that featured local artists, like Johnny Ray Watson and lots of local bands, Tommy Anderson, and of course, Maines Brothers Band. At that time, Randy Brownlow was the piano player but as the Opry band, we would—the Maines Brothers band would always finish the show. Through that association, from time to time, I would play with the Maines Brothers as an added instrument, add a guitarist. Travel with them some, there was a couple of times Randy couldn't make the gig because of his job. In fact, one of the first times that the band played Billy Bob's Texas, Randy couldn't make that trip because it was in the middle of the week. So I went there and performed with them, and then in the late eighties—I mean the late seventies and the early eighties, I had written some songs that the Maines Brothers recorded. They recorded, "Ain't Nobody Lonely" and "Love is a Gamble" on the Route 1, Acuff album and later recorded song of mine called "Easy to Love" on the Panhandle Dancer album. And I played in all those sessions as well. Late 1982, Lloyd Maines called me up one night and said, "Hey Randy Brownlow is leaving the band, he's decided he can't commit to the band because they rest of the guys had decided that they were going to go full on and try to get a record deal and really start travelling and touring." So Randy felt like he couldn't commit to that, he had a really good job in the oil field, so Lloyd called me up and said, "Would you consider being in the band?" Guitar had always been my

primary instrument and piano was my secondary instrument, it was like, English is my first language, you know on the guitar, if I wanted to speak Spanish, it was like I had to translate it. So, I wasn't sure, really, I had the skills to jump right into it. But I talked it over with my wife. At the time, I was really working with a Nashville Music Publisher and was really thought on the verge of getting some songs cut, my original songs but I had to make a decision, okay. We talked about it and I got called Lloyd back and said, "I'm in." Starting in January 1st, 1983 I became an official member of the band. In fact, took Randy's place, not only in the band but in the partnership as well. The Maines Brothers band is a limited liability partnership. I became one-seventh owner of the band.

CP:

Can you talk about that partnership? We were—Andy Wilkinson and we're talking about, everything was always democratic with the Maines Brothers. It was like everything was voted on, and it was run just—

CB:

We discussed everything and I learned some valuable, valuable lessons, we would have an issue, it might be in music, it might be finances, it might be where we're going to stay in what hotel. We would get together, discuss it, seven guys. Bring it to a vote, majority rules and then we would do it Lloyd's way.

CP:

[Laughter] Okay, that makes sense.

CB:

That's pretty much how it went. But it was really good organization. The band, we had essentially all of the members were on salary, including our sound man, Joe pilot.

CP:

He's sort of the official member there of the band that nobody really thinks about because when you look at the album you only see the band; Joe's always there. So important

CB:

Oh yeah. Absolutely essential. In so many ways, from his sound expertise, from his personality, it's just such a, always an encourager.

CP:

Probably the nicest guy I ever met.

CB:

The nicest guy. I mean literally, he was wearing a long sleeve shirt one time, I don't know, Fender or something on it, he was working for Lubbock Music Center, I said, "Hey Joe, I really like your shirt." He said, "Okay." Takes it off and gives it to me. [laughter] That's just the kind of guy he is.

CP:

Took it off his back, wow.

CB:

We immediately, the—Lloyd had been in discussions with a couple of different record companies in Nashville. Even before I joined the band and there was discussions going on, but pretty much immediately after I started the band we really just hit the road and by the spring of that year, we had signed with Mercury Records. And in the summer of that year, I think maybe June or July, I think it was maybe June, they sent the legendary Jerry Kennedy down to produce, and of course he produces Roger Miller and Stafford Brothers and countless other people. Nashville sent him down to produce us because, when Lloyd went up to discuss the terms of the contract with the record company, he had two non-negotiable points. It was, first of all, Mercury only wanted the four brothers. And he said, "No, we're a seven-piece band. You take us as a seven-piece band. Or leave us."

CP:

Who were the seven members at this time?

CB:

Okay, there was Kenny, Lloyd, Steve and Donnie, the brothers, Jerry Brownlow, Richard Bowden, and I. Lloyd's other caveat to signing was that we would record in Lubbock in Caldwell Studio. I was surprised that they agreed to do that.

CP:

What was the reasoning for staying in Lubbock?

CB:

Lloyd wanted control.

CP:

Control of the music.

CB:

Control of the music, yeah. And he said the first things can't happen if we go to Nashville, is that they're going to bring in all session players, and probably Lloyd would be the only one in the album that's actually playing. But he wanted to make sure that it was our album that we were all playing on that and Jerry Kennedy, he was a great guy and a funny. He told all of those great Stafford brother stories, stories about his life, but he essentially just sat back. And produced the album. The only thing about those Mercury albums is, I didn't feel like that we really really, they were trying to make us another Alabama. So the music that we chose, I don't think really reflected the band that we were. We were a hard rock and country rock swing band. And they wanted to make us another Alabama.

CP:

What kind of music would that have been? I guess the term was progressive country at that time? You guys were probably more progressive than Alabama.

CB:

Oh yeah, Alabama was just mainstream country. We—they had—I had a hard time finding a way to promote us. Lloyd pretty much called us aggressive country. That was an off-shoot of the outlaw country and really, we kept, the record company didn't really get behind us, even when we had a top twenty hit. It finally came—

CP:

What was the top twenty hit?

CB:

It was called "Everybody needs love on a Saturday night." It was from the second album. But we felt like from the very beginning we weren't really behind us. They didn't know what to do with us. In fact, one of them promo guys just admitted to us one time, he said, "Look guys, we call these radio stations and all they tell us is, 'Man, these Maines Brothers guys are good but they're just too Rock for Country and too Country for Rock.'"

CP:

It's kind of like what happened with the flatlanders early on. They didn't know where to put them, so they didn't.

CB:

Which is now the Americana charts. We were just essentially twenty years ahead of our time. We hit the road and we got signed of Mercury made the first album. Got on Austin City Limits. Did that show, did several of the Nashville Now shows with Ralph Emery, it was an hour and a half show back then. And we went up there and did several of those, up there. In fact, one in

particular show we did, we were going to promote the second album which was called, “The Boys Are Back in Town,” we had recorded that song that the Bus boys had. That was the theme for 48 Hrs. movie, [starts singing] boys are back in town. And we had Tommy Anderson and Richard, Don and a few other horn players. Played on the album, played the signature lines and so we were going up to do the Nashville Now Show, Lloyd said, “Man I love the Nashville Now horn players to play with us.” And so all the way up there on the bus, I handwrote all the parts, trumpets, trombones, sax parts. Literally no copy machine, I made five copies by hand.

CP:

Do you still have those copies?

CB:

No, I don’t even know where they went. I wish I did but I got up there and Lloyd said, “Go to the leader of the band,” which is the lead trumpet player. He was the leader of the Nashville Now band and he said, “Tell him we want them to play on it.” I had my arrangements here as go there and said, “Excuse me man, we would love for two trumpets, trombone, and a couple of saxes to play with us for our “Boys Are Back in Town” song. I got the charts here, I got the arrangement.” He looked at this, “Damn, that’s not an arrangement, that’s a career.” [Laughter] We’ll just do a head arrangement.

CP:

That’s hilarious.

CB:

I didn’t know, whether to be pissed, doing all that work, or take the compliment. Anyway, they played their butts off, it was great, they just did a little head arrangement. But we did that several times and there was several other different television shows that we did in Nashville Network back then. We got signed with Barbara Mandrell’s booking agency. She had been in that really bad car wreck and had been away from the music scene for a couple of years.

CP:

Who’s done all the booking before this? Lloyd?

CB:

Just us. We had our own record label, did our own bookings, our own book keeping, we had a manager named Paul Godwin, which was kind of funny. He owned a big feed—not feed store, but fertilizer store out East of town, and had some other interest—I don’t know how exactly he got involved with us but he had met Lloyd and one thing led to another. He’s the one who decided to put the partnership together. These guys need to be of legal entity. He said the first thing you need to do is double your price. We were going—you know how hard it is to get

booked now and we were one of the most expensive bands around anyway at that point. We can” really get booked now? He said, “You lose a couple of bookings but, what’ll happen is, you guys have product, you got a name around here, people see how much you charge and they’ll go, ‘Man those guys are expensive, they must be good.’” And we started doing real well, we were selling lots of albums and making our own t-shirts then we got with Mercury, hit the road and bought a bus.

CP:

Bought the bus.

CB:

Bought the bus from Jay Boy Adams. Worst decision ever.

CP:

I heard they were expensive to maintain, and upkeep.

CB:

At that time, and that was [phone rings 00:15:16] in 1984 when we bought the bus. It was fifteen hundred dollars sitting in the parking lot uninsured. Then you had insurance on that then it was three hundred dollars a day, for a driver, plus fuel, plus—that’s if nothing goes wrong and something’s always going wrong. We tore up the highway and that’s the only way to go but you talk about an albatross. In fact, one time, we had gone up to—we’d played in Amarillo and we’re heading up to Nashville to do something, middle of the summer, we left Amarillo on a Sunday morning about ten o’clock or so, but an hour outside of Amarillo, the air-conditioning goes out in the bus. So all the way up there, no air-conditioning. One time on our way back, we had stopped in Oklahoma somewhere, just to—we’re exhausted, those long tours, four, five hours still away from home. It’s time to stop, get out, throw the softball around just a little bit, just to get out of the bus. We’re out there at this little park area and somebody looked over and says, “The engine’s on fire.”

CP:

Oh no. Whatever happened to the bus?

CB:

We finally wound up selling it. It was a really hard time we had lost our record deal, actually asked out of our record deal. Because we just felt like they weren’t behind us. Decided to sell the bus, luckily, we only lost twelve thousand dollars. On the bus.

CP:

How much did it cost to buy a bus back then?

CB:

We bought it from Jay Boy for hundred and twenty grand.

CP:

This was all decked out?

CB:

Oh yeah, it was the one that had the, there's a picture of it right there. It had the fifty-seven Chevys on the side. It was one of those ones that Jay Boy had really done upright. It was a good bus, but it was just a money pit.

CP:

I guess most people rent them these days.

CB:

We tried that, the only problem was at the time, Jay Boy was the only game in town and every time we went to a lease it when we needed it, there was none available. So we decided just to bite the bullet.

CP:

Was he running that business here in Lubbock? Or was he down out of Austin?

CB:

Yeah, he was still in Lubbock, it was out there on the Shallowater highway. Roadhouse Bus Company. It was—we pretty much had to have it because we were driving so much, and we pretty much wanted it because, you know we couldn't show up to these gigs, where we're opening up for, Ronnie Milsap, Hank Williams Jr. in a van pulling a trailer.

CP:

So yeah, talk about some of the people that you played with, shared the stage with.

CB:

The list is just long as you can think of.

CP:

Is there any one show in particular that stands out more than any?

CB:

The biggest show that we did, and it was right before I joined the band officially, is that we opened up for Alabama. First time they had come here. They had just—they had about three or

four hits just starting to explode and we opened the show for them. Some local promoter did the show and we got a standing ovation, and just set the crowd on fire.

CP:

In the coliseum?

CB:

In the coliseum. As we were walking off the stage, Randy Owens said, "Damn guys could you leave a little for us?" [laughs] So we actually got to be pretty good friends with those guys, but we did lots of shows with Joe Ely. Of course we travelled with Barbara Mandrell and her come back tour. Literally all over the country, but gosh, we opened up for Doctor Hook.

CP:

So you just kind of get attached to a leg of the tour with whoever is headlining as a support act.

CB:

Yeah and we were the opening act, and most cases, we did lots of festivals too but we would open up for—gosh—we played down in Alpine, Texas, Clayton Williams had a big ranch down there. And every year he had thrown this big soiree for all his buddies his oil buddies, and his cattle buddies, and we would open up the show. And first time we played down there, we played down on the tennis courts as the opening act and then they, the headliner would come on and play, then they'd come back to us and we would play the dance set. Let's see, we opened up for Merle Haggard, Charlie Pride, Mel Tillis, and just all the big ones.

CP:

All the big ones. What about—did you headline any shows?

CB:

Yeah, we had. In fact, the biggest headline show we ever did was we rented, after Coldwater Company went out of business that was always our main stay for New Year's Eve. We decided to throw our own dance at the exhibition hall at the civic center. It was New Year's Eve 1984. It took about six months planning, but we did everything. We rented the hall, we rented security, we bought all the champagne and party favors, opening act, the stage, the sound, lights and everything. K triple L kind of co-sponsored us with us. In fact, they ran a live feed on the air, from eleven until one o'clock. It was great, we made a butt load of money.

CP:

Sold out, huh?

CB:

Sold out. And that was—we were pretty much in our hay day then. We just had the—I think the first album, second album was just about to come out, we were doing well and—

CP:

People like to go out and dance then.

CB:

People like to go out and dance. We also would go around to the area high schools and perform. Lubbock High, Monterey, Coronado, Roosevelt, just all the area high schools.

CP:

Did y'all play in Plainview? Because I remember post up something that some girl, "Oh, I remember when they came and played our school and that song, "Break the Fall," I just love that song."

CB:

Yeah, we would—and we'd parlayed that into what we call the panhandle dance that we would do every spring at the ballroom at Texas Tech. Back then, I think you could rent the ballroom for like fifty bucks. Plus, you had to pay for security, but it was a non-alcohol dance specifically geared to high school students. And we had a big following, we'd pack that place every year. Of course sell merchandise, five bucks a head to get in, that was one of—another thing that we did, along that same line is, we would go to little communities, Muleshoe, Plainview, Snyder, all around Big Spring and get with the local JCs or the Quanah's club or Lion's club or something. Rent some place like—Muleshoe's got a nice little community center, we'd rent that and the service organization would split it with us, we'd let them do all the refreshments and all. And we'd get partnered with the local radio station. For the funniest one, just KMUL, or KMMML or whatever the Muleshoe is, they had a—they want a sponsorship with us and they said, "We do all this stuff, we give all this promotion. The main thing is, our guy has to introduce you guys.", "Okay." And he just came and made a big deal out of it. "Right before y'all start, Joe, he's our head guy here. He's going to introduce the band.", "Okay." And just kept on it, big deal, cuts off to the mic, "Ladies and gentlemen, Maines Brothers." We would just fall it out.

CP:

That's hilarious.

CB:

But we would go in and team up on a Saturday or something, have a Maines Brothers versus the JCs or the radio station on softball game that afternoon, kind of to promote the show and just made it a real family friendly thing and that was our thing. We did really well on those deals, up

until January the first of '86 or '87, one of those, before that day, we were able to buy a million-dollar liability policy for about two hundred bucks. Covered a twenty-four-hour period. Just because it was B-Y-O-B thing and so we felt like that would cover us. And then January first, the rates went up to a thousand dollars. For a twenty-four-hour period. That was our profit, so we kind of had to quit doing that, unless somebody else would guarantee it. We had a really good organization. One of the best businesses, I've ever been a part of, of course, you got four blood brothers and a mix, and three others. Anytime you got blood in the mix that brings its own set of challenges.

CP:

The sibling rivalry, right?

CB:

The sibling rivalry, yeah. Especially when the oldest sibling is the boss. So that was some tense moments over that and then just seven guys a sound man, a light man, the bus driver all in this mobile submarine.

CP:

The band were all partners, were any other like Joe or anybody else a partner?

CB:

No, we just paid salaries to people. In fact, LaTronda when she was still LaTronda Maines, she was on salary as a secretary. We had our rehearsal hall out at the fertilizer place and that's where we rehearsed, kept all of our stuff and did all of our business there. It was good run organization, it was just we were looking at the end of, I think 1985, end of '85 and we had made a ton of money. It was like we made a quarter million dollars.

CP:

In a year?

CB:

In a year. Of course, our expenses were two hundred and fifty-one thousand dollars. So we were just—and the record company just never got behind us. It was a real weird time for Mercury Records any way, they had two big acts, Stafford Brothers and Kathy Mattea and they poured all their effort into that, they went through a couple of presidents. The whole, I think the whole organization their Mercury Polygram Nashville was then struggling, stayed in disarray. And the old joke was, if you wanted to get away with murder, just kill somebody and then get signed by Mercury records. Nobody will ever find you again. But we—after the second album we started on the third album and they had gotten a new president. He was a great guy, he had used to—his name was Steve Popovich and he would work with Springsteen and all those rockers and they'd

somehow pegged him to run the Nashville thing and he didn't really know all that much about country. He just—they just poured all their efforts into Stafford Brothers and Kathy Mattea, and we had started on our third album had about half a dozen cuts and Lloyd just went to him and said, "We'll do anything, we'll come to Nashville and record, we'll do whatever you guys want us to do. But you got to do a video on us." This was 1987.

CP:

Video was hot then?

CB:

And their reply was, "Well, you know, videos not that important in country music." And so Lloyd said, "You know it's all the same, I think we ought to just part ways," and at that time, the record company was in a pretty much of a disarray and they just said, "Okay." They didn't know what to do with us anyway. And we parted ways and went back to doing our own, producing our own records independently but—

CP:

What album was that that you were working on?

CB:

It was just going to be the third album. They turned it into the *Red Hot and Blue* album. We went ahead and finished the songs there.

CP:

So what were the two Mercury albums?

CB:

High Rollin' was the first one and *The Boys Are Back in Town* was the second one. The hit that we had "Everybody Needs Love on a Saturday Night" was from the second album. And I thought, the first album contained that "Little Broken Pieces," [sings] did I really kiss his wife? I thought that was a hit. And I thought they should release that as a single. But they thought—the Mercury people, "We don't want to pigeon hole you guys just like a novelty, drinking group." Jim Stafford had recorded it as well; he was friends with John Hadley that wrote the song. John's a friend of ours. And he released it before we even had a chance to release it. So we released a song called *Louisiana* that went mid-50s, the second record—second single was a song that Jerry and I had written called "You Are a Miracle." It got in mid-50s. And then, that was all from the first album. Then on the second album we released "Everybody Needs Love on a Saturday Night" and it got into the twenties on its own basically. That was very little promotion that the record company did. And we were out there on the road, we were promoting it with the—

CP:

Which part of the countries you were playing all over the country?

CB:

Literally, with the Mandrell tour from Ogden, Utah to Great Neck, New York. And all places in between. We played the Palomino in California, of course, Billy Bob's and places in Nashville all up through Oklahoma, Nebraska, all the mid-west and the Great Plains. Didn't get into California much past LA. Did Vegas.

CP:

Did you guys tour out of the country any or did you stay in states?

CB:

We went to Switzerland in the late eighties as part of a tour with Llano Wineries and Texas tourism and Lubbock tourism. We went over there and spent about ten days over there, playing sort of a cultural exchange thing. Very interesting, this was 1988, '89 something like that, Swiss and Europeans, they don't like Americans at all but they love all things Texas especially Lubbock, Texas because the Buddy Holly thing. So they welcomed us, with open arms because they were from Lubbock, Texas.

CP:

That's great. Were you the only musical act?

CB:

Yeah, they exchanged wines and exchanged—it's like, getting them Swiss to come over to Lubbock for vacations and they trying to get Lubbock people come to Switzerland so in the middle of the winter it was freezing cold.

CP:

So did they like the music, were they dancing?

CB:

I loved the music, yeah. They didn't know how to country dance, they just kind of jump up and down. We had young girl that was part of the sound crew just darling little girl didn't speak much English at all. Finally, about the last week, last few days we were there, she came up to me and she says, "I got it, shit." [Laughter]

CP:

That's hilarious.

CB:

They loved the Texas connection and anything Buddy Holly. We also had to do some Buddy Holly stuff.

CP:

I guess after that, you guys kind of, started to—I guess part ways and families I guess began to take over.

CB:

Donnie left the band for a while and we had another drummer named Mark Gillespie. We continued, we made one more album but it was kind of—by then the fire was pretty much gone. Lloyd had spent—started spending more and more time in Austin. He was gone, gosh, probably three weeks out of every month down in Austin. He's becoming really well known as a session player and a producer. He had started, then producing, Jerry Jeff Walker, young Robert Earl Keen. Playing on big people's records and he was still working, still doing sessions here. He was, at that time, producing early nineties, he was producing Pat Green and some of those young guys coming up, and Kenny ran for county commissioner. So he became a politician. And Steve went back to work with the state and the child support department. He was big into that. Jerry went kind of back into radio, Richard moved down to Austin and eventually started playing full-time with the Austin Lounge Lizards. Donnie kind of got out of business mostly and was working with his father-in-law in the cotton business. Nineteen ninety-three I got hired by South Plains College, so by 1993 we were playing maybe a couple of times a year. We paid off all of our debts, sold the bus, and we still—we would play maybe once. I think we played '93, '94 a couple of times and didn't play really together as a band until we opened up for the Dixie Chicks in 2000, August of 2000. It was funny because Kenny was calling around everybody and say, "Hey the Dixie Chicks are going to be headlining in Lubbock in August, and Natalie wants the Maines Brothers to be the opening act. Is everybody available on this date?" Everybody called Jerry and said, "Jerry, you available on this date? Would you like to do it?" He goes, "Oh yeah man, that sounds great, I think I can do it. Just remind me one more time, what instrument do I play?" [Laughter]

CP:

It'd been a while, huh?

CB:

It'd been a while.

CP:

Six years?

CB:
Yeah.

CP:
But now, you sort of have this semi-annual reunion concert.

CB:
We did.

CP:
Sell out every time.

CB:
In about 2002 or three around there somewhere, Lloyd went back in and took all the old independent albums that were on Texas soil, five records, and remastered them and we started making CDs of them. Selling them in our concert and at Ralphs' like that. We sold more CDs than we ever sold albums. As a non-working band. We—every two or three years, we'd get together and—

CP:
Was the partnership dissolved or?

CB:
No, the partnership still exists today.

CP:
Still exists today?

CB:
Still exists today. Still generates income. To this day. The hardest thing about getting a reunion together was finding a weekend that Lloyd wasn't working because he's not only—at the time, we started doing these and it might still be—if you want Lloyd to produce a record for you, you stand in line, you wait eighteen months. If you wanted to play on your record, steel or dobro or whatever, you just email him the files. But, then he was playing with—he had gotten this partnership with Terri Hendrix as a producer and record label owner, and they play a lot, and he still plays with Robert Earl, Ely, Jerry Jeff and whoever wants him at any given time. If he's available and the money's right, he'll play, so he's really hard to track down. Richard's the same way. Richard left Lubbock started working with the Lounge Lizards, after he left them, he just sort of have fiddle, will travel, and he's been working the last few years with Ryan Bingham.

CP:

Yeah, I got to work a show with them.

CB:

Yeah.

CP:

And boy those you kids just, "Who's they got on the fiddle? Man he's always breaking strings. Looks like he breaking strings up there."

CB:

Yeah, he's an entertainer. The band just sort off, didn't break up, didn't dissolve just sort of went to sleep. In about ten years. It's interesting that I guess the people that—our fan base from back in the eighties grew up and had kids, decided that was a nostalgic part of their life. We always had a real big local following. We were kind of out of the mainstream in that as that we always were respected in our own country. And of course, one of the many great things about that band is we had all grown up playing Honky Tonks with various other bands and understood the performing business, and the audience is the number one concern for the band. We're there for them, without them, we were just up there on stage making noise. But always respected the audience, love the audience, had a real relationship with the audience, a real contact. They felt like they knew us and could come up to us and shake hands, have a beer. It was funny because on the Mandrell tour, literally from Logan, Utah all the way to Great Neck, New York, every time we played somewhere at least one couple came up after the show and said, "Man we went to Tech and used to come out to Cold Water Country and dance to you guys."

CP:

That's great. Dedicated fans, probably no one more dedicated than T.G. Caraway as I remember. Number one fan.

CB:

Number one fan. He rode many miles with us on the bus, towed it, and fetched equipment, and sold merchandise.

CP:

Oh really?

CB:

Yeah.

CP:

That's great. So, you mentioned in '93, kind of shifting gears, you started South Plains College. That's a big career shift there for you.

CB:

Big career shift. I was actually had gone back to school. I had started school way back in the Dark Ages in '68 at Lubbock Christian College and spent a year there and hadn't been in school since, and decided to go back and start on a degree.

CP:

A degree in what?

CB:

It turned out to be General Studies. I just basically got into it just to see—I had started doing more and more writing, fiction writing and that sort of thing, and I wanted to get into the writing part of it, and when I got the job at South Plains College, it was originally the first few semesters, it was what is called full-time temporary. On a semester by semester basis, depending on enrollment. Actually I got a call from Bonnie McRae, who was Bonnie Stevens—Bonnie something. She was the next one after that, Dickinson. Bonnie Dickinson. And they had hired her because one of their panel instructors had left, and turns out they had more enrollment than they had teachers for so she said, "Would you consider coming over?" I guess, I don't have a degree or anything but they hired me because they needed somebody. I took right to it. It was a while before I got hired full-time, after a couple semesters, Hardin called me in his office and said, "I want you on here full-time. I'm going to put you on tenure track, but you got to finish your degree."

CP:

Were you going to LCU?

CB:

No, I was going to Tech. So I went to nights and weekends and summers and correspondence course, CLEP [College Level Examination Program] test and everything, and I finished up in the Fall of '98. I finished my degree, but yeah, that was a rough time because I had to—I had full-time job, I had the radio show, I was playing music on weekends, had kids in elementary school, going into junior high and my wife's mom was dying of cancer. And so she was travelling to Dallas at least two weekends a month, flying. And so, that was a rough, Rough time.

CP:

Who were playing on the weekends? Just—

CB:

I played with Don Caldwell and Rex Thomas, a lot with Rex. Just whoever called and needed a picker for the weekends. But it was funny, John Hardin, he's a—he called me in his office every now and then, it's like, "Am I getting fired?" but he called me in and he said, "I'm going to ask you a question and I want your answer to be yes." Okay. That's when he offered me to make me the program coordinator for commercial music. Took that job on for a lot more money and less pay, and he also said when they cut the funding for the old country caravan, that had been the big deal out there for the music department, when the new president McDaniel came in, the first thing he did was cut the funding for that. So Hardin called me in his office and said, "I want you to do something for me and I want you to say yes." He said, "I want you to create a television show that's student produced." Because we want people to come here and plus we want to use this sound and the video people and we use the talents of those students as well.

CP:

Knew Tom T Hall by then.

CB:

Tom T Hall said, "What're you going to call it?" I said, "I don't know, Well, when will we have it?" He says, "Probably once a month." I said "Well, we could do it—Wednesdays church night, Friday, nobody's there and its football. All the pickers would play, how about Thursdays," he said, "Okay. What're you going to call it?" I said, "I don't know, Thursday Night Live?" So that's how that was born.

CP:

Still going to this day.

CB:

Still going to this day. I did it fifteen years, handed it off to my, the kid came after me, Wade McNutt—he did it five years and it's two or three years on with the new people now. But it was tremendously successful, they used to play it, replay the shows on Saturday night on the LISD channel here in Lubbock. A lot people watch that and we had to—that was all—a lot of students that were in that. And some over the years have gone on to do really big things. First steel guitar player I ever had in that ensemble was Jeremy Moyers, of course, he went on to be with Lonestar and then Clay Corn went to play with Pat Green. And Jeremy Garrett went on, still a member of The Incredible Stringdusters.¹ Kym Warner be a highly successful bluegrass group The Greencards and I mean just lots of students have gone on. Australian kid from—named Jedd Hughes guitar player went on to—won a couple of Grammys with Rodney Crowell and Emmylou Harris. A lot of kids went through there and gone on to do real well.

¹ The Infamous Stringdusters

CP:

It's amazing to me, as a former student and instructor at South Plains and still on the advisory board that it's just not as known and so many people have gone through there, and it's just a constant struggle for us in the advisory board especially in sound tech trying to keep student enrollment up. It's such a great facility.

CB:

And it's—

CP:

I guess it's that location, location.

CB:

It's the location, location. It's just when Tim McCaslin retired and Emily Wheeler decided to quit teaching, I was trying to hire guitar instructors. I had called some of the really well known players from Nashville and around places, and they were all real interested until they found out what it paid. Even with the benefits, which is the really good benefit package there, the low salary and move into some place that nobody's ever heard of in the middle of nowhere. In fact, when we hired Sonny Borba, he came from Utah, he said as he flew into Lubbock, he was going, "Oh my gosh, what am I getting myself into?" He said, then he drove in a rental car going, "Okay, no, I'm going back to Utah." But once he got inside the building and saw what was going on, he said he was hooked.

CP:

There's something just comforting walking in that, for me. I know what it is, and just have seen it grown. I remember when you could smoke in the control room way back when, and that was like in the mid-eighties when I was first started. Well I finished my first semester, was in '87. I didn't graduate until about—

CB:

Well you were a student--

CP:

I was a student in '87.

CB:

And you were there for a while when I first started.

CP:

I came back in '93 and finished up in '94 and started working for Don that year and then—he actually started—I was an intern. He started paying me after a while and I was like real happy about that and then I helped him open up the Cactus theatre and—

CB:

I was the piano player in the original Lubbock Texas Rhythm.

CP:

You were. That was a lot of work for me.

CB:

For all of us. In fact, when I started getting more involved in school, Don called me up to do a show one time, I said, “Don, I just can’t do this anymore, I’m just—I don’t have the time or the energy.” And he was very unhappy with me.

CP:

He wanted you to say yes.

CB:

He wanted me to say yes.

CP:

Well, it’s a lot of commitment. Well, I remember, I had duct tape teeming in carpet as people were walking in the floor that first night. [CP Laughs] There was always something going wrong. I was the plants manager, was my title, which I think, I think is a glorified term for janitor, custodian. I was like—boy, it was rough. Rough times. But I mean, I learned a lot.

CB:

Yeah, me too. That was some, got to play with some great players. I had on and off all those years got to play with Steve Meder. One of the most consonant professionals ever. Enjoyed to work with him, Joe Don Davidson, Terry Sue, and just Mark Peyton, Braxton Howell, some of the others, Donnie Allison such a joy to work with. I loved doing the shows with Donnie.

CP:

Those were good times. Back at South Plains, you eventually, it went from just a part-time instructor to running the whole program.

CB:

When Hardin retired in let's see—he turned in his resignation in November of 2002 and the dean called me in his office one time and said, “I’m going to ask you something and I want you to say yes.” We want you to take over as chairman. And I was going, “Is there somebody else in this room?” Because at that time, I was the only chairman who did not have a master’s degree. I didn’t even feel like they would even ask me because I didn’t have it. And he had, Hardin had already sort of started grooming John Reid, to take over the department and when they asked me, I said, “I guess, okay.” It was interesting, in January, we came back to school, started the Spring Semester and the first week of what they call in service week, I put in about sixty-five hours that week. And on the way home, driving back to Lubbock, that Friday afternoon, real late, I’m just exhausted. I was thinking to myself, Man, I just spent sixty-five hours at a music school this week, and I have not played one note of music. So that was kind of a [harbinger] of what it was going to be over the next nine years for me, and of course, we did some good things right. Two weeks after I had started, the president of the college came in and said, “There’s been a big budget cut in Austin. You’re going to have to cut your budget.” Well I said, “Okay, we’re getting ready the budget for the following year.” You had to propose it in February to get your budget for September, I mean, no, the budget you have right now. We cut about twenty-six thousand dollars out of our budget, [snaps] overnight. Had to cut a bunch of programs and the touring ensemble, money for that was gone. We had been doing, producing a little Summer show called the South Plains Opry, money for that was gone, [snaps] just automatically. It was a rough time to start out but then the next year, president of the school comes to my office and said, “We’ve been reading your reports and you guys do need more room,” because we had teachers teaching in closets, those little tiny closets. And so, they built us a new, thirteen thousand square foot building. We added the live sound program, the entertainment business program, the design communications program, and at one time during my tenure as the chair, every—we had a teacher in every single office space in that building. We had—it was thirty-two full-time instructors and six part-time instructors, not counting the studio watch people. Probably about forty people.

CP:

So were you over sound-tech and commercial music?

CB:

Everything.

CP:

Everything?

CB:

Yeah, that's the chair's job. Stewart was—Stewart had taken over the sound-tech running program as departmental coordinator there after Jerry Stoddard had stepped down. Tom Stalcup took over the video after Pat McCutcheon left. And then we added the design communication Paul Davidsons' thing to that. Then, of course, we added the sound on the live sound program, which has been by far the most successful program ever at that school in the creative arts department for sure. As far as training, job placement, that deal.

CP:

Yeah, I'm curious to see how things are going in the next board meeting. So when did you retire from that position?

CB:

I stepped down as chair at the end of 2012 or '13, stayed on a couple more years and I retired at the end of the fall semester in 2012.

CP:

Why did you decide to step down?

CB:

I was out of gas and out of ideas. My health was starting—it was too much, too much stress. And I can see the writing on the wall that—in fact, one of the first indicators, I left to chair meeting one time and the dean had just told all the chair people in the technical department, he said, “Here's the deal folks, just go back and tell your faculty that to remember, every day, every single thing they do is tied to funding.” Everything that the administration handed down, I mean, we had all this stuff every day, there was a new thing on my desk, something else, new program we had to implement, some new survey we had to do, some cost-effective thing we needed to put into place, and the hiring and firing people. It's a lot easier to hire somebody than it is to fire them. So I went through a couple of bad situations there, went through some—most of everybody in that department I loved dearly, got along with them well, felt like I was a pretty decent boss. But there was a hand full of people that had their own agenda, and behind my back sabotaged me at every turn. So after a while, I just, I said, “I can't take this anymore.”

CP:

Got you back into playing though.

CB:

Got me back into playing, yeah. I just—wife and I talked it over and I said, “I'm really ready to retire.” I became Medicare eligible at—and social security eligible, at full social security and

Medicare at sixty-six. So, it was time. And I literally have done more recording and performing in the last two years than the previous fifteen.

CP:

Pretty much, I guess it's you and Steve Williams these days. You guys have got a nice little round.

CB:

I play with Steve, we do quite a bit, I play, actually I play mostly mandolin with the Gathering Praise Band at our little church that we had out the county line restaurant with Junior Vasquez. We also play out as the Gathering Band in secular performances, of course there's the Maines Brothers, every now and then, I play with Rex Thomas.

CP:

Rex is still out playing?

CB:

Once or twice a year, maybe.

CP:

Doesn't he live across the street from Allen out in Acuff?

CB:

No, used to. He lives in Town now.

CP:

He's in town now? I need to interview Rex; I need to get a hold on him.

CB:

Oh yeah, yeah. You definitely need to interview Rex. [Laughter] Steve's got a little blues band he plays with, called the Smoke House Blues band, they play once a month, generally. Just some old guys play in blues. And he's got another band called the Tumbleweeds that is mostly some young guys like Collin Crawford or a Craig Elliot, and then whoever we can find to play drums and bass. Joy Harris. So I played with about in six different bands on and off. And then writing, about to start a new project, you know Justin Robinett. He's become my defacto producer, and I'm going to start on a piano instrumental CD. I just have some original piano instrumentals and just some songs that I like that friends of mine have written that I decided, "I'm just going to do a piano instrumental CD."

CP:

I kind of did that, I was like I wanted to do an instrumental CD, but it turned having some vocal stuff on it, and it just turned into this hybrid thing of Irish meets Indian music with my West Texas folky-ness.

CB:

Is that the *People's Collective* or is that the—

CP:

Yeah, and it's got that green cover and it just turned out to be weirdest thing ever, and it's just the way it progress and next thing I know, I'm performing the whole thing with the whole thing was choreographed and the girls—that was a highlight for me. Seeing the dance, I wanted to put full band behind it, but couldn't because it was just cost prohibitive, and the space, just the problem. So it was a little mix of live acoustic and recorded, some live vocal. But man, just to see those dancers. It was fulfilling. And I've been trying to do a bit of country folk blues album I've been writing, I haven't played my guitar until last night for the first time in probably three weeks.

CB:

I would—been there and done that. In fact, when Scott Farris decided to leave South Plains college, start his recording business, he asked to see me, and we went to coffee together and he said, "Man, I hate to tell you this but I got to do my art." Of course, for him, it's playing it's recording, it's doing all this stuff, and he said, "I just can't do that and teach here." I said, "Yeah, I understand. So you go," because he's a great teacher and everyone was really vibrant for that department, I said but I understand. There comes a point where you have got to feed your soul, or you're just going to die spiritually.

CP:

What's taking over my life is radio show, which I thought I'd never do. It takes me—I want to back up a little bit and talk about the West Texas music hour, you and Lloyd, and I guess Bowden and who else started that?

CB:

Well, originally it was Lloyd and Kenny and Richard and I. Lloyd came to me and he said, what do you think about us doing a radio show? I said, "Well—" we went through, here's the upside, here's the downside. What do we want to do, he said, "I want to make it mostly just centered in West Texas music, the history of it and the modern part of it," I said, "Well where do you want to do it?" he said, "Well, we're pretty good—we got a good relationship with KLLL." At that time, Jon Steel Scott Harris was the CEO there. And so we kind of mapped out what we wanted to do and a little hour show once a week and he went to Scott and said, "We want to do a little

radio show here,” and he said, “What would you guys charge us to do a one-hour radio show.” And John said, “When did you want to do it?” He said, “I don’t know, eight to nine o’clock on a Sunday.” He said, “Nobody buys that time. You can have it if you want.” And the deal was, we would go out on our own and get our sponsors. Just to sponsor the show and kind of give us a little bit of pay, and so they joked, the triple L people were like, don’t do this radio Lloyd and the boys are going to do this show, “Yeah we’ll give them about six weeks, they’ll get tired of it, they’ll run out of material and they’ll get tired of chasing down the advertisers.” Eleven years later—

CP:

It’s amazing, eleven year run. So how did you not run out of material, that’s what I keep thinking about, I’m going to run out of material. Because I was thinking, West Texas, how much can you really do?

CB:

One of the caveats we had on the program is that every show would have at least one Buddy Holly and one Bob Wills in it, in every show. There’s Wayland, there’s the Crickets, there’s Sunny Curtis, Mac Davis, Joe Ely, you just got to looking around, the best thing we started doing was inviting local people to come on the show and play live. And as the show progressed over the years, we had people like, Willis Alan Ramsay showed up, the Hancocks, Joey Ely, Butch, Sunny Throckmorton, his daughter was going to Tech and he showed up on the show one night, Sunny Curtis. I mean people would come through and for our fifth anniversary, we did a 2-hour show and recorded it live and broadcast it live from Caldwell Studio. That was a hoot, man, people were there drinking beer. We kept it as calm as we could but—we would sometimes pack several people in that little tiny studio that where triple L, which is over there—at that time was over on fiftieth east of Q there. But we had a great time. One of the things in my book is, the story that we started doing very early on a special Christmas show the Sunday before Christmas, and Kenny had written a song that a group had recorded. It wasn’t really a Christmas song, but it was in the spirit of it and we had some other Christmas things that people had brought us and so I called Andy Wilkinson and I said, “Andy, do you have a Christmas song?” this was like September or so. We’re trying to put together stuff for the show, he said, “I’ve never written a Christmas song.” He sat down and wrote the Tumbleweed Christmas tree. And they went in the studio, they recorded it, we played it and the audience love it. We got lots of comments, “Hey we love that song.” Of course, it went on to be a pretty career defining moment for Andy. He actually played it on the NBC show. So we just toured in—it start out the four of us, Richard didn’t last, but just a few shows and then he decided he was going to move to Austin, so it was just Kenny and I and Lloyd. And sometimes, I did the show by myself, sometimes it was just Kenny and I. The more Lloyd started going to Austin the more he missed—we started doing a lot of them, just going down to the studio and pre-taping them. We’d get fifty-eight minutes to do the show, because we’d do it just live right there in the studio. But we still had people dropping

by doing live shows even though we were taping them, a guest artist come by. And every now and then, we'd bring in somebody like Andy or Don, somebody would come in and guest for us if all three of us were gone. It was lots of K triple L folks were beginning in their radio careers there and they got put on Sunday night shift, and part of their shift was doing the radio show. Bill Woodard and his ex-wife Leslie, they would part of the serve time there. As the West Texas—

CP:

So did you have quite a few advertisers coming onboard?

CB:

We started off, we had, when Womble Alls was still here, Mark Womble was a real big music fan and he and Lloyd were kind of buddies. So they were our biggest, first sponsor. Moyers music when Wally had his music store down there. They were big sponsors over the years. When Kyle Abernathy had Kyle's 88 Key Café, they were there. Caprock Café were sponsors for a while and we'd just go out and I think, for a hundred bucks, I think it was hundred bucks a month, they would get a mention in every show. And it was just good old boy radio, all the things we did was just off the cuff, and sometimes I'd play some guitar and Lloyd would talk or we'd do funny stuff, it was really laid back show. I think that's what people liked about it. It was this real laid back and we, of course, push the boundaries of West Texas out quite a bit, but I tried as much as possible to keep it local, keep it, local bands, somebody make a record we'd play it. We were the first radio station, first radio show to play any Dixie Chicks music even before Natalie was part of the group. We were the first group to play any music by Ricochet because Heath had been a student at South Plains College. And he had come do the radio show before he joined the band. And so—

CP:

Do the tapes still exist? I think y'all recorded a lot of these shows.

CB:

Charles Chambers, recorded every show we did for quite a while, on cassette. I may have some around.

CP:

It'd be interesting to go back and hear it.

CB:

Yeah. We opened the show, every show with "Farm Road Forty," Lloyd's song. That was our theme song. The last song we played, the night we went off the air, what was "The World Goes on Forever." Robert Earle, his version of that Lloyd had produced, of course. It was interesting during the times that Kenny was running for office, he could not be on the radio show. We

couldn't say his name on the radio show. So, during that time, we'd say, "our special guest this evening is Johnny Guitar, he's with us in the studio tonight."

CP:

Johnny Guitar. You still call him that?

CB:

No.

CP:

You should some day. Johnny Guitar.

CB:

Johnny Guitar. Johnny X. Or Johnny X Guitar. There's just whatever.

CP:

You had mentioned a writing about that time, talk a little bit about what your current projects are. I think you're writing a book.

CB:

Writing a book. For several years now, people from different walks in my life, sit down and talk about the old, old stories and people I've met and the business and Terry Hendricks approached me a few years ago and she said, "I love these stories. You need to put them down in a book." And I said, "Everybody writes a book." But an interesting thing happened a few years ago, my wife's cousin, who's a little older than me, his name is Dan Jordan, they lived up in the Garland Dallas area where my wife is from and their kids were our age and we use to go every Christmas and have big Christmas parties, and Dan was a librarian and a part time tuba player. Anyway, great guy. But he was diagnosed with cancer and within a few months [snaps] was dead. Just all of a sudden, he went from healthy guy to in the ground. But he had told his wife to call my wife and say, one of the things he wants at his funeral is for Cary to sing a specific song. It was an old Johnny Cash, June Carter song, "On the foreshore banks of Jordan." He wanted that and wanted me to sing it. And so we drove up to the funeral there in Dallas. It was really uplifting service, my wife spoke a little bit, Dan's mother spoke a little bit, his friends spoke a little bit, and it was pretty much stories of Dan's life, very uplifting service. And the last thing on the service was me singing that song. And I didn't know anybody on his of the family hardly at all or any of his friends. But I got up there and sang the song and after the funeral everybody's sort of, milling around going to the big place we had the after funeral meal, the widow came up to me a little later and she said, "Thank you so much for doing this, Dan would've loved it. I know he's smiling down from Heaven. People have come up to me just one right after the other saying,

what a great positive service this was, and they all say, that last song was so good and so perfect for it and that guy up there singing, he was really good, it was almost like a professional.”

CP:

Almost?

CB:

That's the title of the book.

CP:

That's the title of the book. When do you plan on publishing?

CB:

Hopefully Fall of '18. I'm about 95 percent done with the writing. Jerry Stoddard is going to do my editing, I say I'm not sure how many or what kind of pictures I'm going to include, that's cost prohibiting, I think. But it's just a short—series of little short vignettes like that.

CP:

That'll be a good time because they're getting ready to get Literacy Lubbock and the book week and all that going on during in the fall, so that'd be a good time for it to come out.

CB:

I'm told that first of October is when most of the writing releases their books. So if I can get it all done by then—

CP:

In time for Christmas.

CB:

In time for Christmas of '18. So I'm just about through with the writing of the book, I've got most everybody that's in the book, I've got permission to use their name and their stories. There's a couple of places in the book where it will have to be, unnoted country star. Because I don't have their permission and they probably wouldn't give me permission. But I've got permission to use a couple of the lyrics, I'm still working on several different places in there I use just a snippet of lyrics of songs. And that can be real dicey as I understand. Supposedly your allowed under fair use to use four lines of lyric.

CP:

As long as it's footnoted.

CB:

As long as it's footnoted. But I talked to a guy who wrote a book about Towns Van Zandt, he said he followed that rule because everybody in the business told him that was the standard rule. Turns out, the book comes out, the guy that owns all of Towns' rights, sued him. He said, "But I didn't use more than four lines.", "I don't care; you owe me thirty-three cents a book."

CP:

Did he have to pay it?

CB:

Has to pay it.

CP:

Wow. Go figure.

CB:

In the introduction, I say, "If you're a—if you're thinking this is going to be a torrid steamy tell-all book about sex, drugs and Rock and roll, sorry." Sorry to disappoint, it's not. Basically, it's what happens on the bus, stays on the bus. A lot of innocent people don't need to be drug into stuff.

CP:

Well, looking forward to it. Thanks for sharing stories with us Cary.

CB:

I can talk about music, and songwriting and my career, I can bore you for days.

CP:

Well we can always come back and follow up. I mean I think that's a good stopping point today with the book and everything, and let's kind of reset and think about it more. I would like to definitely talk about songwriting and your creative process, I think that would be a good-- and maybe get some examples, of you playing and things like that. All right thank you.

CB:

All right. I do have—

[End of Recording]