

**Oral History Interview of
Alan Munde**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
December 8, 2011
Wimberley, 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 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 growing up in Oklahoma, playing sports in school, and attending the University of Oklahoma. Munde describes his growing interest in bluegrass music and his experiences playing the banjo with different groups.

Length of Interview: 04:19:25

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Andy Wilkinson (AW):

This is the—what is this—the eighth of December, year 2011. We're in the hobbit hollow home of Alan Munde and Kitty Ledbetter, talking to Alan Munde. It's—what time is this—about eleven—

Alan Munde (AM):

Eleven—ten after eleven.

AW:

Perfect. So we're—you know, I don't know that we'll get everything done we want to do today, and there's all kinds of stuff to cover, but I think we can get a good start on it.

AM:

Alrighty.

AW:

I just want to get things going, and so whatever digressions you care to make are perfect. There's nothing to follow. Although, I've got to say I'm interested—you know, we need to capture biography-kind of details, but I'm really more interested—and I think people will be, you know, fifty, a hundred years from now, listening—to hear you talk about your—the way you approach your music. And so that's the thing I'm really most interested in, but let's go ahead and start with some bio—like your date of birth, and where.

AM:

Alrighty. I was born November 4, 1946, Norman, Oklahoma to—my mother was Zelda May Ogle, originally from Shawnee, Oklahoma. And my dad is George Leonard Munde, originally from Providence, Rhode Island. He hitchhiked out to Oklahoma during the Depression because he had an uncle that was in the army at Fort Sill in Lawton—and he had been, in his own words, he was a pooped out child prodigy.

AW:

Really?

AM:

Yeah—and he had been a sort of a math wizard, and at a very early—relatively early age, he attended Brown University—I think, maybe like when he was fifteen.

AW:

Wow, that is—

AM:

And he didn't like it at all and resented just the whole social aspect of it. So during the Depression, a lot of people were on the move. His father had died, and he had been what at the time would have been called a chemist in—and I don't know if it was a dye factory, or a fabric factory that used dye—but I'm sure back in those days, all of that stuff was carcinogenic. So I think he probably died of cancer at a relatively early age. And then my dad was there—his mother and three—there were three siblings, all brothers—and he, being the oldest—as he describes it, they were just standing around on the street corner one day with nothing to do, and said, “Well, I've got an uncle in Oklahoma. Let's go.”

AW:

All three of them?

AM:

No, just one of them, and then a buddy of his. So my dad and his buddy hitchhiked and rode the trains to Oklahoma, and got there—I don't know how old he was—would be at this time. I'm going to guess seventeen or eighteen. He had heard that they were recruiting students at the University of Oklahoma, so he went up to Norman—and back in those days you actually went into the president's office—

AW:

To apply?

AM:

Yeah, you just went and he recruited you. So he went in there and was recruited—started school at the University of Oklahoma, and that's where he met my mother, who was going to school there, also. She was from Shawnee and going to school there. So they met in the late thirties, married—and I have an older brother who was born in 1940, Mike—Michael—Munde, and then another brother, Jeffery, was born in 1943, then I was born in 1946, and then I have a sister who was born in 1949. And if you look at that, you'll see it's three years apart. Well, my dad was Catholic, so it was—they had their little plan. And my mother, interestingly enough, was Baptist, but converted—because you had to—and she became much more—as many times happens, the convert becomes the more—

AW:

assiduous churchgoer—

AM:

Yes—and adhered to the canons of the church, and one thing and another than, then you know, my dad may have been. So they met, and I was born in '46—and my dad is a civil engineer—

was a civil engineer. And at the time I was born—let me back up. He worked, after he graduated from the University of Oklahoma, he worked for the Oklahoma Highway Department—and with the war, they loaned him out to the Department of Interior, and he traveled and did things like map the coast of North Carolina, part of it, map part of the coast of Texas, worked on the TVA project, and so—and there're all stories that go along with those. But then, finally, he felt obligated to get in and join the navy. And so he joined the navy and was in the Pacific part of the war. His favorite movie, you know, that he thought was really accurate—and if you remember it, it was *Mister Roberts* about—I think it was Henry Fonda, was a second lieutenant on some seagoing vessel in World War Two—and my dad really related to it because he felt like that was a real accurate portrayal of the silliness of the captain and everything. And I believe, until he went to see *Indiana Jones*, that was maybe the only movie he ever went to.

AW:

Was *Mister Roberts*—and then jumped right into *Indiana Jones*. (laughs)

AM:

Right. He was not a great moviegoer or a book reader or anything—he was an engineer. After the war, my remembrances are him telling stories about the war—you and you hear a lot of people, “Oh, my dad never would talk about it.” My dad talked about it all the time.

AW:

Really? That is unusual.

AM:

Yeah. Well, I think for him, he was a little older, you know. He may have been in his later twenties when he went, where a lot of the other were eighteen and nineteen, and it was probably real traumatic, where for him—I don't want to say it was a big adventure, because it was very dangerous—

AW:

But he was shipboard, right?

AM:

Yeah, he was shipboard. He was a radioman, and—

AW:

Yes—my uncle was a radioman.

AM:

Right. And he also was a driver—I don't know what you call them—if driver is the proper naval term—the operator of a landing craft. So he would—you know, he told stories about landings and how you climb down the rope to get into the boat, you know, because you have—the ship is going one way, and the boat is going another way—and how you had to climb down these rope ladders, and you know, just lots of little stuff like that.

AW:

Did he make landings?

AM:

He did, but I couldn't tell you what they were. But he would always—his term was—and it's an accurate term—he would—"Poor sonofabitch—that poor sonofabitch," you know, he'd say "I'd load up these poor sons of bitches," you know, that was his term for this sort of doomed people. Just poor sonofabitch. He was in Japan at the end of the war, and was a big admirer—he did not like MacArthur, but he did say that MacArthur managed Japan well. And what he noticed—I mean, this is just sort of down at the grunt level—he said, "You go to Japan, and there are all these Japanese men with nothing to do," and his thing is that they could have been a huge problem, but MacArthur organized them, and he said he gave them armbands. So, you know, a certain colored armband meant that you collected garbage, and another colored armband meant that you were a messenger, or you know—he understood, sort of, the Oriental sense of organization, and how to organize down at the very bottom level, and he sort of admired that. So, you know, there were a lot of stories like that. He hated Truman, but he loved that he dropped the bomb, because they were all convinced that if that hadn't happened, it would have just been a long, drawn-out invasion. My dad drank a bit, and he would get to drinking, and he would come in our bedroom, and he would take off his shoe, and he would sit the shoe facing the corner of the room, and he would say, "That shoe is the entire Allied invasion fleet. These walls are Japan. That's what it would have been," you know, that sort of comparison of this tiny little invasion fleet up against this huge island of Japan with all these Japanese dug in.

AW:

Yeah—and he would do this lesson more than once? That's amazing.

AM:

Yeah. And he would tell us stories of his youth, you know, back in Providence. He didn't like Providence very much because it was too cold. I never ever went to Providence. He went once or twice to see his mother, but ultimately his mother moved to Oklahoma, and as did the younger brother move to Oklahoma, so he never had much of a reason to go back. Yeah, he would talk—you know, the first ten years of my life were us sitting at the dinner table listening to him talk either about the war, the Depression, or his youth. And it was—you know, looking back on it—

and my mother got irritated at it because we were irritated, you know. We were sort of trapped. And he would be drinking, and it would be his moment—and it was his life. But if you think about somebody at that time—the Depression and then World War Two, that's a hell of a lot. I always wondered, you know, I've got all these pictures of him in the Pacific, and he's got his shirt off, and he's got a mustache, and I always thought—even as a kid, I thought he was a handsome guy, you know, and in his uniform, he looked like a movie star, really, to me. You think, How did somebody that was that wind up being your dull old dad?

AW:

A question for the ages.

AM:

Right—well, looking back on it, I think he had all the adventure he needed. That was it, you know, “I don't need any more adventure. I'm ready to just be—”

AW:

I want to be home at five fifteen and eat supper at five forty-five?

AM:

You got it—“I want a job, I want to go to work, I want to come home, I want my family, I want my house, and then I want to do it again tomorrow. I don't want to go off and fight on the other side of the world on these islands that I can't pronounce the name of, among people who I really don't even—I can't appreciate,” and then the Depression was really difficult for men, I think, more than the women.

AW:

Yeah—no work, and—

AM:

You know, it's funny, in his descriptions of the Depression, it's all about the men. You never hear about the women, because they never—I know there was the great migrations of families, but if you go all the way back east, his description of all the people on the train were all men. It was the men that ran away.

AW:

I'll bet his description, really, is accurate.

AM:

Oh, I'm saying it is, yes. And he—just one other quick story I always loved—he said he and his buddy hitchhiked—they walked to the edge of Providence, hitchhiked to the edge of New York

City, and then walked through New York City to the other side and got on a train—and by getting on a train, I don't mean he bought a ticket.

AW:

He hopped the rails.

AM:

Hopped the rails. And he said there must have been a hundred and fifty or two hundred other people on that train—doing the same thing. To the day he died, he hated New York City because of that little walk through—

AW:

That one walk.

AM:

That one walk—he hated—something—and every time he wanted to make—sound like a New Yorker, he would say “Oh, you just go down to toyedy-toyd and toyd,” you know, and that was his whole idea of New York—was just this mass. And he would say, you know, “They ought to cut it off and float it out into the ocean. It's like a whole other country.”

AW:

I think you and I had the same dad.

AM:

Yeah.

AW:

I really do. Did he ever disappear for times and come down to Texas? (laughs)

AM:

No, no, he didn't do that. But just one quick story, and then I'll get off of this. He hopped a freight, you know, out of New York City, and he said, “Ultimately it stopped out in the country in Pennsylvania for some reason. When it stopped, all these guys got off.” I don't mean they got off to go somewhere, they just got off to rest. And he said “We were sitting there, and there was a boy—fourteen years old or so—out in a field plowing with a horse. After a couple hours, the train started to get going again, and all the guys got back on the train. The kid in the field went over and tied his horse up to a tree and came and got on the train.”

AW:

(laughs) He got on with them.

AM:

Right—and this is my dad, who is probably not a lot older, describing this kid, he said “And that kid got on that train,” and once again, he says, “That poor sonofabitch. All he knew was that he had an uncle in the Dakotas somewhere.”

AW:

Good grief.

AM:

And I’m going “Well, weren’t you headed to an uncle in Oklahoma?” You know, I mean “Weren’t you a poor sonofabitch, too?” But anyway, so he got to Oklahoma and met my mother—she was interesting. She was—at school she was a telephone operator.

AW:

Yeah—spell her last name—maiden name.

AM:

O-g-l-e.

AW:

Okay.

AM:

Zelda May Ogle was her name. She was from Shawnee, and had a real interesting bunch. Her mother came in one of the land runs, I don’t know what, as an infant, and her dad—and I’ve always wondered this—if you ever wonder where the nickname “Lum” comes from, it comes from Columbus.

AW:

So that’s—if a person was named Columbus Ogle, they’d be called Lum.

AM:

Right. Lum. Well, his name was Columbus Ogle. He was—they called him Lum. He was—my mother’s grandmother’s name was Brown, and as with a lot of people at that time, they had money and land, and then they didn’t—speculation, or whatever it is. To this day, between Norman, Oklahoma and Tecumseh, Oklahoma, there is a Brown Cemetery, and that’s my grandmother’s family—was the Browns. And they had money—so between Norman and Shawnee, my mother had relatives, and one of them were the Brendles—and there’s a Brendle Corner out there, and I used to go out there to visit Ralph and Charlie Brendle—World War Two—Ralph was a World War Two vet who had been shell-shocked—was the word they used

back then. But he told me—because I wanted to take my—I had some dogs that I wanted to let run—so he took me down to a piece of property that he owned—and he told me this, and I don't know if it's true or not, but I'll repeat it—he says “This is the last piece of property that is in original ownership from the original land run” was in the Brendle family.

AW:

Really?

AM:

Yeah. Now, it's gone since then, but I thought, Well, that's kind of cool. So the Brendles—they were in my mother's family. I don't know the Ogle side too much, but they've been there since the land run. She had a cousin named Clementine [**Mary Clementine “Clemi” Brendle**] who, during the Depression, left Oklahoma and went to Chicago and got in with Al Capone's gang and married one of his henchmen-colleagues-associates who was named Murray “the Camel” Humphreys. He was actually captured in Norman, Oklahoma in the fifties, getting off the train to come back and see Clemi—Aunt Clemi—my mother's Aunt Clemi—and she lived for years and years between Norman and Tecumseh, and we would pass her house—it was right near this Brendle Corner where Ralph and Charlie lived—but she was always the black sheep of the family, and my mother wouldn't talk about her a whole lot other than to relate, you know, that—even in the sixties and seventies, as an older lady, there were still rumors that she was dealing in drugs. My mother's family had sort of an outlaw element in there, somehow. But it makes, you know—when you're not connected—it made kind of fun stories and gives you interesting things—but that's my mother and dad. And then I was born in '46 in Norman, Oklahoma—my dad had gone to school there, as my mother had. My dad worked in Oklahoma City, but he liked the idea of living in Norman, so bought a house there and I grew up there. I'm going to say at the time I grew up it's twenty thousand—twenty-five thousand—and I grew up basically not far from the University of Oklahoma, so it was nearby. A lot of what—the shops and things were called Campus Corner, and I would go there as much as I would go downtown, you know, so I was right in between downtown and Campus Corner. I had a—you know, it was a really great—

AW:

That's a nice area of Norman, still.

AM:

Oh it is, yeah, it is.

AW:

Not far from where John Hadley lives.

AM:

Very near—just across the railroad tracks from where the Hadleys live—and the railroad tracks ran through Norman, and that's how Norman got there—it was Norman's camp—and Norman—I don't remember if that was a first name or last name—was the surveyor, and that's where his camp was, and so it was called Norman's camp. So I guess it's his last name, probably—and became Norman, and a train station grew up, you know, and it developed as it was. There was—during the war, there was two navy bases. There was a north base and a south base, and they were there after the war, when I was a kid, they were part of the makeup of the town.

AW:

Is the north base—is that where the airport is, now?

AM:

Yes—Max Westheimer Field is the north base—and the south base—

AW:

I've actually eaten breakfast there.

AM:

Oh, have you?

AW:

It's a great little café in that depot.

AM:

You know, I haven't been there in so very long. The south base is where the baseball field is, now—L. Dale Mitchell Park—and the big new museum—I forget what it's called [**Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History**]**—the Lloyd Noble Arena is—that was all the south base. My grandmother—used to be a bus service—and my Grandmother Munde would take me on bus rides just, you know, for entertainment. You'd pay your nickel and ride the bus. And the bus would go through the south base. You had to—you just couldn't ride the bus onto the navy base, you had—**

AW:

You had to get off?

AM:

Well, we would either have to get off, but if some sailor vouched for us—so we just got to ride through and just back out the other side. You know, as a kid, it was a great, great—you know, it's almost the American ideal childhood, you know. You live in a neighborhood, you know all

the kids in the neighborhood, there's a little strip of stores at the end of the street—it's got a little grocery store in it, you'd go down there and buy some candy or a drink or whatever—the street would—when it rained, it would flood, and you'd go out and play in the water. You know, the DDT guy would go by and you'd get your bicycles out and ride along in the DDT fog.

AW:

I've done that, too.

AM:

And we'd play polo on our bicycles with canes, you know, wooden canes and a tennis ball, you know, whack it. At the end of the street there would be storm drains, and we'd whack it—"Oh, gosh, it's headed for the drain," and we'd race down and try to catch it before it went down the drain—lost a lot of balls down the drain. So it was a really, really great childhood, I think. It was ideal. And my mother and dad were Catholic, and so I went to a catholic school.

AW:

Oh, you went to—you didn't go to public school—you went to a Catholic school?

AM:

Until the eighth grade I went to a Catholic school—it was called Saint Joseph's—and it was on—there's Campus Corner, our house, downtown, and then on the other side of downtown was Saint Joseph's. We would walk—my two older brothers—and I remember clearly my brother Jeffrey, who is—my brother Mike is the oldest, Jeffery, and then me—and I remember sitting in school—he took me to school, a sort of orientation—and I can remember sitting in the desk, you know, like this—

AW:

Right above the level— (laughs)

AM:

Yeah, just above the level of the desk—and this was a school that was—I wish I could remember the order. I never was big into what the nuns were—but they wore all black, you know, all you could see was their face and their hands, and they had the big white—

AW:

The wimple?

AM:

Is that what it was?

AW:

I think that's it.

AM:

And then covered with black—and they lived in a dorm on like the third floor of the school building. The classes were on the first floor and the second floor, and then the basement was the cafeteria and a little—it wasn't big enough to be a gymnasium, but you could run around in it if they moved the tables. So Sister Mary was my first grade teacher, and just some of the names—I don't remember what grades they were—Sister Silveria, Sister Immaculata, Sister Emma, and there would be a lay teacher in there every once in a while. So I went to school there, and it was good, you know, it was good, and it's—

AW:

Were they of the mean catholic nun variety? (laughs)

AM:

You know, it varied from one to the other, but there were—some of them, I think, were kind of bitter about the choice they made seventy years earlier. But on the whole, you know, they were an incredible bunch, and they tried really, really hard—and all the classes I had from first grade to the eighth grade, there were two classes in each room. So when I was in the first grade, half the room was first grade, the other half of the room was second grade. So as I went on up, it just kept—

AW:

Until the eighth grade, then you're the top dog.

AM:

Right—and I can't remember if seventh and eighth were together or not—I can't remember—but many times there would be two grades in the same room with like forty, forty-five kids in a room. So there was an aisle that divided the two—and so she would teach one side of the room something and make an assignment, and then come over and teach the other side and, you know, make an assignment.

AW:

Well that's kind of cool. So you were always learning ahead and also always reviewing—probably is a good way to learn.

AM:

Right, right. You know, and if you think of it that way, it was pretty incredible—and, you know, very, very difficult. Those nuns had a very, very difficult life, I think, and the kids probably

didn't help much. This was in the days of no air conditioning, so—they had these big windows that had these big metal bars that come out that had notches in it. You'd push the window out and hook down the little bar, and you may have had a ceiling fan—I can't remember. But it was just—and they were dressed—I mean head to toe, all day long, no matter what the weather. I can remember—I'm sorry about this cough—

AW:

That's all right.

AM:

—is, you know, every year the students would get together and buy the teacher—the nun—a present. I remember going to the principal—who I think was Sister Silveria—and asking what Sister—I wish I could remember her name—anyway, she must have been in her seventies. Anyway, what would be an appropriate present for us students to collect money and buy for her—and she suggested support hose. So that's what we got her. It was kind of an interesting world. And then Father Connelly was the father at the church, and very, very early on—I don't remember the Saint Joseph Catholic Church—but what I remember is that they were building a new church, and Father Connelly was in charge of the fundraising. While they were building the church, we would go to the chapel on the navy base for services. So I remember that. And then when they built the new church, we would go to what is now Saint Joseph's Church and Father Connelly was there. I always remember seeing the Catholic church—the priest is God's agent on Earth, so when the report cards got handed out, Father Connelly would come over and hand out the report cards. So here is God's agent on Earth giving you your report card. and he would call my name, and he would always look at the card, and then he would reach it down and go, say, "Try to do better next time."

AW:

Every time?

AM:

Every time, you know. So it was—you know, it's one of those lives, to me, that's in some way sort of textbook-sort of mid-America life—and I really enjoyed it. I had a good time as a kid—had lots of friends, played a lot—and you know, just like lots of places, you had a bicycle, and you'd leave in the mornings and, "Bye mom, I'll be home at lunch," or, you know, you'd get back "What'd you do?" "Well, I went down to Freddy's" or "I went over to Gary and David's and played a lot." So it was real good. At Saint Joseph, I played sports, you know, I liked baseball, and basketball, not so much, but football a lot, so I played. And it was always ragtag—never had uniforms—you'd play in your blue jeans and ten different colored helmets, and you know, whatever you could get over your shoulder-pads—and that was football. And you'd have the huddle, and we had a coach. The Thompsons was a family that had a lot of kids, and one of

the older Thompson boys or uncle or something coached the team for a while. My oldest brother coached for a little while, and he's only three years older than I am—you know, the seventh and eighth grade—and just ragtag, thrown-together—sometimes we'd play games and the coach couldn't make it because he had to work, so we'd just show up.

AW:

What teams did you play?

AM:

Well, there were other Catholic schools, and we would—the coach would go out and get—basically, for those other teams, we'd be scrimmages. One of the public school teams might scrimmage—you know, play a game on Friday afternoon at three o'clock, you know—hardly even a field—just mark off—here's the goal line, here's the other goal line—I don't even remember if we had referees. The coaches probably reffed the game, too. It was just kids out there banging heads together and trying to do something. But some of them were kind of official—there were some schools in Oklahoma City—Bishop McGuinness had a school up there and we'd go up and play them and just get our asses whipped—just every—I mean, because we were just a very tiny school, and these boys that were just—you know, some of them didn't weigh fifty pounds, I bet—but we had a good time, and I always enjoyed it. Very seldom would the parents come out because they would be—the games were all Friday afternoon at three o'clock, or something like that—or Saturday. If it was a Saturday game, and there was a field there that had been built by WPA, called Hardy Field, but we called it Sticker Stadium because—

AW:

For the obvious reasons.

AM:

Yeah, because it was just full of stickers.

AW:

Goat heads.

AM:

Yeah, goat heads and—but I mean, as kids, you just—

AW:

You know, you mentioned the parents not coming, and I thought—the only time I played football was in junior high—and I don't think my parents ever came to a game—and I don't remember many parents coming to games. Occasionally somebody's dad would offer to come

because they had to help drive or something—I wonder when the world changed, and now, mainly in the stands are parents? I would think back, that the stands would always have people in them—and now, I'm wondering who those people were, because there weren't our parents.

AM:

Well, you know, it's true for summer baseball—I played baseball a lot in the summers—and all those games were during the day. You know, at the end of the year, they'd have a tournament or something—I think my dad maybe came to one of those, but parents never, ever, ever came, you know? And I remember having a—you know, you had a bicycle, and you'd take your glove and you'd slip it over the handlebar—you know, where the little wristband was—you'd slip it over there, and you'd ride—tootle off to wherever the game was, and you'd play your game on some sort of hard, scrabbly-kind of thing—and there were never any parents there. I always—you know, and I think what that meant, not having parents there. I think, for me anyway, since most of my sporting career was a failure, it gave you a chance to fail without incredible embarrassment—but also, at the same time, to have a good time.

AW:

Yeah—my remark wasn't aimed at how sad it was that our parents didn't come—we didn't think anything about it. In fact, I think if our—I'm like you—if our parents had been there, we'd have been on the spot, you know? “Oh my gosh, I can't fumble, I can't—”

AM:

Yeah—all of that—you know, you had a chance—

AW:

—or be left on the bench the whole game, you know, which happened to me a lot.

AM:

you had a chance to learn to play the game and kind of refine whatever skills you have without the embarrassment of wondering what your parents are going to think or whatever. It was a good way to do it, I think, looking back. But you have to remember—and I always—I think of this from time to time—when you and I were growing up, America was probably half what it is now. We're over three hundred million people, now—it was probably a hundred and fifty, hundred and sixty million, you know, and things didn't seem like—the pressure was a different kind back then.

AW:

Well, I mean, there're lots of things that were different, you know, in terms of communication, in terms of alternative things to do, and none of us—I doubt that you had any sort of games to play

indoors, unless you had a Monopoly board or something like that. Most of what we did, as I recall, was outdoors, and we did it with other kids.

AM:

Oh yeah, yeah.

AW:

We didn't do it with the Ethernet, or—there wasn't any—it was much more social in lots of ways.

AM:

It was a different time, for sure, and I'm sorry in some ways it's changed. There's a lot of things about the fifties that are pretty damn wonderful, but as we both know, there's a lot of really, really incredibly bad, deadly, horrendous things in the fifties, too. But you know, I'm happy to have done that. Going back to the sports—I was kind of a bigger kid, and at some point—so playing sports was kind of fun, you know, because I was bigger and I could do things—but at some point, the other kids started catching up. Some kid ran into me and just—I thought, Man, that hurt like hell, and I said “You know”—I mean, I didn't put all this together, but that's about the same time I got interested in music.

AW:

Oh really? (laughter)

AM:

Yeah—was about the time I lost interest in—

AW:

—in sports—

AM:

Well, you know, it never is fully formed in your mind, but I knew somewhere deep down inside that I wasn't very good—I wasn't good enough to continue much farther.

AW:

Yeah, so did this revelation begin to form when you were now in public school, or still while you were at catholic school?

AM:

By the eighth grade—when I went to the ninth grade, that's when I started public school, and they called that junior high. Then the tenth grade, back when I was in school, that was called

high school, and I went over to the high school, and it was then—whatever age you're at in the tenth grade—that I got interested in music. I'm not sure what did it, but I can remember sitting there watching Ed Sullivan—or whatever show was on—and there was a big folk music thing. And I can even remember—mentioned to my mother, I said, "You know, I don't like this folk music, or whatever that is," and I still don't.

AW:

I think you're the one that gave me the pin—you know, the little pin you put on your shirt that said—I think you gave it to me—that said, "If I had a hammer, there'd be no folk singers."

AM:

That could have been, yeah. But about that same time, my oldest brother, Mike, had gone to the navy, and he came home—when he came home, he brought with him a guitar and a record on how to play it—and it was Pete Seeger's *Folk Singer's Guitar Guide*—was a record and a little booklet. And I would listen to that, and I'd go, "Man, I like the sound of that. I like that." So he was busy with going to college and other issues, so I started picking up on the guitar—and I should even mention, prior to this my oldest brother and my sister—who is the youngest—both took accordion lessons at separate times. When my sister took accordion lessons, after the lesson I would get her to show me—so actually the very first instrument I ever played was the accordion.

AW:

Really?

AM:

Now, I don't—I couldn't play it to this day at all, but I can remember looking at the notes and pushing the keys, and I could make the sounds, and I could do it right. What I do remember about that was funny looking back on it was the tempo. I would get going, you know, and it's this athletic thing, you know, pumping this thin, and after a while, it would just going so fast I couldn't keep up, trying to play these "Long, Long Ago," and all this. But that was really what I did first—but then my brother and the guitar was what set me off. So I would listen to the record—Pete Seeger's thing—and he would talk about this strum or that strum, and he could play a little melody and then strum with it—and it was—"Jesse James" was the song in the key of D. It was "Here's how you play the melody," and sort of Woody Guthrie church lick, or whatever he called it. As far as he went with the melody, I could do it—I enjoyed the hell out of it. I thought that was really cool. So I got real interested in the guitar, and I talked my dad into letting me buy a guitar, because that was my brother's guitar, and I don't know, he either wanted it or I wanted one of my own. Well, back in those days—this would be in the mid-fifties—the music stores weren't fully developed—you know, this idea of a music store for stringed

investments, you know, band instruments were developed. Well, where you went—where I went—was to Fabian's TV repair, and he sold guitars—

AW:

How interesting.

AM:

Yeah. A lot of times you hear people say, "At the drugstore" —you go to the drugstore and buy strings and things. I'm sure that's true, but for me it was Fabian's TV repair. He sold strings and picks and guitars—he had a guitar in the window, a Kay Archtop Guitar—and I think it was \$40. And I talked my dad—my dad knew him because he knew him in the same way he knew everybody—was that they belonged to the American Legion. His whole life after the war was a continuation of those sorts of relationships. All his friends, all the activities that he was mostly involved in revolved around veterans—even church, you know, there were a lot of veterans. As a result—and I never knew their stories—but I met a Russian guy named Mike Ivanov who—this has nothing to do with music, but just the social milieu—and Morris Tannenbaum, you know, he had all these sort of ethnic characters that you might not run into otherwise, other than they were all veterans. You had—whether you liked them or not—you had to deal with them because they were veterans, and they could belong to the American Legion, and that was part of the deal—and it was a good thing, and I belong to the Sons of the American Legion, and we go to Sons of American Legion meetings and that's how I got into building model airplanes, is through the Sons of the American Legion. They would—a guy bought all these little kits. They were blocks, you know, you just carved a block into the shape of a plane—solid wood—and so that's how I got into that. Anyway, this Fabian had the TV repair place that sold guitars, so my dad let me sign up and pay out—you know, I signed to pay \$5 a month—or I can't even remember, really—until I got this \$40 paid off. So I took that, had the guitar—

AW:

It was the Kay that you bought?

AM:

The Kay Archtop, I had this Kay Archtop, and I looked in the phonebook for a guitar lesson. This is going to be real cool—this is where it gets really cool. There were two places. There was Carl and Bob's Music, which was downtown, and then there was one called Mike Richey's Guitar Center, which was on Campus Corner, which was just a few blocks away—so I—well, there's the closer one. So at age fourteen or fifteen, I called up and made an appointment for a guitar lesson, grabbed my little Kay guitar—I don't even know if I had a case—and walked down and met Mike Richey, who is Slim Richey.

AW:

(laughter) That is cool.

AM:

It is. So I've known Slim since I was fourteen or fifteen. He had a little music store in one half of a tiny duplex. In the kitchen—where the kitchen would normally be—he had some display shelves and things, and in what would have been the living room, he had some guitars and stuff hanging on the walls, and then the lessons were given back in the bedroom. So I would sit on the bed, and I took lessons from a guy named Jim Kennedy, who Slim still knows, and we've had contact with. So the first thing Slim tried to do when I met him was tell me that the guitar I had wasn't very good and sell me another—which, eventually, he did. So I started taking guitar lessons—and really loved it—and I won't say I was a prodigy or anything at all—not even close—but I did do well. I could make things work, and I kind of understood—and they would talk about notes and time—you know, reading music—and I could—had done the accordion a little bit, so I kind of understood a little bit of that. I don't think I had much innate musical sensibility, but I did have the mechanical parts to make it work—and I knew if you put your fingers down like that and learned to move them, you could make music. And that's how music was made. So I immediately got into loving the guitar and made all the guitar lessons I could. At the time, I had a friend down at the end of the street—Gary McNabb—and he had a guitar because his dad played guitar a little bit. He would bring his guitar and we would kind of poke around together. I don't think I had a great sense of how music—you made music with other people, you know. We'd strum on it and bang around on it. There was another kid that lived around the corner named Mike Stapp, who I thought—even as a youngster, I thought he had a lot of musical ability because he could go to the piano and sit and pick out melodies. And there was—Tex Ritter had a song called "Hillbilly Heaven." "I dreamed I was there in Hillbilly Heaven." and Mike didn't know how to play guitar, but I did, and so I'd strum a chord and he would start singing. Then he would say "There needs to be something else right here," you know, so he could hear that there was something—you know, you need to move your fingers to the—what else have you got? So I'd move it to the other—"No, that's not it"—but he could kind of direct me and sort of "Oh yeah"—sort of these groups of sounds started to kind of make sense to me. I'd listen to the radio and I'd start to hear the same sort of grouping of D, G, A, and D—you know, just the three important chords. So I was sort of surrounded by you know, just little inklings of music making. This guy's dad—Gary McNabb's dad—was really, really strict. I mean he whooped his kids with a razor strap. But you know, as he got older—and especially in the music—it's the first time I ever saw him smile—that I remember him being—I was always afraid of him, but when he found out we were interested in music, he became a lot friendlier, and I've enjoyed him. He played guitar and could strum some and sing a song or two—you know, "Red River Valley" or something—and so that was sort of the very earliest stuff. But then hanging around Slim's—and I call him Slim now because that's what he goes by, but it was Mike Richey back then—by hanging around Mike Richey's, you know, you—there wasn't a lot

of place to hang around when he had the store in his house, but eventually he moved to a storefront on Campus Corner, so you could go in and hang out. I'm not sure how, but just watching TV and also Pete Seeger—I went to buy a Pete Seeger record because I thought he was a guitar player—got home and it was this other thing. And I thought, Well, I like that sound, too, and I saw it on TV, and immediately, when I heard the banjo, I really liked it. And so I thought, Well, I want to get a banjo. So I bought one through Slim. I've got this very same model that I had back then—first banjo I ever bought—was called a Vega Ranger, and it's a really—the least expensive banjo they made, and I've got a model just like that in the other room now. It's not the one I owned, but it's exactly like it. I think it was a hundred and five, a hundred and twenty-five dollars, or whatever it was. I had been working—you know, back then—that's another thing, I don't know if kids do it so much nowadays—but I got a job, you know, when I was fourteen as a carhop, and then I worked at a soda fountain, and then delivered newspapers, you know, different experiences. And they were all good experiences in the learning sense. They weren't good much otherwise. I think I made forty-five cents an hour—I think is what the rate was at the time. The first job I ever had was a carhop at the first Sonic Drive-in in Norman, Oklahoma. I worked there, and that was kind of an odd experience, because all of the sudden you're around adults that are more worldly, you know, the cook and the lady that ran the cash register—you know, they were—I mean, my eyes were—you know, I couldn't keep up with it, and I didn't know what they were talking about. So it was a good experience, sort of just getting out into the world. But anyway, the money I made, saved, and bought the banjo, and it was a good banjo for me at the time. I just spent my time playing the banjo, and also—and this is really cool about music, as you know—is immediately, when you start playing music, you start looking for other people that play music. So I found a couple other guys my age that played and were very serious about it—and both of them very brilliant people. One of them is Bryan Nielson. His dad had been the Economics professor at OU and had been part of Kennedy's kitchen cabinet, you know, unofficial sort of advisors, then Lynn Baroff, whose father was a jewelry salesman. But both of them were extremely talented, you know. They could hear songs and find the chords—and Lynn played guitar, and Bryan had a really, really, really nice old Gibson mandolin—an F4. And so we three got together and started playing music, and that's when I really started playing music.

AW:

What age were you then?

AM:

Oh, sixteen, seventeen—still in high school. We called ourselves the East Ridge Ramblers, because I lived on East Ridge Road at that time.

AW:

And of course, there was the New Lost City Ramblers, and they were all the—

AM:

Right. And see, Lynn and Bryan, both being—especially Bryan—being in sort of the college world—

AW:

Oh, because of his father or because he was older?

AM:

Well, let me back up. I've confused things here. Bryan Nielson's father had died and was not part of this Kennedy thing. That's another guy I knew. But there's a Nielson Hall in Norman at the University of Oklahoma that's named after his father or his grandfather—I can't remember. Anyway, Bryan was real hip to music—for me, he knew Hank Williams, he knew Woody Guthrie—and Lynn Baroff knew the New Lost City Ramblers and ultimately, Flatt and Scruggs. A friend of mine, for Christmas one year gave me a Flatt and Scruggs album—and that's the thing that really fired the pot—was hearing Earl Scruggs play the banjo. It was like miraculous. There's a guy named Pete Wernick, and he made this observation, and I think it's really good. He says, "You hear Earl Scruggs play, and it's like the most incredible music you've ever heard in your whole life. You can't imagine a human doing it—but I think I can." You know, what is there about it—that all-in-one package sounds so incredible, but then, also, says, "Come in and do it—that you can do it" For me, anyway, I don't listen to symphonic music and go, "Well, I could do that," or I don't listen to jazz and go, "Well, I can do that." But in bluegrass, there's something about it that is incredibly open and inviting, at that time, anyway. So I heard that, and that's what we wanted to be. We wanted to be a—

AW:

That may be a good description, though, of bluegrass. It is sort of a "Welcome in" kind of music. You know, jazz is really quite the opposite. It's like, You're not hip enough to do this.

AM:

You've got to be real good before you can participate.

AW:

Well, I mean even the attitude of the music is like, I'm going to let you hear something, but—you know, yeah.

AM:

Right. You don't know what you're hearing.

AW:

Right—you have to—I don't wasn't to say “earn” your way in to even listen to it, but in some ways it's true. Bluegrass, you know, it hits you and boy, there it is.

AM:

Well, you know, part of it—

AW:

—that's a thing I like about it.

AM:

Right, right—and it's sort of the charm of any sort of folk music is it's—conceptually, it's relatively simple. Performance-wise, it's incredibly difficult, but the concepts, you know—I knew G, C, and D, and that's about—I won't say that's all there is to bluegrass, but if you can do that, you can participate, and you get started in it, anyway. So it was a really inviting, attractive sound I loved. And the album that I got was called *Foggy Mountain Banjo*, which was an instrumental album. So it was doubly attractive because my parents never liked the singing—especially my mother. She thought it was just dreadful.

AW:

Bluegrass singer or singing?

AM

Bluegrass singers. But at the same time, you know, in our house, we had symphonic music, you know—any house in the fifties, you know, you had—

AW:

Reader's Digest Collection—

AM:

Yeah, whatever of whatever—and I would listen to it, and I found it incredibly attractive, too. I would put on—when I got into music, I'd put on all sorts of stuff—and I remember—and to this day, I love *My Fair Lady* because I love the songs, you know, and I have seen the show in London, and I've seen the movie of it, and I love it. I love *My Fair Lady*—and I love *South Pacific*, and I love musicals, because the—and we'll get into this later—because those era of songwriters knew how to write songs that people would like and could sing and reproduce. That's why they are standards is because—and I'm going to talk later about what my theory about that is—but anyway, they knew how to—you know, they were these European-trained musicians who knew how to craft a song to where people would like it most of the time. They had all the stories, and—I mean, it was the fifties at that time.

AW:

Were you much listening to popular radio?

AM:

You know, that I did not, although when I worked at the Sonic, it was on all the time, so I know, you know, the stuff.

AW:

Yeah, well, and you were right next door to KOMA—Oklahoma City, which—

AM:

Exactly—

AW:

—which is what we listen to in Lubbock, you know, because that's where you heard the new songs first.

AM:

Yeah—and Oklahoma City had its own musical scene—WKY had a guy named Danny Williams, and all these DJs that did sock-hops and all that sort of stuff. But you know what, I never really—I mean I liked it okay, but it was never anything that I—you know, I didn't get the guitar and learn to play “Peggy Sue.” The first thing I learned to play was “Jesse James,” and then after that, it was always into this Hank Williams-y, Woody Guthrie, New Lost City Ramblers, Flatt and Scruggs—so it was always sort of the country music—and I can remember, as a boy scout going on a campout and walking back—all the other boys were singing “The Battle of New Orleans,” and I—“Where did you learn that?” and they said, “Well, it's on the radio.” But I didn't—you know, I wasn't a radio junkie like that—in that way—because, you know, by the time I got interested in music, the music I was interested in was not on the radio. As I got sort of matured, country music was the closest thing, so I listened to country music—and back then, you could still hear Hank Williams and Hank Snow and you know, the more straight-ahead, classic country music. Oklahoma City had a station called KNOR—no, that's the Norman station—I can't remember the station in Oklahoma City, but it was owned by a guy named Jack Beasley. Early on, they had a noontime TV show that Jack Beasley played the bass on, and Wylie Walker and Gene Sullivan were the band, maybe along with an accordion. I don't know if you know them, but Wylie Walker and Gene Sullivan went by the name “Wylie and Gene.” But they wrote “When My Blue Moon Turns to Gold Again,” and—

AW:

Oh yeah. The story I hear about that song is that they were broke down on the highway north of Lubbock and wrote that song.

AM:

They had a—when Joe and I were doing the book, I found—

AW:

I guess that's where I read it.

AM:

Maybe so—references of Wylie and Gene being on the radio in Lubbock. So they were there, also.

AW:

Well now, so maybe I didn't read that in that book, but I heard that story, and it was distinct that they'd said "Yeah, we were broken down, sitting on the highway north of Lubbock" and waiting for somebody to come get them and take them—

AM:

No doubt, no doubt, because they were in Lubbock—because I've found references to them being on the radio. Also, there was another group in Oklahoma City—and I don't want to get into—and they were called the Willie Wiredhand Serenaders, and that was for this little character that was the symbol of this rural electric co-op, 0Willie Wiredhand, and it was—

AW:

Yeah, in Lubbock, let's see, the co-op's symbol was Reddy Kilowatt.

AM:

Okay, same character. Well, the band that was the Willie Wiredhand Serenaders in Oklahoma City for many, many years, and the bass player was a guy, I believe named Kenny Driver, who had a music store called Driver's in Oklahoma City, so he was kind of a prominent character. They were also in Lubbock, because I found reference to them in Lubbock.

AW:

Just coming through to play?

AM:

No, they were doing the same thing in Lubbock that they did in Oklahoma City—and I believe it was maybe even for this Reddy Kilowatt. I'd have to go back and look because it was a picture. I wouldn't have recognized the name, but I saw a picture in an ad, and—

AW:

Now what was the Driver's name?

AM:

Kenny Driver, I think was his name.

AW:

There was a Jack Driver in Lubbock—

AM:

Maybe related.

AW:

—when I was growing up, and I'm trying to think of what he did—why—I'm going to look that up. I wonder if they were related.

AM:

You know, there's a large connection between Oklahoma and Lubbock, you know, there's a lot of back and forth stuff there. But anyway, Wylie and Gene were on TV with this Jack Beasley. Jack Beasley owned the country music station in Oklahoma City, and he was sort of a big BS artist who I met a few years later. Anyway, so Lynn Baroff and Bryan and I played in a band, and we would get together and play—and we played high school functions and whatnot. And I remember—I don't know what grade I was in, eleventh grade or whatever—and I don't remember how it got arranged, I must have done it—but there was a class party at one of the teacher's homes, and Lynn and Bryan and I were going to play for this class party. Well I had to work at the—I worked at Liberty Drug—I think it was Liberty—I don't think that was it. It was one of the drugstores on Campus Corner. So I didn't get off until nine, so I ran over there in the rain, got there wet, and they had brought my banjo. And I remember clearly, All right, they're going to entertain for us, and never thought in my mind of what it would be like. I just thought we were going to play music—of putting my banjo on and looking up and all of the sudden, everybody's looking at us—and my muscles just went to jelly. And I thought, God, where did this come from? What is this? And so any time anybody describes, you know, How do you play when you're nervous or—I always think back to that moment, you know, because I know exactly how it feels, because I had no earthly idea to expect that—you know, because I'd never—that may be the first time I ever played for an audience. I may have played for my parents or friends or whatever, but I can remember just the muscles in my hands—and I moved them—and I moved and we got through it, but I just remember feeling really, really, totally inadequate. It was like, No, I'm better than this. I'm better than this. But we did it, and that was an event that I remember. So we played together as much as we could, and Lynn and Bryan went to what was called University School, and it was sort of the University of Oklahoma Department of Education experimental school. It was called University School, and I went to the public school.

AW:

That was a thing at that time. They had one at Texas Tech right there—

AM:

Did they?

AW:

Yeah, and I don't know how you got into it at Texas Tech because it was—I think you had to know somebody.

AM:

Well most of them were the kids of faculty members—is one way they got in. And this is—there's a picture of us—Lynn and Bryan and I and another kid we'd found that played bass named Greg Clark—those three went to University School, and they got us to go out there and play at an event out there, and that picture still shows up—you know, I can show it to you in different magazines—or books. And I must have given it to them—I don't know where that picture is, now. But in the meantime, I knew that that banjo I had was not a bluegrass-style banjo.

AW:

Was it a four-string?

AM:

Five-string—but it was an open back, and I actually—

AW:

Did it have the different scale—the shorter neck, or—

AM:

It may have. It wasn't that, it was just the sound of it. I knew at the time I was playing—once again, Pete Seeger had a thing called a basic strum, and I did that, and then I did a frailing stroke, and that's how I played. But I knew I wanted to play the three-fingered style, so I got some picks, and I would try to make some noises, but I did not have any idea how to do that. And I found—and I don't know how—maybe hanging around Mike Richey's guitar center—I tried a couple banjo teachers in Norman that weren't helpful for the bluegrass kind of playing, but I found—through Mike, I found a guy in Oklahoma City named Gary Price, who I still know to this day. And I went up and took a lesson from him, and how I did this was—I think it worked this way—is the workweek used to be Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday till noon. So my dad went up to Oklahoma City on Saturdays and got off at noon. So

this guy—Gary Price, who is several years older than I am, I'm going to say he's probably five to ten years older than I am, because he was in college when I was still in high school and married, and living by himself, so he was probably in his early twenties and I was seventeen or eighteen. And my dad—I would ride up to work on Saturday with my dad at ten or eleven o'clock, he would take me to Gary Price's, which was not far from where he worked in Oklahoma City, he would go back to work and I took a lesson from this Gary Price. Once again, just the mechanics of it—not the music of it—but the mechanics of it I recognized immediately. When he told me that a roll had eight notes in it, and he showed me one roll, I won't say it was immediately I knew everything, but I knew the—you know, it was like the Rosetta Stone. I kind of went, Oh, I get it. It's all these patterns that you repeat over and over, and you just—so he showed me one roll, and the next week, when I went back, I played for him—and I won't say he was shocked, but it was like, "How did you do that, you know, in one week?" sort of thing. Because I did—I really did get it. I mean not everything was apparent at all, but at least I had the sense of it. And so I think I took two lessons from him, and he really sort of—he just—that's it—he just showed me a roll or two, and I was on my way, and I never went back. I could afford another banjo, so Slim had a sort of, as it turns out to be, kind of a crappy, put-together banjo for \$250, and I bought it. But it had a resonator on it, and kind of a tone ring, but it sounded way more like bluegrass, and that's—I played that for a long—several years, and graduated from high school, started at the University of Oklahoma—and still hanging around Slim's music store. For me, you know, the music—in that day, anyway, the music store was the place. That's where you hung out—and he was on Campus Corner, so he got a lot of college kids in there, a lot of traveling musicians—if there were any in that day—would come through there, you know, and you could hang out there. Conway Twitty, who lived in Oklahoma City at that time, would come in down there and—you know, I mean I saw Conway Twitty there. I mean you talk about an odd little community—this row of stores right next to—Slim was on the corner—no, there was a shoe repair place on the corner, then there was Slim's music store—called Mike Richey's Guitar Center—then it was Joe Walden's TV Repair, and this character, Joe Walden—Slim would have him build him sort of electronic stuff from time to time that Slim would sell in the store—you know, fuzz makers and just stuff—distortion boxes—and Slim would sell them. This Joe Walden—who is there to this day—and I think lives in this TV repair shop—got into rebuilding player pianos. So he would do TV repair and player pianos. Conway Twitty had a drummer named Tommy "Porkchop" Markham—

AW:

What a great name.

AM:

It was. This Tommy "Porkchop" Markham would come into the store and hang out—and he was a real flamboyant character—and he would go next door to Joe's place and play the piano—he

played piano, also. And that's the first time I ever heard "Elvira," you know, he would do Elvira—I don't know where the song originates—I'm sure it's with some sort of black group.

AW:

Well, the fella that had the hit on it was a guy named Dallas Frazier.

AM:

Oh, really?

AW:

Uh-huh.

AM:

Oh, okay.

AW:

And that was a radio hit, but where—and I have an "Elvira" story I have to tell you—but I'm not sure of the origin. I don't know that I ever looked to see who wrote that song. I played in this little cover group in Lubbock in the eighties, and we were playing country clubs, mostly—we hardly ever played a bar or anything—we stayed busy playing country clubs because we played fifties and sixties rock and roll and country—and all the county club crowd could dance to all that stuff, so my job was to find tunes, you know. So I'd get these things I'd listen to in high school, and we worked them up, and sometimes we'd do medleys with them, but most of the time we just worked up the tune. And so we worked up "Elvira," you know, and everybody—it's one of those kinds of songs, you know, that the audience can sing along to and likes—you know, like a standard—and so we played it. And nobody in that area played it—and I didn't hear anybody playing it except people like us, you know—I mean our band—(phone rings) do you need to grab that?

AM:

Oh, let me look and see who it is here. Yeah, let me get this.

AW:

Sure. I'll put this on pause.

AM:

Hello?

Pause in recording

AW:

So we'd play that song, and during this time period I was walking through my living room, and some sort of country music awards show was on—which I don't ever watch—but as I walked through, the Oak Ridge Boys were saying—and they were winning an award for doing “Elvira”—and whichever one of them—you know, they're all thanking God and mama and whatever—but one of them said, “And I want to thank that little band in Texas that gave us the idea to record this song.” And I heard that and—so the next day, I started doing some checking, and sure enough, they'd been playing in Lubbock one night and staying at the Holliday Inn where we played. So I'm certain that that's who they were talking about. “Elvira”—what a story.

AM:

Well, it was—yeah—so the point of it is kind of this, is you know this Tommy “Porkchop” Markham was really—in my mind—into sort of black, boogie-woogie, piano-y stuff, and so Slim's—Mike Richey's Guitar Center was a real, real sort of—

AW:

It's like a mixing pot.

AM:

Right—a crossroads of a lot, a lot of different stuff, and Slim, himself, was real supportive of all different kinds of music. He wasn't real big on rock and roll because he's a jazz guitar player is what he was at that time, and still is to this day, but he loved bluegrass and classical music, and any kind of rock and roll who was interesting, and you know, he was just a real great person to be around, to see operate. He also operated at a much different level of—oh, I don't know how to put it in the most positive way—of sort of doubt and sarcasm and seeing through bullshit. You know, he was really—I won't say he was cruel, but he did not suffer fools lightly, and to the point where he could be almost abusive to people, and they enjoyed it. For instance, there was a lot, a lot of—he was on Campus Corner, so there were—the fraternities and sororities were big business for musicians at the time—and there're a lot of fraternity guys coming through—

AW:

Oh yeah—that's where you got your gigs.

AM:

Yeah—and a lot of these fraternity guys are full of shit—and there was one in particular, and Slim would always refer to him as Super Jew, you know. And it may have been offensive to some people, but coming from Slim, you know, you felt like you were being recognized. And then there was this other character that would come through that was blind, and his name was Roger. And he would come through—and by come through, he lived in Norman—and you knew Roger was full of shit, because he dressed as a hippy—you know, he had a headband and beads

and all this stuff—but he’s blind, and you go—he’s had to buy in to somebody’s telling him “Man, Roger, if you’ll just dress like this, you’ll look really cool.” So Roger plays guitar some—Roger comes in and says, “Slim, can I see one of your Martin guitars?” And Slim goes “Of course you can’t, Roger, you’re blind. If you’d like to feel one—” you know, so I mean he was sort of that kind of a character. For me, being seventeen and eighteen, and then nineteen when I got into college, and twenty, it was like a real interesting education for me—and not only for me, but a lot of the community in Norman. To this day, I know a lot of people—or not a lot—I know several people who are connected with Slim through his store—you know, bought stuff from him and knew him, and I think we all have sort of the same sense of Slim, that he was real hip, you know, guitar player, and so anything that he—any kind of view that he had had sort of a sense of hipness about it. He had ways of dealing with authority that were—for me, it’s “Yes sir, no sir, right away, sir,” where Slim would kind of try to work it, you know, he always had a scheme of how to work authority—you tell them this, but you do this—so he was sort of—had this irreverence about almost everything that was real healthy. Looking back on it, and looking at it right now, it’s a real healthy skepticism about things—and I learned a lot, not only about music—and a lot of the appreciation of music I have now comes from me just hanging out and hearing Slim play and hearing him talk about music and talk about musicians and sort of pointing out things to me—not directly, but just, you know, indirectly. There was a lot of sort of—you know, folk music was still kind of a big thing, and there’s a lot, a lot of snobbery in folk music—I mean it’s incredible. Slim would always, you know, ride them real hard about stuff that they thought, or they did, or just something they did. You know, I want to go back and mention one other quick thing that’s real important to me. When my brother came home from the navy with his guitar, it was a Stella—or Silvertone, it could have been a Silvertone—anyway, it was real junk. It was terribly hard to play. And my brother Jeffery had a friend named Jimmy Strateger—who just died—who played guitar. And he was a Catholic boy, you know, we knew him from church and from the Saint Joseph’s School, and Jeffery as is a teenager, and Jimmy Strateger is a teenager. Jimmy was a big ole tall, long-legged guy, and he drove a Renault Dauphine, if you remember those.

AW:
Oh, yeah.

AM:
—so his knees were right up under his chin.

AW:
I used to ride to school with a kid in a Renault Dauphine.

AM:
And he came over one day and played guitar—and he played a Chet Atkins style, where he used

a flat pick and held it like this, and then his fingers. And he played one day, and I'm going, "Gah, that is so beautiful." It's like—there he sits on out couch, playing, and he's making all these beautiful sounds. And he played a little bit, then he says, "Man, this guitar is a piece of shit," and I thought, How could it be a piece of shit when it sounds so beautiful? How did you do that? So that was a real magical little moment for me, too, at that time—earlier on. Anyway, so I hung out at Slim's and met a lot of people and, you know, started University of Oklahoma, and was playing bluegrass banjo by now and could play a lot of the standard repertoire all by listening to the record and trying to figure it out. I don't know how close I was, but I was close enough to where it was, you know, going good. So Bryan and Lynn Baroff and I had our little East Ridge Ramblers—and there was a Friday—a student concert every Friday called Friday at Four and you could go audition for it, and if they liked you—this student committee liked you—they would schedule you for a Friday at Four. So we went and played. At first, I think they turned us down, but eventually—maybe the second time—they took us and we played. Well, one of the tunes we were playing—there was another student at the University of Oklahoma named Byron Berline, who played fiddle and had recorded a record with the Dillards called *Pickin' and Fiddlin'*

AW:

Already by the time he was—

AM:

In college. Yeah, I mean—he had met them—I mean it's part of their story—they came through from Missouri and stopped in Oklahoma City and spent a month or two in Oklahoma City, either working jobs—but there was a club up there called the Buddhi, and they played there—

AW:

B-o-o-t—

AM:

No, I'll have to think about it—I know it was with Ds—Buddhi, like Buddha, but Buddhi—

AW:

Like Buddha but with an "I" at the end?

AM:

Yeah, something like that—the Buddhi—and they played there, but they came down to the University of Oklahoma and played a real casual thing, like out on the patio—and Byron met them there and started hanging out with them and played with them and ultimately went to California and recorded with them. Byron is two years older than I am. So I'm not sure—I'd have to look at the record to see what year that was actually recorded, but I was aware of it, and I

knew Byron—there was this guy at the University of Oklahoma named Byron Berline—I knew who the Dillards were because I saw them on the Andy Griffith Show, and I had bought their records. I bought a lot of records with whatever money I had from a record seller there on campus, back in the days when you go in and you look through the records, and “I’d like to listen to this one,” and there’d be a booth and you’d go back and play it—the guy out front would hear you with the record go (makes sound effect) and he’d say “Be careful,” you know, as you put the needle down. Then there was another one around the corner called Thompson’s Sound System, and he also sold records. So I would go to those places and found the Dillards records—and found Byron’s record. And they had this—the most attractive one at the time—and most bluegrass-y one on there was this thing called “Hamilton County Breakdown.” So Bryan and I and Lynn Baroff learned it. Let me back up, even. By this time, I think Lynn Baroff, for whatever reason, had dropped out of the group, and we got a guy—a college student named—I forget his name, I’ll think of it sometime—but he played guitar, and he was a little hipper, even yet, than Lynn, who was pretty darn hip, but he was from—I can’t even remember where he was from. Anyway, we played “Hamilton County Breakdown” at this Friday at Four—that was one of our tunes. Well, Byron Berline happened to be walking by and heard us play, and he went “Gah, they’re playing “Hamilton County Breakdown.” That’s a tune I recorded.” So I don’t think at that moment he came up and said anything, but one time I was over at Slim’s store, and Byron came in and recognized me as the banjo player that played there. So that’s the first time I met Byron that I recall—was at Slim’s—Mike Richey’s Guitar Center. He may have said, “You want to get together and pick?” or what, I don’t even know, but we started playing music together. Now he’s two years ahead of me, so he was probably a junior, and I maybe a freshman—but it could have been he was a senior and I was a sophomore or something like that. But anyway, we met and started playing music together, and that was a real boon to my playing because he was playing on a TV show in Oklahoma City with a banjo player named Eddie Shelton—and I met Eddie Shelton through Byron. Of all the players—banjo plyers—that I credit with really, really, really kind of getting me squared away and going on the banjo, it was this Eddie Shelton. Eddie was from Dallas originally, and he worked for National Cash Register Company as a repairman, you know, back when cash registers were mechanical, and had all these levers and they had to fix them up. So he was in Oklahoma City working for—they had assigned him to Oklahoma City. So through Byron I met Eddie Shelton, and Eddie—I would go spend time—he lived in Oklahoma City, and sometimes he would come down and pick me up and I’d go spend the weekends with him, and we would just play banjos all weekend. He had some friend that would come up from Dallas who would play bluegrass, and they were sort of my first introduction to really, really hardcore bluegrass-ers that knew the songs, they knew the artist, they knew the words, they knew how the harmony went, and they did it. That was sort of the first—and I would sit there—I remember going up there and sitting in the living room the first time I maybe rode up with Byron—and I don’t even know if I—they asked me to play one tune, maybe. But they were just more rehearsing, but I sat there the whole day and just listened to them, you know, and payed as close attention as I could and tried to soak it all up.

AW:

Do you remember any of those players besides Shelton?

AM:

Oh yeah. Mitchell Land was the mandolin player, at this time Warren Swindell was the guitar player, and I think Warren's wife played bass, but I can't remember if that's true or not. There may not have been a bass; I can't remember. So it was Byron and Eddie Shelton, Warren Swindell, and Mitchel Land, and then if there was a bass, that would be five—and they played all afternoon, just one bluegrass song after another. It was really wonderful.

AW:

Did Dallas have a bluegrass scene?

AM:

I believe it did, yes—and later on, as I got to know Mitchell—and not Warren, so much, Warren and Mitchell split and didn't play anymore, but Mitchell had a brother named Louis Land that played, and I would go down on weekends—I'd take the bus down—as I got to know them better and spend the weekends down in Dallas hanging out with—if Eddie was around—he tended to be out of town a lot because National Cash Register had him traveling around, so it would be Mitchell Land, Louis Land on the guitar, me on banjo, and a guy named—called me just the other day—named Tootie Williams played bass. They called themselves the Stone Mountain Boys, and you know, personnel changed, but Mitchell and Tootie remained the same a lot, and Eddie would play banjo—you know, he was their banjo player—but I would play when Eddie couldn't do something, or—but I spent a lot of time, it seems to me, going down there to play with those guys in Dallas. Now, as to the rest of the Dallas scene, I don't know much, because that's where I always went, was to their house. Going down there, I met a guy named Doc Hamilton, who now lives in Austin, and I see Doc quite often—and Doc, I think, was living in Houston at the time and worked for Xerox and was in Dallas training and somehow found out about Mitchell and came over to Mitchell's one day, and I met Doc there—and Doc has been a big influence in the sense that he was a really, really excellent musician—played guitar, piano, fiddle—never seemed to aspire to be professional, but was always a really, really fine musician—and always knew the hip stuff, and he also had tapes of really hip musicians. I'm going to stop and say one thing right here—that Junior Vasquez said, that I think is the most profound thing. It struck me as incredibly profound in terms of not only—you know, in a sense everybody's life, but certainly the musician life. He was interviewed by Kenny Maines, you know, on that show that Kenny had. And I'm sitting there listening to it, and it's real interesting. I'm loving—you know, because I'm not real hip to the Hispanic music and their things, but you know, it's the same thing—and here's the story. He would describe, just as I've done, you know, "I met so and so and so and so and played with such and such then I met such and such and played with them, and then I met so and so and so and so and we got together"—you know, it's

just this continue—and he stopped, and he says, “You know, it’s sort of one thing led to another,” and I went, you know, it’s so simple, but as I’m telling this, I’m starting to spin off. Don’t forget so and so because you met him and such and such—but it truly is this, as soon as you run into that first musician, and you go out at somewhere and play, then you start—you’ve met—you start this whole incredible network of people you met that influence you, and you’ve really got to be careful—I mean, you don’t have to be careful—but some of them are more so than others, but Doc is one that was—because Doc always had the hip music. He knew who the hip players were, he knew what the hip licks were, and he had tapes of them, you know, there’s a banjo player that played with Roy Acuff that was really hip and cool named Larry McNeely. Well, I don’t know how, Doc had tapes of Larry McNeely sitting around a house somewhere, playing. And I’m going, Wow, I’ve got to have that. And Byron—when I met Byron, since he had recorded with the Dillards, even while he was in college—and he went off and played the Newport Folk Festival and met Bill Monroe, and sort of got his life—musical life—going, but he’s still there at the university, waiting to graduate. There was a guy that came through named Larry White from California, and he had a bunch of tapes of this group out there called the Kentucky Colonels that had Roland and Clarence White and Roger Bush and Billy Ray Latham, and Byron and I would sit and listen to those and Eddie Shelton and I would sit and listen to those tapes—and just wide-eyed, you know, at all this really hip, incredible music going on—and it was really, really, for me, a really, really exciting time, even though I’m in Norman, Oklahoma—stuck there. You know, you have this sense that there’s this world out there of this really hip stuff going on.

AW:

Well, and they keep sending emissaries to you, you know?

AM:

Exactly, exactly—and not only they’re sending them to me, I’m standing in the way—you know, I’m flagging them down—or trying to the best I can. But it all comes from just, you know, this network—as soon as you get interested in music people start sharing with you. Pretty soon, your world is this incredible place. To be eighteen and nineteen, and to listen to Clarence White for the first time—and Roland White, and Billy Ray Latham and Roger Bush and Scotty Stoneman, and then Larry McNeely, and then Benny Thomason, the well-known Texas fiddle player—Texas Shorty—I mean, it’s like—and then Buck White is in there. He was from the area, too. All of the sudden, it’s like God—and to this day, I can truthfully say at that time, I hadn’t heard much music, but all the music I heard was the best. I remember going to North Carolina when I was—later on with Jimmy Martin—and playing banjo, and this North Carolina guy says, “You’re from North Carolina, aren’t you?” and I said “No, I’m from Oklahoma,” and it was at an event where there were a lot of local bands playing—and he says, “There’s not much music there, is there?” and I said “No.” But really what I wanted to say was “No, there’s not very much there, but everything I’ve heard is better than what I’m hearing today.” You know what I mean?

It's just—I mean there was Byron Berline, and Eddie Shelton and that bunch—and then through listening to Doc Hamilton and the music he had, and the music Byron had on tape, it was like I'd already heard the best.

AW:

Well, you know, this is an interesting point because I think it's something worth exploring. Listening to the way you talk about what really was a scene—although it was a very small scene—in some ways it strikes me that it's a more productive environment because I think—back to Lubbock—very small scene, but the average person in that scene is far above average everywhere else, just like what you're talking about. And then you go to a place that has a big scene, and there's something about—like the pool of talent is—maybe it's all the same if there're three people that are really talented, but if there are thirty people, they're all a little bit less talented.

AM:

I know what you're saying.

AW:

You know what I'm saying? Because one of the things I think about is right where we are right now—the Hill Country music scene. When I started playing and got serious about playing, people would say, “Well, you really need to get down there to Sisterdale” —I just drove through Sisterdale—“and Fredericksburg” —and so I get down here and I'm listening to people, and I'm thinking, None of these people can hold a candle to the guys I hear on Friday nights, you know, back home playing at the Legion because that's the only job they can get.

AM:

Yeah.

AW:

It was a much smaller scene, but it was much more intense, and I wonder if the—I don't wasn't to say isolation—but when you recognize you're a small part of something really cool, and it's like you versus the whole world—if there's not an intensity difference—I don't know if I'm—this is all kind of vague and wishy-washy right now, but there's really something to that, I think.

AM:

Well you know, years ago—and this is what education does for you—at the University of Oklahoma there was a lecture by a guy named Archie Greenway—I think that was his name—and I knew his name only because he had recorded a song, or recorded an album, or something on folkways—and folkways, you know, is what Pete Seeger was on, so I would kind of check out—so I recognized the name. Well, he's a folklorist, is what he turns out to be. This is one of

the very few things I remember of his lecture—is that the purest—and I don't even know if it's true, I'm just going to repeat what I've remembered—the purest form of a culture is at it's farthest edge.

AW:

Yeah. Perfect.

AM:

And so, you know, as you move away from the center, it sort of distills down to these fine points, and so Norman, Oklahoma was at the far distant point of sort of a bluegrass culture. So there may be something to that.

AW:

Yeah, I think that really puts it in a much better way, but I think that's exactly right. If you're on that edge, and you're going to be part of it, you've got to be serious about it.

AM:

That's another thing.

AW:

It can't just happen easy.

AM:

Now I want to mention one other thing that's real important, too—is that as interested as I was in bluegrass at the time, and as I made all these connections, they were kind of—from time to time—you know, once a month, once every six months—now with Byron it was a lot. So there was a lot of other musical cultures going on in Norman that if I wanted to play music, I had to somewhat relate to—and I think it wound up being important in my career more than bluegrass—is country music, and a really specific kind of country music called Western swing. And it's not the swing part of it or the Western part of it that is necessarily so, but it is the song type—you know, how Western swing songs are like popular music, but done with guitars—kind of that sort of thing. So a lot of the music making I would do in between these bluegrass things—there was—at church, a guy played fiddle named Eddie Shader, and he ran the cleaners—worked at the cleaners downtown, just down from Fabian's TV repair place. He played fiddle, and he had a lady that was a hairdresser that played piano, and a guy that played guitar, and they would get together and play music, and they would invite me over—and I played banjo, but I did not play banjo like in the early Bob Wills, Light Crust Doughboys kind of band. It was still using my fingers, but they would do “Bubbles in my Beer” and “Please Release Me, Let Me Go,” and just all these sort of pop country songs that they could get their hands, brains, and fingers around to do. So I played with them, and I enjoyed it, and it was a challenge for me to try to wrangle out

some little something that I could play on “Please Release Me, Let Me Go.” So I did that, and then I also worked at a place called West Town Barbeque that was run by a guy named Doyle Salathiel, who came from a very, very musical family. They were Greek—Salathiel—from Oklahoma City—and his brother, who changed his name to Merle Lindsay, had a group called Merle Lindsay and the Nightriders or something like that—and it was a Western swing band, and had a dancehall called Lindsayland—and a nephew named Max Salathiel was a really fine guitar player in Oklahoma City, also. They were all—this Doyle Salathiel had been in New York in the late forties—in the jazz scene up there, and roomed with—I’m going to say these names—it’s not true, but it’s like Tal Farlow and Jimmy Rainey—and hung out with all those guys, but didn’t stay—came back to Oklahoma. He played guitar, and he was a really, really handsome Greek gentleman who drank way too much. But he played guitar really—like Slim played, you know, this jazz style. So I worked for—he hired me to come play at his barbeque place called West Town, and I would stand up there and play—and then one night it would be a fiddle player that he had hired, and another night it would be his cousin that sang Six Pack To Go, and so I sat there and tried to struggle through all of these other kinds of musics than bluegrass. So there’s this other element in there that, in the end, I’m going to say—use the word softened my sort of bluegrass sensibility, because they had different kind of chord changes, different kinds of melodies, just different sensibility about how the tunes—you do them. And so it made a lot of difference in my playing later on when I started—you know, when I was a professional player—and I had to come up with something I wanted to do. It wound up being different than just another sort of hard-driving bluegrass tune, I could do these little—and I’m going to use the word “softer-edged” kinds of things, and it gave me a little different view of how to look at music, and how it can be arranged, and what little elements are there.

AW:

Well, it’s a finesse.

AM:

Yeah.

AW:

You know, one of the things that’s interesting when you bring that point up is that I think about kids that come through my songwriting class now, you know, the current generation. The ones who are good players tend to be interested in things like metal and bluegrass. And at first, I thought, What an odd combination, but then, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that they were these really balls-to-the-wall—not mechanical—but very technical, driven kinds of playing that they were doing—yet that kind of bluegrass is not what I hear when I listen to Country Gazette or when I hear the bluegrass people that I like, they’re all much more finessed like you’re talking about. I wonder, do you know enough about the rest of those folks—did they have the same kind of broadened influences that you have?

AM:

Well, there's a lot of contemporary bluegrass that has a lot more contemporary influences than me. Sam Bush was more interested in rock and roll than I was. I've never ever really cared much for rock and roll—and I think mostly because of the attitude. I never could get beyond why a G chord in rock and roll was harder to play than a G chord in bluegrass. When they hit it, and they make all the faces and grimace—I just thought, you know, it's not that hard. What to me rock and roll did to a certain extent is—you know, if you go back and you look at the early—and by “early” I mean Merle Travis and Chet Atkins as guitar players—but just the country performers of the fifties and before then—to me, it always looked like what they were doing was trying to make something hard—to them—show business was making something hard look easy. To me, rock and roll was just the opposite—it was to make something easy look really hard, and I just—the attitude of rock and roll was never where I wanted to be. I never seemed to cross there. I know there is a rock and roll that is highly skilled and—I mean, you know, brilliantly played and beautifully played, and I know it's there, but I just haven't the energy to search it out and get into it because basically, all the music I like—and somebody asked me, says, “What's your favorite kind of music?” and I say, “Well, really, I think what my favorite music is, is any music that had a life during the 1950s.” I think, to me, that was the best stuff. As jazz guitar players—and it's not because they never got any better, it's just because I never got any better at listening. I mean it was like 1950s had all the music I could handle.

AW:

In your defense, I would say it's not really—that's not exactly it, because I think the same thing about rock and roll—not the fifties, but the sixties. If you look at the rock and roll of the sixties, you see music that was complex—not all of it—but I mean that's when the Beatles and the Rolling Stones—and people were doing things that were very inventive, and yet they were still melodic and musical—I mean, for goodness' sake, those people sang harmonies, you know?

AM:

I agree.

AW:

But there's a time period there that's like that, but then it's not the same. So I think when you say if it was music in the fifties, you like it, and you're saying, “Well, it's because I didn't progress,”—I'm not so sure that that's true. I think there really was something about that time period because it's also like—and I love that Archie Greenway quote because the other thing is, at the beginning of the musical style, it always seems to be much more—the flowering of creativity is just enormous, right? How many things are being done different, for instance, in heavy metal than what Led Zeppelin did? And the answer is nothing. It came out in one burst, and at the time it was novel and new, and since it's been just more of the same. I think that happens with a lot of them.

AM:

Well you could say that easily about bluegrass, I think. If you listen to the satellite radio and listen to the music, you could say it's not gone anywhere.

AW:

Well, but there're exceptions to that. I mean—

AM:

There definitely are.

AW:

—you—

AM:

Well, I—

AW:

No, I think there's no question about it. New Grass Revival—I can think of a number of—and Allison Krauss—I can think of a lot of bluegrass—people that came from bluegrass that—maybe even the bluegrass people think they're traitors, I don't know—but they have that, as you say—you said that it's softer in the sense—the edges—but it's more finessed and more exploratory.

AM:

Right. I mean, it's a really fine line when you start talking about music and one thing and another, but just going back to rock and roll—mostly it's the attitude. You mentioned the Rolling Stones—"I Don't Get No Satisfaction"—well, I guess I never got—I was always—I was much happier than they were.

AW:

Oh, I imagine they were pretty happy.

AM:

Yeah.

AW:

I think that was just the song.

AM:

Yeah—but it's just this attitude of—you know, I enjoy music—and I know there's a little showbiz element to music, but I'm not into it so much. I prefer—you know, and I always

describe them as people who can stand there flat-footed and do their music. They don't have to leap about or sort of cop an attitude. One of my favorite—and I talk about him as often as I can—one of the very, very most eye-opening musician's musical performance I ever saw was—and you may have been there, it was in Lubbock, and Lloyd Maines hosted it—but it was Sonny Curtis and Butch Hancock and Jimmy Dale Gilmore and Joe Ely—do you ever remember that?

AW:

Yeah.

AM:

It was a concert, and it was at a concert stage—

AW:

Yeah, at the civic center, I think.

AM:

The civic center—and it was a really—and I went there and I thought, Well, we'll go just because it's—we've just moved here and it's West Texas music—and so I sat through whatever it was, and then Sonny Curtis—and I just thought, Well, here's this Nashville guy, and he came out, and to this day, that was one of the best shows I ever saw in my whole life was Sonny Curtis and his guitar, and he had a little mandolin player with him, and maybe a bass player—I can't remember. But he was so good, and I would describe his show as standing there flat-footed and doing what he could do. Ralph Emery used to host a show in Nashville—and it was on at like midnight—and he would have one artist, and it would be like Merle Haggard or Marty Robins or some artist—just by themselves—and Merle Haggard would play the guitar and sing—and it was everything you need to have Merle Haggard. Marty Robins—who I'm not a big fan of—sat there at the piano and did everything that you need to be Marty Robins—it was spectacular. I didn't like the songs, I'm not real crazy about his singing style, but he was brilliant—and that's what I like—are these people that can come out and be all that they are just sitting on their ass. And I don't mean to—Joe Ely came out all by himself and could not shake and wiggle enough to make up for what he wasn't. It was—to me—please don't play this for anybody—

AW:

No.

AM:

It was pitiful. It was pitiful. You know, as he tried to shake and move his guitar and make all these movements—and I thought, Because you're nothing, I won't say nothing. If you want to know how to do it, watch Sonny Curtis. Learn to play your damn guitar, write good songs, sing them well—it was just amazing to me to see Sonny Curtis do that because I—truly—only knew

the name, and I thought he was going to be some schlocky Nashville songwriter, but he was, to this day, one of the best shows I've ever seen in my whole life.

AW:

Yeah, Sonny is brilliant.

AM:

it's incredible.

AW:

—and his music is complicated.

AM:

His guitar playing is perfect, you know—for his little presentation and what he does, it's as good as a man needs to do. I was never—you know, one other time I went to see Dave Brubeck at Texas Tech, and it was an acoustic—

AW:

Was it when his sons were playing with him?

AM:

No, this was very—I got there in '86, so it was probably '86 or '87. And he had a clarinet player—it was him and a bass player and a drummer and a clarinet player—and they introduced the band, “Here they are, ladies and gentlemen, the Dave Brubeck Quintet,” and they all walked out, and whenever they got to their instrument they started playing, just sort of vamping. Well, the first one to get there was the drummer, and it was a very tiny little drum kit, and he sat down, and I don't think it was miced at all, he sat down and just touched it and it was the most beautiful thing I ever heard. It's like—you know, every drummer—

AW:

You think it was Joe Morello still playing with him?

AM:

I don't think it was, but whoever it was knew exactly how to do it, without beating on the damn things and having just an array of drums—just a really simple little drum kit, and he just touched them and it was—almost all the music was there. To me, those are the musicians and the music that I like. It's people that can just come out and be all that they are.

AW:

On YouTube, which is a dangerous thing to get on for me because you go from one interesting thing to another, and you can be there for—

AM:

Oh, all day for days and days and days.

AW:

Yeah—there is some great film of the original Brubeck group—you know, in the Take Five years—and here they are on one of those simple, ugly sixties stages—you know, like on the Tonight Show or something with a sparkly curtain or whatever—but they're all wearing suits and these little tiny skinny ties, and they all—they look like accountants—and Morello is sitting down to a cocktail kit, you know, it looks like almost—and that's all there is and this incredible music. Who could be hipper than those guys? It was amazing.

AM:

I know. It's stunning.

AW:

Well, this whole notion about the performance side is really interesting because that's the other thing that rock and roll people say—"Those bluegrass guys, the last thing they want to do is smile when they're playing an instrument. How do they just stand there and play?" So is it the music the moves it one way, or is it that people with certain sensibilities have been drawn to one kind versus another?

AM:

It could be that, you know, that you're just drawn to that. Here's my—this is really long and drawn-out, but it's important to me—is there's a woman named Rebecca Solnit who wrote a book called *Wanderlust* and it's called "The History of Walking." It's like a big long essay on walking—and in there she talks about pilgrimages and how important pilgrimages, you know, as a walk—that's an important thing—and in taking these pilgrimages and putting your feet in the same places that either people who're famous or sacred people have put their feet before, you gain insight and understanding that you can get no other way. There's no words, no pictures you can look at, no sounds you can hear—you have to put your feet in these places and walk this walk. I got to thinking you know, when I play, that's exactly what you're doing. You're fingers are taking a pilgrimage, and you're putting your fingers down in the places that famous players have put their fingers. If you approach it that way, you know, then playing becomes—takes on this different aura of showbiz—it's not showbiz at all. It's all of the sudden this sacred event, and people will say, "Do you mind playing Foggy Mountain Breakdown?" and I go "I love trying to play it," because what I do is I try to put my fingers down and move my fingers as best I can,

having studied it, in the way Earl Scruggs did it. And as I play, I'm listening and I'm going, "Am I getting it? That's close." You know, it's just this—you're trying to get all these little nuanced things of how hard to hit a string, how hard to push down, to pull off, just listening to the sounds as intensely as you can—trying to listen to yourself play, because you're not just playing—I mean, at best—these are when you're at best—is you're making this pilgrimage, you know, I'm putting my fingers in these sacred places that musicians who I've admired since my youth have put their fingers. You know, I play guitar some—and I like to play jazz guitar because of Slim, you know, I've always loved that. And I'm not good, and I don't have any pretense of being new and innovative at all—if I could just put my fingers down and make the sounds that Barney Kessel made or Herb Ellis made or Wes Montgomery—or any of the players—if I could just catch a little bit of it, to me that's it. I really don't—I won't say I'm not interested in new—being new and creative because I'm what I call a traditionalist. Everything I do comes from somewhere, you know, there's nothing I do—I think—that is like out of the blue. Everything I do has been done before, but maybe not on the banjo in that particular way. It's just—it's sort of a new ordinary. I don't know how to describe it, but that's how I think about it is just that—when I recorded with Jimmy Martin—and I can take you to the recordings right now—and I do a lick that he wanted me to do, and what I do is I go, "Man, right there I sounded just like Bill Emmerson, and I really love it." You know, it's really funny—I'm really trying to make sounds that I've heard before. But I can't do it, you know—I want to do it—I still have this part about me that, "Well I'm going to try it like this," but I want to make it new, but fit into—you know, it's like writing a new song that sounds like an old song. I'm done on that, but that's—back to this not smiling and all this sort of stuff. There is a lot of attention that needs to be paid. Some instruments—and I understand what people are saying, you know, you'd like the musicians to relate to the audience a little bit, and I don't blame them a bit—and I try to, and I know that's part of it. But when I really get into it, I cannot look up and not feel a bit—a problem with it. It's because I'm—I want to be here, too—I'm part of the audience, to be honest with you. I'm part of the audience because I'm listening, and I love when it sounds right—and people will ask, "What are your most memorable performances?" and usually, I think what they want is "Oh, when I played for ten thousand people at such-and-such a place" —

AW:

Yeah, Carnegie Hall or whatever, yeah.

AM:

—and it really is "Any time that it sounds good." It could be a house concert, or it could be out with a PA out in front of some people. It's all about the sound, and does it sound good. I was in France a couple years ago and played with Byron Berline and a guitar player named Jim Hurst, who are both just really, really solid musicians that you can play with and they just carry you along—and I just really love that because there they were; you didn't have to think about the music at all. So all I had to do was play, and so I could sit and just listen. You know, I could

play, and they were so right-on I just listened—and it was so damn good—it was so damn good—and not my part necessarily, but listening to them.

AW:

Well, this is another really great way of thinking about this, because we—and I've got to confess, I'm on the bluegrass side of all this because I'm a guy—a folkie that writes songs—and I sit there and close my eyes when I sing because if I open them up and look at the audience, I'm going to screw up, because I'm going to pay attention to something besides what I should be paying attention to. But I think—I also think that what I really like in music is to—in a live performance—is to watch musicians make music, not entertain me. The entertainment for me is, you know, I'm watching Brubeck and his group, and there's nothing showy going on, but they're so deep into the music, you're not going to ever be able to reel them back out, you know, and that is a joyful thing to me, you know, as an audience.

AM:

At that level, it takes a lot of attention. It's being creative—and a really high level of creativity in the moment for many moments, and you can't do it and smile at the audience. You've got to be kind of in the music. I'm not good enough to do it otherwise, either, so I don't pay a lot of attention. I do try to smile and look up every once in a while when I'm not trying to be attentive to the music all the time. I can really, really—like that concert with Jim Hurst and Byron Berline, I don't think I looked up much at all because I was just—it was sounding so good to me. Those are really good moments for me. It's funny—it's real funny—I really never intended to be professional. It's like Joe and I—Joe wrote this song about our workshops that we do—“We just wanted to teach you G, C, and D; we didn't mean to change your life.” And really that's all I wanted—all I wanted to do was learn to play the banjo. I didn't mean for it to change my life, but it did.

AW:

Yeah. Well that's a good place to—

AM:

Stop.

AW:

Stop for a moment. This allows me to know what to do when we come back.

AM:

Okay.

AW:

But that is very cool—very interesting stuff here.

AM:

Well good.

AW:

So we'll take up part two here shortly.

Break in recording

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

I'm sorry we just turned the recorder on seconds after Alan told a great story. But this is still the eighth of December and we're back at it. When we had to stop for me to go to the sandbox and make my run into town to deliver that exhibit, you had mentioned something very interesting, and that being that you had never set out to be a professional musician.

Alan Munde (AM):

You know, it never occurred to me to do that. You know, in the back of—all I wanted to be was a good musician, and I guess, in America, that's what good musicians are supposed to do, is be professional—you know, or get paid for it or rewarded for it somehow. But it never occurred to me that I could actually do that, although I never stopped myself from—when there was an opportunity—from doing it. All I ever wanted to do was play—and I think a lot of musicians are like that—they just wanted to make music, I guess—I don't know—early on, that's all I was interested in was trying to be good and learn the next lick and string notes together and make the sounds that I heard on the recordings that I really liked and loved—and that's really what I wanted to do, was make those sounds. The professional part of it just sort of was a happenstance of doing that.

AW:

Well you mentioned, in America it's thought that you have to be a professional to be good—or vice versa—are there other places—other cultures—where music is looked at differently?

AM:

I'm sure there is—you know, America—and I'm not being critical, I'm just—as my wife often quotes her father as saying—"I'm not criticizing; I'm just saying"—is that America is real utilitarian. Everything has to have a reason in a utilitarian sense, and I'm sure there are other cultures that are not that way. I had a student one time—real interesting, and I'm sorry I can't remember his name, he was only at South Plains College one semester—but he was taking a break from being a relief worker in either Burundi or Rwanda—somewhere—and I thought,

God, how awful is that? But what he talked about was getting to know the pygmies. He said, “The pygmies would just go—they would be there during the day, and then at night they just were gone. They just lived out in the jungle. Every one of them was a magician, an entertainer, a singer, a dancer, a musician—their whole” —his thing about it was how much joy—he thought they were just joyous little people, and that entertainment was what they were about. They were a troupe of entertainers—and he thought that was real cool. So I assume there are other cultures that, you know, just music is a part of your being.

AW:

Yeah, well you know, when you mentioned that, I stopped to think about the few times I’ve been over to the UK—and I noticed particular audiences—especially the Irish—everyone sings, and not only that, they all sing in parts and they—it was revelatory to me to see that just your ordinary crowd—if you didn’t sing, you were the oddball, as opposed to if you did sing.

AM:

Well, you know, here in America, where I see that—and my wife is from Springfield, Missouri, and then her relatives are all down in the Ozarks, and they’re all pretty much of the Baptist religion, pretty much—and I went to—her aunt and uncle were celebrating their, I’ll say fiftieth wedding anniversary, and we were there and just sort of spontaneously, Kitty and her cousin Linda and her Uncle Frankie started singing—and I mean they don’t sing together ever. But they knew all the parts, you know, and if they could remember the words—the words were the hard part—but they just sort of sang spontaneously. And I think a lot of that comes from the church, you know, so in those American churches where singing is a part of their service, it’s like that.

AW:

Yeah. Garrison Keillor came to Lubbock last year and did his stand-up thing, and I’ve got to say it was incredibly brilliant.

AM:

He’s a brilliant man, for sure.

AW:

That’s as well-structured a program as I’ve ever seen that was unstructured—he did it all off the cuff. But he walked out in the middle of the audience to start and began to sing “It is Well with My Soul,” and the whole audience began singing, and they were singing in parts, and he obviously had done his research—he knew how much church music is done in Lubbock, and that that would be the thing, and probably—I thought—and there, that was your flat-footed, but still very entertaining.

AM:

Well, you know who was, I think, right-on in many ways in his approach to the thing—was Pete Seeger. He was—he played the banjo and sang very, very well, but what he was most interested in is you participating. I think he sort of touched a real need for people to connect with each other in some way that is—I won't say it's nonverbal—but in a way that's non-rehearsed, and you don't have to think about it—it just sort of points out the commonality of people, and that we're all the same. I can't remember the exact percentage, but the genetic difference from one human to another one is just infinitesimal—but we put a lot of weight on that, when in fact, it should be the other way around. And I think Pete Seeger and the really great ones like Garrison Keillor—and I'm sure many others—find that and are able to pull it off, whereas music performers actually accentuate the difference in a sense in that they're specialized and they're up there saying, "We're doing things you can't do."

AW:

Right, "Don't try this at home."

AM:

Right. So it's a funny, funny deal all the way around.

AW:

Have you read the book *The Gift* by Lewis Hyde?

AM:

No.

AW:

I'm going to send you a copy. This is something that's right up your alley. So you set out to just be the best you could be at it and enjoy the process of it—listening to it—you've talked about listening a lot—how did it evolve into your job?

AM:

Well, all through college I'd play, you know, with little pickup things here and there. There was a group of players in Oklahoma City I got in touch with—Walter Hawkins and Albert Brown and Doyle Butler and several others—and we would go play. I had a really good time and they drank a lot. That was basically how it went—and they enjoyed that a lot. We had a real good time doing that. So there was always this sense of—even if it was we went and played at a bar and they bought us a beer—that there was an opportunity, you know, that there was something you had to offer that people were kind of there for—and I'd play at every little event I could. There was a couple—let me make sure I don't forget anything or anybody—and played with Byron, you know, but with Byron it was similar. He enjoyed having a good time, and we'd go play just

to play, but there would be always this sense that we were good enough to entertain people, you know, and get their attention and whatnot. So I played and hung out at Slim's—Mike Richey's Guitar Center—and he eventually hired me to be a teacher there and I taught banjo and guitar.

AW:

While you were in college?

AM:

Yeah, while I was still in college.

AW:

And by the way, what were you studying?

AM:

I was in education and was going to ultimately be a high school social studies teacher—and I did get my degree. There was also a guy there named Charles Gardner, who lives now in Nacogdoches, Texas, and is—wrote me the other day—he's eighty years old, now, but I met him when I was seventeen or nineteen or twenty and he was at college getting his master's degree in geography—and he played fiddle, and he and I played a lot together, too, and would play at various—Sonny Curtis says, you know, "We play at the drop of a hat," and it's the same thing. It's just "There's a party; bring your banjo,"—there's an event, "Here, bring your banjo." So there was always sort of like an extra cachet playing music, and I should also mention something else really important—is that—I don't remember the year, probably '68—a student at the University of Oklahoma and I went to the—what is it called—oh, it's the Arkansas—what is it called—it's the folk music festival in Mountain View, Arkansas—maybe called the Mountain View Folk Festival—1968—

AW:

Jimmy Driftwood country.

AM:

Jimmy Driftwood—and I went up there and by then—you know, hanging around Byron—and Bill Keith was a banjo player that played this style that allowed you to play fiddle tunes, which are just a series of straight eighth notes rather than part of rolls, you could play melodies. So I was doing some of that, and this friend of mine—I can't remember his name—he was in the geography department with Charles Gardner, is where I met him—and we drove up to Mountain View, Arkansas and attended the Mountain View Folk Festival, and there I met Courtney Johnson, who was from Kentucky and a banjo player—and later to be the banjo player in the New Grass Revival—but I met Courtney there, and Courtney went back to Kentucky and told his friends—Wayne Stewart and Sam Bush—that he had met this banjo player from Oklahoma who

played these fiddle tunes pretty good. So Wayne Stewart, who was older than I—if I was twenty, Wayne was twenty-three or twenty-four, and Sam was fourteen or so—and Wayne is kind of a free spirit—back in the—this would be the late sixties, '68, '69—and he was going to go to California because California was the golden place to be. And so he stopped through Norman, Oklahoma and spent the night with me and my parents, and we played music together. When he left, rather than going to California, he turned around and went back to Kentucky and told Sam Bush that he had found this banjo player that he really liked, thought—I'm making this up; I don't know what he told Sam—but was real hip. Let's get a band together. So he wrote me—or called—and said “When you get out of school, come to Kentucky and we'll put this band together.” He even had a name for it, called Poor Richard's Almanac. So I thought, Wow, what a—I mean, it was like a—I don't even know what it was. I wouldn't have even known what it was to have a band, you know, I had no idea how you got jobs, I had no idea how you made a record, or any of that. So one Christmas—the Christmas before I was to graduate, I believe—I took a bus up to—he lived in Hopkinsville, Kentucky—and I spent a couple weeks there and Sam and I and Wayne played music together and really enjoyed it, and it was real exciting for me because Sam Bush is Sam Bush, you know, even if he's fourteen and fifteen—at the time, he was a marvel, and he was a really good guy—and Wayne was a good guy back then, too. So we made plans—when I graduated, I would go up to Hopkinsville and we'd have this band, Poor Richard's Almanac, and don't ask me what we were going to do; I haven't the foggiest notion.

AW:

You were going to have a band, huh?

AM:

Yeah—and I was incredibly, incredibly, incredibly naïve. I had no idea. So I graduated in January of 1969 and went up to Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Well, you know what happens when you—in 1969 and you're not in college, and you're a male is you get your draft notice. So I got my draft notice and I said, “I'm sorry, I just can't—it's beyond me.” So I got up there in January and I think I had to report in May, so it was like I just turned around, almost, and came back. So I came back and without going into all the gruesome details, they wound up turning me down because I had high blood pressure, which was like one of the best things that ever happened to me in my whole life.

AW:

Yeah, I was 4-F'd because I was allergic to tetanus shots.

AM:

Yeah, you can't go to Vietnam without a tetanus shot.

AW:

Well, I thought—I'm worried about getting shot by a bullet, not getting shot by a tetanus needle.

AM:

Well they want to give you a tetanus shot after you get shot by a bullet or shrapnel.

AW:

So you reported for your physical in May and then got turned down?

AM:

Right—and that's quite a story, too, in a sense that one of the groups I played with while I was in Oklahoma was a gentleman named Carl Salzmann and his family, his wife and his daughter sang gospel music, and they loved bluegrass, so I'd play with them, and we played a church in Norman—a Baptist church—I can't remember which one it is—the night before I reported. So we're playing, and then they get to this portion where they're offering up prayers, and Carl Salzmann steps up and says, "This young man is going to the army tomorrow, and we would like to pray that they find something wrong with him that is not deadly, but will keep him out of the army." Sure enough—

AW:

Really?

AM:

Yes—and so they all hubbub-hubbub, rhubarb-rhubarb—and then I reported the next day—and it's a long story—but anyway, they turned me down—kept me for three days—and—

AW:

For three days?

AM:

Yeah, because—oh, it's a long story. I had claimed I had high blood pressure because the doctor had mentioned it one time, so I thought, Oh, I'll check it. So I did, and then I was supposed to go to the doctor—they said to claim this, "You have to go to the doctor for three days in a row and get your blood pressure checked and then turn it in"—and I did, and it didn't seem worthy of turning in, so I didn't. So then when I got there, they said, "There's something missing. There's supposed to be a report from your doctor," and I said, "Well, I did it." I didn't tell him I didn't turn it in, and they said, "Well, we're going to have to keep you for three days to check it out," and the first day they checked me, the doctor said, "I don't know why they're keeping you; they're not going to take you." That was on the first day.

AW:

On the first day?

AM:

Yeah, and I thought, Well, this is hopeful. So by the third day—and I remember sitting there, and it was a navy doctor—and I think on the form it said, “physically fit/physically unfit” and he had a red pen, and when he circled “physically unfit” I didn’t like leap out of my chair or anything, but internally I was really joyous.

AW:

Yeah. Did your blood pressure go down when he circled that?

AM:

It could have—it could have quite a bit. But as you can see, I just went through open-heart surgery—

AW:

So they were right?

AM:

—so they were right. But I’ve been on—

AW:

In the long-term.

AM:

Yeah. I’ve been on medication ever since then, you know, so it’s supposed to have been held in check. So anyway, they turned me down, so here I was, away from Kentucky, back in Oklahoma, and it never even entered my mind—and I don’t know why—it’s because I’m too naïve—Well, I can get some money together and go back to Kentucky. Well by then, Sam and Wayne had gotten together with Courtney Johnson—and he was playing banjo in this little group called Poor Richard’s Almanac and I thought, Oh well. I got a job there in Norman—and I don’t know—just goofy me—I went around and applied for several jobs and got two offers and took them both. So I worked—and one of them is still to this day, one of the very best jobs I’ve ever had in my life.

AW:

Really? What was it?

AM:

Yeah. I was a shipping clerk at the University of Oklahoma Press.

AW:

I'll be there week after next.

AM:

Oh, will you?

AW:

Yeah, my friend, Byron Price, is now the director.

AM:

Oh is he?

AW:

Yeah, and I'm doing a book with him, so I'm going to be up there working with a designer. Now they're in a different building, so I can't go see the memorial Alan Munde shipping clerk position.

AM:

Right, no, no, it's long gone. But it was a really—what better job is there than to get an order that said, "I want this book, this book, and this book," and then go find them on the shelves and wrap them up and pack them up and send them off—and during every break—you got fifteen minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes in the afternoon—and I would read whatever book was in front of me during my break. I would just sit on my desk and open the book and kind of thumb through it, or—and that's where I read the J. Evetts Haley *XIT Ranch*, and the *Matador Land and Cattle Company*, and I read *Gunfighter of Myth and Legend* by a guy—and Englishman named Rosa [*Gunfighter: Man or Myth? By Joseph G. Rosa*], and what other books did I read while I was—Charles Goodnight—

AW:

My uncle.

AM:

They're all—the OU press had all of those, so you know, that's where I read all of those. And that's how I knew so much and felt comfortable with West Texas when I finally got out there.

AW:

Because you'd read it all.

AM:

It was all right there, you know. It was real intriguing to me. But they had lots of other books,

too. They had one on the army of Tennessee, you know, the Confederate group that was called the Army of Tennessee—I read that, and the history of that army—I mean just whatever was there. It's funny, you know, there'd—always one of those books would be there during break because they were pretty popular at the OU press. So I loved that job, and it had—and my desk was like this—and right in front of me was a great huge wall of windows, so I looked right out onto the campus—a passageway between buildings, so I could see students and—I mean, it was ideal. I made a dollar fifty, or a dollar fifty-five an hour. So I did that during the day, and then I get off at five, and then at six or seven o'clock—I can't remember—I was a janitor at the John Roberts ring factory—and they made class rings.

AW:

Yeah, I think I probably bought one at one time.

AM:

Yeah, and I would go out there and sweep up and wipe down—I was the only one—and I liked that job—I was the only one. And I would go out there every evening and just do my job. While I was in college, I also worked with my oldest brother, Mike, who worked for a janitorial service, and he got me on a crew that cleaned in Oklahoma City—a place called Unit Auto Parts—and they rebuilt starters and generators. You know what, that's a really good kind of job in the sense that you go in—and this was a crew of seven or eight college guys—and you'd go in and it's dirty, and you'd work for four hours and it was clean. It was a real sense of—

AW:

You could see that the job was finished.

AM:

Yeah, exactly, exactly. So those were good jobs. So anyway, that summer—

AW:

Just out of curiosity, why didn't you try to find a job teaching?

AM:

You know—I don't know. That's a good question—stupid.

AW:

Well, no, it's not stupid. I've taught in public school enough to know I'm glad I never did that for a real living.

AM:

Well, you know the real truth is that I was scared shitless. I did my student teaching, and

somewhere in my soul I knew that this is not good for me or the students—because I was not—if I had been forty years old, I might have—could do it, but to be twenty-one or twenty-two and thinking that I could teach fourteen-year-olds or fifteen-year-olds anything just—I thought, This doesn't compute. It just didn't seem right—and later on, I'll tell you, it was all confirmed. So anyway, I was working that summer that I got—that would be 1969—I worked that summer, those two—after I got turned down by the army. And this is what—you want to know what got me into the music business? This is it. And if you'll remember back in those days, there was a pizza place called Shakey's. And Shakey's had—and every one of them had a piano player and a banjo player, and they would do singalongs. Somebody—I can't remember who—told me that there was an opening for a banjo player at a Shakey's on Del Road in Del City, Oklahoma, which is not terribly far from Norman. So I went up there and auditioned on my five-string—but I would take my thumb pick, and I would just whack-a-whack-a-whack on the banjo—and the banjo player that had the gig was there, came in and says “You know, son, you need to take that fifth string off,” and I thought, Well, rather than that, I'll just mute it. Interestingly enough, the guy—but he was a kid—that played the piano was—I was twenty-one, and the kid playing the piano was younger, and he had run away from home—the story I remember, he was from Waco and he had gotten there—and he was a brilliant piano player. He lived in a motel—or somewhere nearby Shakey's—and came in every day, and what he would do is put quarters in the player piano and watch the keys, and he would learn to—and some of those are played by two hands, I think, or you know, they're mechanical, so they can do anything they want. But he would pick up the essence of it and play it. He would—we had fake books—and somebody would request a song, and he'd find it and put it up there—and he was—he could play the melody and the chords and call out the chords to me at the same time—and I would get a third of them, maybe. But, you know, on the banjo, if you just get kind of the rate going, you don't need the tone all the time. It would have been much better if I did, but some of the stuff I would know and could follow and was no problem. Here's the tricky—or the important part: those two other jobs I was working paid a dollar fifty an hour—maybe a dollar fifty-five—Shakey's paid five dollars an hour.

AW:

That opens your eyes.

AM:

Oh yeah. The sad part was that's the last best job I've had in the music business—in comparison to the rest of the economy—because I was making three and four times minimum wage, which was pretty decent. I'd work five hours, maybe five to ten, something like that. So I kept my job at the OU press and quit the job at the John Roberts. I worked—I had worked there, you know, several months, so maybe in—I got that job—it seemed like it was cold, getting cold, so it was maybe September—no—September, probably, I did that. Well, during the summer, besides doing the two jobs, there's a music store—the other music store in town was called Carl and Bob's, and it was Carl, Lauren, and his son, Bobby Warren. Carl and Bob played with Jude 'n'

Jody and the 301 Ranch Hands in Oklahoma City, and they had had a country music show on television every Saturday for many years, and I'd watched it forever because they had guitar players. Even if they'd just strum chords, I'd watch it. Carl and Bob owned a music store in Norman, there—Mike Richey had the sort of hip one on Campus Corner—Carl and Bob had the one on the other side of town, and they were almost all country, you know, all the country players knew Carl and Bob and bought stuff there. So I got to where I started hanging out there because Slim—Mike—moved away from Norman, he left. He had left the store in the charge of some people and it sort of went downhill and with Slim—Mike Richey—not being there, it wasn't quite as fun to hang out, and I sort of lost interest in it, and started hanging out at Carl and Bob's—because they were very, very nice, and they liked the banjo and the music and whatnot—and even got me on to play on one of the TV shows up in Oklahoma City. There was a guy there named Harlow Wilcox, who was a country guitar player of very, very low skillset. It was mostly sort of boogie-woogie, bluesy, but not all that good—very nice guy, though, Harlow Wilcox—and he recorded an instrumental called Groovy Grubworm, and you laugh, but it—they made a deal with—it became sort of a local hit, and they sold it to—

AW:

Well, it's hard to beat a guy named Harlow Wilcox playing a song called Groovy Grubworm. You can't make that stuff up.

AM:

No, I'm not. So Harlow recorded this song called Groovy Grubworm that ultimately became a hit, and in 1969 was the BMI Instrumental of the Year—and it's just really low-level, and it's sort of this boogie-woogie on the low strings, and then it stops at some point, and there's a voice that goes "I'm a grubworm," and then it starts up again.

AW:

How'd I miss it?

AM:

I've got a recording somewhere. It's probably in the—you know, I gave it to the museum out there, so you can look it up. So as a result of Harlow's success with that, he was going to put together a band to play and tour and take advantage of that in 1969, and they needed an album. So they had this song they wanted—they said it'd be great for banjo, would I come down and play banjo on it? So they had a little recording studio in the back of the store, you know, with the egg crates on the wall—and Carl was the recording engineer, and Carl played bass and Bobby Warren played drums—and so it was called Moose Trot.

AW:

The song?

AM:

Yeah—and it was, once again—

AW:

Sticking with the theme of—

AM:

—animal—critters—and I think he even had one called “Crippled Cricket or something like that. He recorded all this and then wanted to put a band together and wanted to know if I would play bass and then do banjo on some stuff. Well, hell, I’d never played bass in my life—but of course, I said yes. This was like—you know, “Do you want to play at Shakey’s, or do you want to do this?” You know, and musicians—I can see how they make poor choices because they don’t know—and I was one of them that—you know, I wouldn’t have known what questions to ask. They said “Do you want to do it? We’re going to try to—I’ve got all these contacts for clubs up in Pennsylvania.” Well that sounded kind of exotic to me. So I said, “Sure, I’ll do it.” I didn’t know what that meant. So anyway, that was in the works, and at the same time to sort of kick this off, they were going to go to the DJ convention. The DJ convention has since sort of blossomed into—I don’t even know if they still do it—it’s called Fanfest.

AW:

Oh yeah.

AM:

They moved the business part of it away from Fanfest because so many fans would show up for the DJ convention just to see all the artists and whatnot—they separated the two—but back then, it was just the DJ convention. Wayne Stewart and I were still in contact, and I said “I’m going to go to Nashville to the DJ convention,” and Bowling Green, Kentucky—which is where Sam Bush lived—and Hopkinsville—well, Wayne was living in Bowling Green at the time. It was only maybe sixty or eighty miles from Nashville, and they said, “Well we’ll come down and get you, so I used Harlow Wilcox and those guys to get a ride to Nashville, and I said, “When I get there I’m going to go off with these friends of mine while y’all do your business.” So I went with Sam and Wayne, and somebody—and I think a character named Tut Taylor—rented the third floor—or organized—where the third floor of what was the Noel—N-o-e-l—Hotel, and that was a bluegrass heaven. During the DJ convention, that’s where all the bluegrass-ers went—and Sam and Wayne knew about that and said, “Let’s go there.” So I spent three days at the Noel Hotel—I don’t even remember where I stayed. I haven’t the foggiest idea of where I stayed. We may have gone and gotten a room, or we may have just slept on couches out in the hall, but we stayed there for three days and played music—and I saw Vassar Clements, Josh Graves, Kenny Baker—I can’t even remember who else, now—but a lot of the Nashville—Roland White was there, Bill Monroe may have come up—being there—there was a banjo player there named Al Osteen, and

I missed—earlier, I had gone to Bill Monroe's—in like '67 I went to Bill Monroe's first bluegrass festival in Bean Blossom, Indiana with some friends from Oklahoma, and then went again the following year and I met this banjo player named Al Osteen—who just died this year—and he was from South Carolina. Well when I got to Nashville with Harlow Wilcox and them, Al Osteen was playing banjo with Jim and Jesse, which, to me, was like “Man, that's heaven. How do you do that?” Al told me, says, “You know, Chris Warner is leaving Jimmy Martin, and Jimmy Martin is looking for a banjo player. If you're interested, I'll introduce you when he comes up.” So he came up, he introduced me to him, and I don't even remember if I spoke words to him—it was just like—and I was a real, real shy, naïve kid, looking back, and I may have got out the words “I'm interested—if you're looking for a banjo player, I'm interested in it,” and he said—he may have said something to me, or not, and went away and came back the next day. I'd also met—when I went up and spent that Christmas with Wayne Stewart, we went over to Lexington, Kentucky, and I met J. D. Crowe and Doyle Lawson, who was playing with J. D. at the time, and this is one of those “One thing leads to another” kind of stories. Well, when I got to Nashville and was wanting the job with Jimmy Martin, Doyle Lawson was playing in Jimmy Martin's band at that time, and he remembered me from meeting him when he was with J. D. Crowe—and I had gotten up and played the banjo with them, and I guess I did good enough he remembered—and Jimmy says—came back the next day and says “So you're interested, let's play some.” So I got my banjo out and I played “Cumberland Gap,” and right away he started telling me how to play it—you know, “Do it this way, do it that way, do it this” —so I tried my best to do like he wanted, and he may have come—that may have been the first day—he came back the second day and he says “Well, if you want the job, be back here” —this was on a weekend—he says, “Next weekend we're playing in Hamilton, Ohio. Come on back.” So I said “I'll be there,” and he gave me his phone number. So I went back with Harlow Wilcox—rode back—and this was after playing all weekend with Sam and Wayne—and Vassar Clements, a lot. Vassar was there playing a lot. He was a great one. And I met some people there that, to this day, are still friends—Mike Long is one of them, and many others. Anyway, so I came back home—this is all in October, early October maybe—and as soon as I got home, my dad helped me buy a car—a 1961—this would be '69 —so this was a 1961 Buick LeSabre, which is like the biggest car Buick made—it was like a boat—for three hundred dollars, and I had saved up—had some money saved up, so I bought the car, loaded it up—and by loading it up, I threw some underwear in the backseat and my banjo. So I went to Nashville, I had this Buick LeSabre, I had a banjo and a guitar, and some clothes, and three hundred dollars. That's how much I had.

AW:

And a job.

AM:

And a job—so I was told. So I drove all the way to Nashville, got there on a Wednesday—is this going too long?

AW:

Not at all. I'm just checking the battery.

AM:

—and got there on a Wednesday, called Jimmy, “Do you have a place to live?” and I said, “Well, I’ll find something.” So I found a little place for ten dollars a week—just one room and a bathroom down the hall in east Nashville. Ultimately, he said, “You know, I’ve got a better place for you. Come stay with me for a few days and I’ll get you connected to this place where Gloria Belle Flickinger”—who played bass in the band, was staying—a rooming house. So I stayed in this first place for a week, and I got there and we went out on the road—he had a 1949 Flxible bus—and we drove from Nashville—left at midnight and drove up to Hamilton, Ohio, which is above Cincinnati—and you’ll love this. The thrill—and it was a thrill—was going through Cincinnati in the morning, and the road becomes elevated and went right by Crosley Field, and I could look out in between the level of the stands and could see the ballpark. God almighty. There was Crosley Field where the Cincinnati Redlegs played. They don’t even call them Redlegs anymore, do they?

AW:

No, just Reds.

AM:

Yeah. They were the Cincinnati Redlegs, the home of Frank Robinson and Vada Pinson and Jay Hook, and I can’t remember who else. But anyway, that was a real thrill. Then we got to Hamilton, Ohio and played on a show that was called—Jimmy called them a phone deal.

AW:

A phone deal?

AM:

A phone deal—and what it was—this was—you know, a lot of the things I did with Jimmy were like the end of an era things, but it was where some promoter would get a package together of relatively low-end country music acts at the time. So it would be like George Morgan and Jimmy Martin and maybe Lefty Frizzell because he was on his way out. I don’t even know who the—you know, he wasn’t Ronnie Milsap or whoever the stuff was in the late sixties. And he would put this package together of four or five bands, and then the promoter would go up there and sell it to some civic group like the fire department or the policemen or some bank to raise money, so that the bank or the police force or somebody would pay the ticket, and then they would get 500 tickets, and they would sell them. How they would sell them is, you know, people would say, “Well here’s \$10 but keep your tickets.”

AW:

Right. So you'd play sometimes to a sold-out show with nobody there.

AM:

Exactly—but he called them phone deals, because the guy would do it all by the phone—he'd sell them. And the police and all those, I guess didn't matter, because they got a profit from it, and didn't give a shit whether anybody came or not. But there would always be an audience, and sometimes—you know, a lot of times, the bank would buy up a hundred tickets—

AW:

—and give them away—

AM:

—and they would take them to the nursing homes and give them away, so you had a—these busses coming in with wheelchair folks. So it was kind of low-level, but there would always be fans there, too. So the first Jimmy Martin show I was ever—saw—I was in. I remember I had to go out and buy a white shirt because I didn't have one, and he had a vest that the band wore that the last—you know, he would just collect it from the last band member that left, so I was wearing—I needed a pair of black pants and a white shirt and wore a black vest, and there was a hat and a tie I had to get. Doyle Lawson went with me to buy the tie and the shirt and the pants, maybe, and so that was the beginning of my Jimmy Martin career—and Doyle Lawson—I should back up. After I got there and lived in this place for ten dollars, then I stayed with Jimmy, then I lived with Doyle. Doyle and I lived together for a couple months. He was only—I got there in October and he left before Christmas, so it was just a couple months he and I were in the band together. So that was the beginning of my Jimmy Martin days, and I was with him from October of '69 to October of '71, and it was a real interesting time, you know, I was young, I had—I can't tell you how little money I had—it was incredibly none—to the point where I had this Buick LeSabre, and I would never put any more gas in it than I thought would get me out and back.

AW:

Because otherwise it was a waste.

AM:

Because then I wouldn't have any money. So if I was to go out—gas was thirty-one, thirty-two cents a gallon—so I'd put in a dollar's worth, that's three gallons and if it got twenty miles to the gallon—or probably not even that in those things—so it'd give me forty-five miles. I could go into town and back on a dollar, so that's how I'd do it. I would even go to town—there was a place where bluegrass pickers gathered called Bobby Green's Dusty Roads Tavern, and I met, once again, Kenny Baker there and played a lot of music with Kenny and got to be good friends

with him. Roland White would come down a lot—and Vic Jordan, who was playing with Lester Flatt, would come down—a lot of just local players would come down there. I met Jeff Stelling—who is now the banjo builder—I met him there when he was just a student at Vanderbilt, and would hang out with him a great deal. I hung out at his house a lot. I would go down there knowing that I didn't have enough money or gas to get back home, and I would take a set of strings with me and try to sell it while I was there in hopes of getting a dollar—

AW:

Yeah, to get back.

AM:

—to get back. It never crossed my mind that I wouldn't, you know, it was just a really—you know, you talk about there's a woman that has a—I can't think of her name right now—her husband died and she wrote a book called *A Year of Magical Thinking*—it's kind of what that is; you're sort of in this magical spot where it's just fairy dust. It's on an old crappy car, but it went, and I did all those things. I've got my income tax; I think I made twenty-two hundred dollars a year playing with Jimmy Martin, and that may be even counting the little bit I worked at a service station and then for a painter, hanging wall paper and painting. I also did student teaching while I was in Nashville.

AW:

Teaching banjo students, or—?

AM:

No, elementary—I mean high school—

AW:

You mean like as a substitute?

AM:

Right, at public school. I had it in me enough to go down and get a Tennessee teacher's license or certificate, or whatever it was—and it must have been just really easy because they gave me a—I had one for ten years. It was a ten-year—

AW:

Oh, when you got it, it was good for ten years?

AM:

Ten years, yeah. So I could—then I would call the schools up—so I had a little bit of energy about it.

AW:

Well did Jimmy not play that much, or—?

AM:

No, he didn't, and he didn't pay that much. When I went with him, it had just gone from twenty-five dollars a day to thirty-five dollars—and that's only for the day you played.

AW:

Not the travel time.

AM:

Not the travel day. Now, in fact, somebody could say—well, the official was that they were supposed to pay your food and lodging—he would pay the lodging, but never the food. So we could go out and play in Pennsylvania one day and leave on a Friday, play Saturday, and come back Sunday, and I'd make thirty-five dollars.

AW:

Yeah, for three days.

AM:

For three days, yeah.

AW:

Now that's gross, not net.

AM:

Yeah, and that's paying for my food. Now, he would do the lodging, but that was really tricky, too, because sometimes he would just drive instead of stop, and you'd sleep.

AW:

In the Flx bus?

AM:

Yeah—or a lot of times we went in his—he had a Lincoln Continental—and we would go in it, you know, with the bass down the middle and your head against the bass.

AW:

Well now, was he just a skinflint, or was he just not making any money?

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AM:

No, he was a skinflint. He wasn't making much money, that's true, but he was a skinflint. He was really watchful of every penny he did. His whole story is a whole different—that's another book that somebody needs to write. But it was quite an experience, and I got to see a lot of the country, you know, all up and down the east coast—went to New York City, played in New York City—and it's funny who were the bluegrass fans. When we played New York City, who took us out to dinner was a guy named Hal Bruno, who was an ABC news director, and I would see him on the news for several years after that. The other people at the table were Time Magazine, and you know, they were sort of—bluegrass was kind of a fun little niche thing for them. They took us out and took us to a really nice Chinese food restaurant—first time I was ever in a sort of a real Chinese food restaurant—and Jimmy handled it real well. He was pretty pleasant and ate everything that came out and we all had a very nice time. So I got to play New York City and meet some people in New York that I still know to this day, and you know, met a lot of people that I still know, and I'm still friends with—Jeff Stelling, Mike Long, Roland White—I had hung out a lot with Roland there in Nashville. I lived in a—there's a suburb of Nashville called Old Hickory, okay, and there's a little town that's right at the edge of Old Hickory called Rayon City.

AW:

Rayon City as in nylon, dacron, rayon?

AM:

Exactly, and it had been the company town of the DuPont plant that was just down the street. There was a DuPont plant there. I lived on Rayon Drive in Rayon City in a rooming house run by a Mr. and Mrs. McDonald, and I think I paid, once again, ten dollars a week for a room. I was not supposed to get food, but she would feed me. It was a wacky, wacky house, and that's a whole—all of these are incredible stories—to me, they are, anyway.

AW:

Well what—tell me some more about the wacky house, though.

AM:

Well, she was from a place called Red Boiling Springs, Tennessee.

AW:

Red Boiling Springs?

AM:

Tennessee. When I was there, she was—and her husband, he was retired and sort of a meek character, and they were both in their sixties—but she was a ball of energy, and was in—one of

these—in everybody's business, snooping around, listening, gathering information, and coming to really weird conclusions. But she was also very, very religious—fundamental—and one day she came to me and said, “You know, I’m going to have to report something to Oral Roberts,” and I says, “Oh, what’s that?” and she laid out these two letters that were requesting money for Oral Roberts, and she says, “Look at them,” and I looked, and she says “What do you think?” and I said, “Well, they’re both the same,” and she says “That’s it. Somebody is signing his name to these letters, because I’ve got two of them and they’re identical.” She just couldn’t—

AW:

—imagine that he wasn’t really signing them.

AM:

Yeah, right—that he wasn’t writing to her, personally—or she would come in at breakfast, and I’d be sitting there, and she’s say, “Well, I don’t know what I’m going to do. Helen and Frank have gotten into a big fight, and Frank has gone off and joined the army, and he’s going to be sent to Vietnam, and Helen doesn’t know what to do, and she got drunk and was in a car wreck,” and I’m listening to this, and I’m going, “Is this—relatives of yours?” “Oh, no, no, no, this is on the TV.”

AW:

Oh, a soap opera.

AM:

Soap opera. So she would just burst into telling me the story as if it was people she knew.

Another time—

AW:

I have relatives like this.

AM:

Yeah. And you know John Hadley. Well while I was in Nashville, John got his first I think sabbatical from the University of Oklahoma—

AW:

You’d known him at OU?

AM:

Oh yeah, I knew him in Norman.

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AW:

Oh, did you?

AM:

Yeah. I should have mentioned that. But he and I played music, once again, “Let’s go play a party. Call Alan and have him bring his banjo.” The art department was a great party department back then. So John was going to come to Nashville and try his hand at songwriting, and got ahold of a realtor and was looking at houses, and it turned out it was just two or three doors down from me. So that was really great that John and Judy—and they just had one son at the time—lived down the street from me. And also, Adam Granger, another Normanite guitar player, singer—

AW:

I didn’t know Adam was from Norman.

AM:

Yeah. His dad was on the English faculty there—but Adam came and lived down the street from me, too, at the same time. But anyway, John is down there and Mrs. McDonald asked me, says, “Well I noticed your friend doesn’t ever go to work. What does he do?” and I said, “Oh, John? He’s a college professor, and he’s on sabbatical, so he’s got the year off and he’s here trying his hand at songwriting.” She would kind of nod her head, and a day later, “Now what does your friend do, again?” So I would go through it again—and two or three times—and then one day I heard her on the phone, “Oh, I don’t know what he does, but I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s not selling dope.” So she came up with her own story—

AW:

—one that would fit.

AM:

Yeah—one that made sense in her little world. So she was just—and she was into everybody’s business. She had a son named Johnny that I liked—and was a musician. He was a musician—played bass and was a good musician and was having all sorts of wife problems—he worked for Braniff Airlines at the time. He was a nice sweet guy and just got bulldozed—

Break in recording

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

So, let’s back up since we ran out the memory card. All the memories we can afford, we’ve already spent them. Back to the rooming house—and I think we left off with the son working for Braniff?

Alan Munde (AM):

Yeah, Johnny McDonald was a real nice guy, and he lived in Memphis, actually, and would come over and see—no, he didn't. He lived in Nashville, there, and maybe transferred to Memphis later—but he was having trouble with his wife, and he had a daughter—that was part of Mrs. McDonald's world. They also had an older son, and I cannot remember his—Billy, Billy was his name—and he was the troll that lived in the basement. I swear, I never—you saw him rarely. He would just come up late at night and get food and then go back down in the basement. I don't know what his issues were as a person or anything. They finally got him to get out and get a job, but he was—I don't know if he was sort of—my dad's language would be he was “weak-minded.” I don't know if he was a bad guy, or—I don't think he was—and he looked very much like a troll, so that was another element in her world. So she was just really something—and then Gloria Belle Flickinger, who played bass with Jimmy Martin, lived in that rooming house, also. She was there before I got there. So she and I would rehearse—she had a room off the back porch—and we would rehearse together, just she'd play bass and I'd play banjo—and I was to sing baritone, so I'd do my best to learnt the baritone parts and try to make a hand. I did that for a couple years, and got to record with him, I think, on thirteen titles. None of them were—by then, most of the classic stuff he had done in his really great band days were kind of over. But I really enjoyed being there. I learned a lot about—he had a really, really, really strong presentational sense of the music. He knew, I think, sort of exactly what he wanted and it was real tricky because the banjo—in Bill Monroe's music, the fiddle is the important thing. To be a fiddle player in Monroe's band, that's a really juicy job because fiddle was real prominent, where, to be a banjo player, Jimmy Martin was a little juicier spot because he really loved the banjo and loved banjo playing and the good banjo players, J. D. Crowe and Bill Emerson being the really prominent banjo players in his band—and I loved their music, so I didn't have any problem. He was sort of a hard taskmaster in that even during the show, he would turn around to me and say, “I'd give you a hundred dollars right now if you'd have gotten that right” —he was that sense of encouragement. When we would play a festival, he would go—he liked to drink—so he would go out among the pickers out in the parking lot, and he'd come back and he'd say, “Well, I got three phone numbers of banjo players who could do my music right now,” and that was to encourage me to do better, where really, in my mind, I wanted him to do well. I didn't have to be there, and if he thought somebody could do it better, then more power to him. It wouldn't have—you know, I would have felt bad about not being able to do it if—but you know, in truth, he couldn't find anybody. He was such a well-known commodity in bluegrass that a lot of people didn't want to fool with him because—

AW:

Yeah, they already knew.

AM:

Yeah, they knew, and I didn't. All I knew was that Jimmy Martin made records and was a

bluegrass star, and I was all for wanting to be there. I loved his music and I loved trying to play the banjo the way he wanted me to—I still think, to this day, his approach to music is really good.

AW:

Yeah, and what do you mean by that—his approach to music?

AM:

Well, what he wanted was a really—here's part of his history—is he worked—he loved Bill Monroe with Flatt and Scruggs, when Flatt and Scruggs were with Bill Monroe. He loved their music, and if you read the history of it, Monroe and Flatt and Scruggs rehearsed every day, you know, they rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed, and it showed. When Flatt and Scruggs left Bill Monroe, what Bill Monroe took from that experience is, “Well fuck these guys. I rehearse them, I rehearse them, I show them how it goes, and they leave and they get their own band and they compete with me.” So apparently at that point, Monroe quit rehearsing. So when Jimmy was in Monroe's band, it was this banjo player, that banjo player, this fiddle player, that fiddle player, you know, he would just pick up people and go play. Jimmy said, “Some shows it would just be Bill and me and a local bass player,” you know, so he really did not like that, and he was on—they were on the Grand Ole Opry at the time, and when they were in Nashville, then they could get some of the better players just to come do the Opry show. So that was pretty good. And he was on there, and he said, you know, he got to see Earnest Tubbs' band, he got to see Hank Williams, Little Jimmy Dickens—just all these really polished country bands from the fifties that were really hot. They had Buddy Emmons on the steel guitar, and he was talking about Little Jimmy Dickens' band, said they had Buddy Emmons on steel, and then these twin guitars that were rehearsed, and he said they all dressed alike and all the licks were in the right place. So that was sort of his model for—he wanted to do that in bluegrass. So when he did a lick on the guitar, he wanted a complimentary lick on the banjo at the same point so that it was done—it was choreographed—and I could take you through the recordings and show you exactly what I'm talking about. He also—his rhythm guitar is real insistent so that the banjo fits right in with it. So if the whole groove of everybody is that all the time, it has this really intense groove feel to it from beginning to end and not have any shallow spots in it. He would always—we would watch a bluegrass band play and he would say, “Well there's a bunch of guys just playing the best they can.”

AW:

And that wasn't a compliment.

AM:

No, it wasn't. He says, “You know, they're just up there doing whatever it is they can—and they know some licks, but they don't know anything about how to sort of organize it and put it

together.” So his idea was you could have your band members doing a lot if they were all doing things that were centered on the same thing. This is my distillation of it, is that you have a chord, and every instrument defines the chord differently in the sense that the banjo does the notes individually, the guitar does it in this sort of rhythm, the mandolin does it, in this instance, as a chop, and then the bass is bom, bom, bom, bom—and they’re all blended together as this one sort of rhythm unit, and then you defining the chord, and he’s defining the chord, you know, like a G chord down here—while I might be defining it on the banjo way up high, but it’s still—the rhythm of it is there. So you have the definition of the basic harmony, and then you do things that move the chord—one chord—like if you’re going from G to C, you can play a G7th, or you can do a little walk-up run—

AW:

—create your leading tone—

AM:

Right—or you could do a walk up and do it—and that doesn’t mean that both of you do the same thing, but you’re both doing something that is in time in this groove, but gives direction to the chord—to the music. He didn’t call it this, but I call it—just, the rhythm is, I call it, cruising. You’re just cruising—just like a drummer—you know, you just get this rhythm as a band going, then you push it from one chord to another by giving it direction. And then, when there’s holes in the music, that’s when you fill it with your you know, and banjo does its little tricky thing, and the mandolin does its thing. Now on slow songs, the banjo actually remains similar, but if—now the mandolin, rather than defining the chord as a chop, it can play a tremolo, you know, and it can move around from one part of a G chord to another part of a G chord and it’s still G—you’re still saying G. So he would have the banjo playing the roll, the mandolin player doing a tremolo, but not licks or anything, just defining the chord in a pretty way—in an interesting way—that fit with the singing, and then you have the fiddle player back there that plays long notes, sort of similar to the mandolin player’s tremolo notes, and you have it coordinated, rather than just “Well I’m going to play whatever lick I feel like playing.” So he had a real view of what a band was supposed to do, and he also—as a banjo player, and fiddle player—or any of them, any of them—any of the instrumentalists, you would have quick notes and then lazy notes. The quick notes were real specific—so if, like “Foggy Mountain Breakdown” was you know, just that much, all those first ones were quick——

AW:

So they were anticipating the beat—

AM:

Well, I don’t mean quick and ahead of the beat. They were—actually, they were more shortened. They were more punctuated. So they weren’t—and I can’t do it——

AW:

Yeah, they were —

AM:

Yeah, they were—like you cut it off with your tongue. And then you'd get to this—see, you do, and that was a long. So he promoted that, and he would sing the solos that he wanted me to play—or anybody—in that way. So if he wanted “Foggy Mountain Breakdown—he had a tune—just Foggy Mountain Breakdown, just that—he would go , and then when it goes , when it hits that tone, he'd make it real big, you know, he would open up , you know, because he wanted it to be ringing. So he knew what he wanted. He didn't have a real—and he could sing it, but he couldn't tell you how to do it on your instrument. It took me a long—and I was long gone before I kind of figured out—and I may even be wrong.

AW:

No, it sounds—I just think about when I'm playing with another guitar player, or I watch two guitar players, and they're in the same root, and it always bothers me because there's no reason to do that. You could be playing a different root because, as you said, it defines the chord more fully, and so you have a lot more music coming out of the same G chord.

AM:

And you know, one of the comments people would make—we would play—and he also—the other part of him—and this may have been my misinterpretation of what he wanted, but it always felt like, to me, playing with him was shouting at the top of your voice all of the time because you played really hard—or I did—I had to—that was how I interpreted what he wanted where in fact, if I had better control at the time, of what I was doing, I probably could have done it in a more finessed way. People would say, “Wow, I can't believe all that sound is just coming out of four of you.” You know, there'd be Jimmy Martin, me on banjo, Gloria Bell on bass, and Vernon Derrick, possibly, on mandolin or fiddle, either one. And there'd just be four of us, and they said, “Man, I can't believe you make that much music.” Well, the reason is, is because it's organized and planned out that way, and he demanded it that way every time. He didn't like—I won't say he didn't like improvisation, but when he had something worked out and recorded, that's the way he wanted it, because it helped—I think it was less confusing to him, and just felt more comfortable, and he felt like that when people came to see Jimmy Martin, they really wanted to hear the record—or what they were hearing was the record. He would even, sometimes—he had a song that was—I won't say it was a hit for him—but it was well-known. He had a song called “Tennessee,” and he would do it every show—and this is part of his encouraging people to do well in a negative way—we would do “Tennessee” and we'd get a big hand, you know, the people would really love it. He'd say “Don't think they were clapping for you. They were hearing the record.” Shit.

AW:

You were just reminding them of the record.

AM:

Yeah, exactly.

AW:

It'd be hard to go out of that band with—being an egomaniac.

AM:

I didn't come out with a great ego. He would play one band member against the other, the old "Why can't you be more like your brother?" He would go, to me, "Now Gloria's got her part. Why don't you have yours? She gets up there every day and just does it the same." Well, the next day it'll be me against her. I would like to say, Gloria held up really well—and I don't know what their relationship was, and I don't even care—but I have nothing but admiration for her. I've heard a lot of people—or, not a lot—a few people badmouth her, but I don't feel that way about her at all. She was always really, really good to me, and she was—she was kind of a hard gal, but she had a hard road to hoe for sure, being one of the few females in bluegrass in the sixties. She was with Jimmy before I got there, and she was with him after I left, so she put up with a lot—

AW:

—for thirty-five dollars a show.

AM:

Thirty-five dollars—but, you know, she was a woman who wanted to be in bluegrass, and at that time there was no Allison Krauss, there was no nobody—and there was no jobs for women in bluegrass bands other than Jimmy Martin. I will say this about him, he was a womanizer and did not treat women well, but he did have a woman in his band because he liked the musical musicality of it, and also liked the look of it—he thought it was a more showy thing—but he was one of the few places that, if you wanted to be a woman in bluegrass that there was even a model for. He used them when he recorded a lot of his stuff, and so it's good Jimmy, bad Jimmy. He didn't treat them well when they were there, and was incredibly abusive and drank and had a short—I think a short person's syndrome—he was short, and he was also from a very rural and rude and crude environment that taught him some really rotten stuff. He's one of those guys that should have gotten counseling when he was in the third grade and never got it.

AW:

He's also a good example of a thing that I think we don't consider as often as we should, which is you really need to separate the artist from the art.

AM:

Oh definitely. Doug Green always said that Jimmy Martin should just stay in Nashville and make records and never make public appearances because he just makes enemies when he does.

AW:

Well, so, how did you live with that for two years?

AM:

You know, at the time—once again, just like Gloria—if you want to be in bluegrass—to me, the idea of organizing your own band and making your own way—even though I was in that little group with Wayne and Sam, it never was a chance to do anything because we didn't know what we were doing. We didn't know how to get a gig or where even a gig was to be gotten. So there I was—and if you were a banjo player, you could play in Bill Monroe's band, you could play in Jim and Jesse's band, you could play in Jimmy Martin's band, and Don Reno and Red Smiley—Don Reno was the banjo player—Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs—Earl Scruggs was the banjo player—the Osborne Brothers—Sonny Osborne was the banjo player—so there was Bill Monroe, Jim and Jesse, and Jimmy Martin, and that was about it. I just took the first opportunity I got ahold of, and that's where I was. So I wanted to be there, and I did not know what else to do. I finally made up my mind that—and you know, it's not like I really sat down and wrote down a list of plus and minuses or anything, you just sort of flow, and then one day you go, You know, I need to not do this anymore. So I told him I was going to quit, and of course he was “Well, if I'd known you weren't going to stay any longer than this, I wouldn't have hired you,”—that sort of trip. I'm not thick-skinned or anything, but I do know—and I'm not real Bible-oriented—but I do believe the Bible when it says, “And this, too, shall pass.” So if Jimmy Martin is sitting in front of me and he's angry, I knew it wasn't going to last forever. There'll come a last show—I told him, “Just tell me when, and I'll leave.” Anyway, I called my friend, Charles Gardner who I had met at the University of Oklahoma—the geographer—and he was then teaching at Stephen F. Austin—and you may know Stan Alexander, he was the head of the Texas Folklore Society.

AW:

No, but I know Ab Abernathy.

AM:

Ab Abernathy is who I meant.

AW:

Oh yeah, I know him. I have been in Valhalla—I have been in his office, the museum office—yeah, and the East Texas String Ensemble.

AM:

Well, Charles Gardner is the fiddle player.

AW:

Oh, okay, well then I've met Charles. I actually—let's see, what was it—I rode in the Nine Flags over Nacogdoches Parade or something—played a concert—and they were all hanging out at that little store on the square.

AM:

Right, right, Steve Hartz's store.

AW:

Yeah, it was fun.

AM:

Anyway, Charles I knew and I'd kept in touch with—and he'd gone to Stephen F. Austin, was in the geography department, and I told him what I was up to, and he said, "Well, I'll get you a teaching job at the public schools here. I know all the public schools. We'll get you a job here." Well, I knew from my substitute teaching in Nashville that I still was not ready, but I needed a job so I'll give that a try—just sort of dumb "What will I do? Oh no, what will I do?" I wrote a letter to Byron, who was out in California, and I said, "I'm going to quit Jimmy Martin. If there's anything going on out there, let me know. I'd love to come out to California" because Wayne Stewart was going to go to California, and I thought, Well, that will be kind of—that sounds adventurous. So I wrote to—

AW:

Let me know when you get tired here.

AM:

Well, I was wondering, in a few minutes, if you wouldn't give me a ride into the barbeque place and I'll pick up the—

AW:

No problem.

AM:

All right. Well, let's do another ten minutes and then—so I wrote to Byron and said, "Quitting, got anything going out there?" Well, he either called or wrote me back, I can't remember. He says "Oh man, yeah. I'm getting this group together called Country Gazette—me and Roger

Bush are putting it together—would you be interested?” “Yeah, I’d love it.” So I said “That’s what I’ll do. I’ll go to California.”

AW:

This was 1971?

AM:

’71, yeah. But in the meantime, he calls me back—or writes me—probably calls me on the phone—“We’ve got this deal.” Roger and Byron and Kenny Wertz, who were going to be Country Gazette—Herb Pederson—they wanted Herb Pederson, but he didn’t want to do it. He had just left the Dillards and he didn’t want to be in a band again. So Byron told Kenny and Roger, you know, “I’ve got this guy, he’s real good. He’ll be real good. He’s been working with Jimmy Martin and he’ll come out here and do it—this Country Gazette thing.” Well they had been working with the Flying Burrito Brothers, and had recorded an album called *The Last of the Red Hot Burritos*.

AW:

Really?

AM:

Yeah. Roger and Byron and Kenny Wertz—and Kenny played banjo, actually, but he was going to play guitar—and what the Burrito Brothers were doing—were doing their country rock set, and then they would do a set of bluegrass, because Chris Hillman was a bluegrass-er before he was anything else.

AW:

I didn’t know that.

AM:

Yeah. He was in a group with Vern and Rex Gosdin and Don Parmley called The Hillmen out in California, and he played mandolin. So during the Burritos thing he would play mandolin and Byron played fiddle, Kenny would play banjo, and Roger would play bass, and then one of the other band members would play guitar, so they would do a set of bluegrass. Well, *The Last of the Red Hot Burritos* album was that. It was the country rock part, and then they did four or five bluegrass tunes, and then some more country rock stuff. Well, Chris Hillman was quitting and going—here’s my missus.

Kitty Ledbetter (KL):

I’m going to go get the barbecue and get the mail.

AM:

Okay. We were going to go. Let me—can you—

KL:

No, that's okay—no, you guys—

AM:

—get my credit card?

KL:

I got it.

AW:

Oh.

AM:

Okay.

KL:

I know where the money is.

AM:

All right. Thank you, sweetheart.

KL:

You're welcome.

AM:

So Chris Hillman, after the recording of that, was going to leave and go with Stephen Stills, and he was putting together an album and a group called Manassas. Stephen Stills and Al Perkins left to go do that, so the Burrito Brothers now did not exist, but they had all these contracts for appearances in Europe—mostly in Holland. So their management, Eddie Tickner and Jim Dickson—who were also interested in Byron's Country Gazette project—said, "Byron, could you take Rick Roberts, who's left over from the Burrito Brothers, and put together a group called the Flying Burrito Brothers, and if the European promoters will take it, would you go over there and perform as the Flying Burrito Brothers?" "Sure." So Byron said to me, "Here's what we're going to do. We're going to do Country Gazette, but to help get you out here and just to do stuff and make money and move forward, we're going to do this Burrito Brothers thing in Europe. Are you interested?" "Well of course" and he said "Well, you'll have to play electric guitar" — which, I'm not an electric—at that time, for sure, was not—and I said, "I don't own one" and he

said “Well it’s all right, Kenny Wertz has a Fender Telecaster you can use,” so “Okay.” They sent me some reel-to-reel tapes of their shows, and I would rehearse with it in Nashville. And then I left Nashville, drove back to Oklahoma in a 1961 Buick LeSabre that had a front wheel nut—you know, axle nut—welded on.

AW:

So if you had a flat—?

AM:

If I had a flat, I was fucked. So I got back home, and I had the same—I had a new band, I had a different banjo, I didn’t have my guitar anymore because I had to sell it, I had the same clothes, and I didn’t have three hundred dollars anymore. So that was my Nashville experience.

AW:

That’s like—what was this—I interviewed this guy—in fact, I’ll think of his name in just a second, Stuart—maybe Stuart Anderson—Flying A’s in Austin, nice couple—a guy and his wife. He was in Nashville like eight years, trying to make it as a writer and player, and so I said, “How did it all work out?” and he said—he stopped, and you hear this long pause, and he said “You know, a lot of good things could have happened.”

AM:

That’s a good way to—the possibilities are endless.

AW:

So you get there—how did you get out to California?

AM:

Well, this is interesting—or so it seems to me. I actually just drove as far as Oklahoma, and Byron had come back to Oklahoma for Christmas, and so he and I flew from Oklahoma City to New York City and met the rest of the band there. That’s the first time I met the band.

AW:

As you’re on your way to Europe.

AM:

To the first gig—it’s sort of like playing with Jimmy Martin. The first Jimmy Martin gig I ever saw, I was on. So we got there and oddly enough, the drummer was a guy also from Norman—and his name in Norman was Eric Chastain, or Milton Chastain—he changed it—or Milton Sanders. He was a very flexible guy. At this point his name was Eric Dalton, and he had gone out to California with a band from Norman, and was out there and Byron ran into him somewhere

and recruited him for this gig. So it was Byron Berline played fiddle, Roger Bush played bass—electric bass and upright—and a guy—oh, I'll think of him in a minute—played steel guitar—he wasn't particularly good, he was just sort of a beginner—and mandolin—and then Eric Dalton was the drummer, and then the singer and the head honcho guy was a guy named Rick Roberts, who was from Florida and was the last of the Red Hot Burritos. He was on that.

AW:

So he wasn't on the beginning of the—

AM:

No, no. He was not. So Rick Roberts—and he went on to play with a group called Firefall in the seventies and had a hit or two.

AW:

Oh really? I don't remember.

AM:

Yeah, and I always called them "Farfel"

AW:

Farfel.

AM:

You remember the dog on—

AW:

Yeah.

AM:

Farfel. Anyway, that was the Flying Burrito Brothers. So the whole story was, you know, the Bogus Burritos. That was the thing. So we land January 2, 1972 in Amsterdam. I think about this, and you know the war ended in '46, so the years '46 to '56 —twenty-five years after the war, and it had changed a lot I'm sure, but it changed way more in the ten years after 1972, because there were tons and tons and tons of bicycles, whereas by the time—in like 1983, the bicycles had diminished incredibly. Yeah, because people had gone to cars, or they got more streetcars and just more public transportation—but it was really, you know, still kind of Old Europe.

AW:

Did you run into a lot of the American expats over there—music guys like Darrell Adams, and—
?

AM:

I didn't really, no. Who we would run into mostly, if anybody, were you kids over there busking, because we'd be walking down the street, and there'd be a band there banging it out, and we'd talk to them and they'd be from Cleveland, you know. Actually, one of my favorite band names of all time was a band that was over there busking, and the band name was Lukewarm Water—was the name of the band. I always loved it. Anyway, so I met the band in New York City at Kennedy or LaGuardia—whatever airport we flew out of—and got over there, and we stayed at a hotel called the Weichmann, which was run by an expat named Boddy—what was his first name—Teddy. Teddy Boddy, and he was from Colgate, Oklahoma and had married this Dutch woman whose family ran this hotel, and he had stayed over there, had a family, and was a real boisterous good ole boy, drink beer, have a good time kind of guy. So he fit right in with us—with Byron and Roger especially. So I don't remember—back at the museum, there is a red notebook that I wrote down all the dates we played, and they're in there, and I don't remember the first place we played. But the first place we played, I turned the volume on my guitar all the way off, because that was our first rehearsal. That was my first rehearsal. They had rehearsed—and Byron told me to do that, or somebody said “Just turn it off and play,” and I strummed. So that was the first show, and then we'd do the bluegrass thing in the middle, and that was kind of my—what I was there for—and as I learned the tunes, I'd turn a little more volume. Now here's the funniest story of all—and it shows you how just one thing leads to another, and you can't be there if you're not there. So we play, and the last—one of the big last concerts was at the Concertgebouw, or whatever it's—it's the big concert hall in Amsterdam—I mean two hundred, three hundred years old, all the great musics of Europe had been there, and we were playing there. It was recorded, supposedly, for broadcast, but it turns out that the guy—some guy—was going to release it as a record, and our managers basically went and talked to him and said, “Basically, here's the deal. You can get nothing and they're going to put it out, or you can get something and they'll put it out.” So they made a deal and they put it out, and it's called *Live in Amsterdam*, okay, and it's a double album set. It's not worthy.

AW:

But I'd love to hear it anyway.

AM:

Well, it's in—

AW:

Do we have it in the collection?

AM:

Yeah, it's probably there. *Live in Amsterdam*. It's not—I don't think it's very good—not because of the music, necessarily, just the mix. They didn't know what they were doing. So

anyway, I took a couple—by then I was taking some guitar solos—so I maybe took two guitar solos that show up on this record.

AW:

Oh, that's cool.

AM:

Okay.

AW:

So you'd gone from no electric guitar experience to taking a solo.

AM:

Yeah, it's called earn your volume.

AW:

Earn your volume.

AM:

So now, here's—that's 1972, '82, '92, 2002, 2005—so it's thirty-five years since then. There's this book that comes out called *1001 Great Guitarists*, and David Grier—who is a great guitarist—called me and said, "Hey, did you know your name is in this *1001 Great Guitarists*?" and I look, and it's got my name—and the album it cites is *Live in Amsterdam*. It's so weak—it is pitiful.

AW:

Well, that just goes to show, this is such a great synopsis of the music business. Jimmy Martin telling you you're bad when you're good, and the other—

AM:

Telling you you're good when you're bad. Yeah.

AW:

So who knows what it takes to be successful?

AM:

You know, and what it—the instructive part to me is there's no way I could have promoted myself into that book. I couldn't have lobbied.

AW:

Yeah, and someone says, "How'd you get in the book?"

AM:

It's just happenstance. It's one thing leads to another. It's the goofiest thing.

AW:

So did the Dutch think that they got the real Burritos? Were they happy with them?

AM:

You know, they were incredibly happy. They were a really, really generous, warm bunch. It was very cold, they drank a lot of beer, and the music was peppy, and it was American, it was west coast, and it was good enough. Now, the music writers—you know, it was always the "Bogus Burritos," but the audience didn't care. They didn't care so much that we actually went back the next year and did it again. But the next time we went back was with Sneaky Pete on the steel guitar, which was a—talk about a magical experience, that guy was really something. He was overwhelming. When he played, you know, I didn't need to turn my guitar up. It was just stunning. But it was a really great experience; I got to see a lot of Holland, which I dearly loved—really, really, really cold—just as cold as I've ever been in my whole life, cold—a lot of cool experiences and a lot of really great food and nice people, and fun setting up and playing the music, and a lot of goofy, bullshit-y, stupid Dutch stupid, stupid stuff, just because, you know, they weren't hip at all—the technical people. Back then, their instruments were Framus and Hofner, you know, they were all these, I guess, German stuff—and it was really low-level. You saw the Beatles, what they came over with—that was what they had.

AW:

And we all went out and bought—

AM:

Yeah, because you thought that was cool. But it was a—you know, they were way behind the times, musically, sound system-wise—but they caught up real quick. The next—not the next year—I think the last time we went over there was maybe in '82, so ten years later. By then they had Gibson guitars and good banjos and good PAs and they really hipped up. Europe really came along in my humble, state department opinion.

AW:

Well, after that first time there, did you then come back stateside and be the Country Gazette?

AM:

Basically, yeah, although there were still some Flying Burrito Brother gigs left. So when we

came back from Holland, we played somewhere in upstate New York—maybe Albany or somewhere—on the way back. Then Country Gazette actually had a gig—the first full-fledged just Country Gazette—just Byron and Roger and me and Kenny Wertz—we played at whatever college is in Saint Cloud, Minnesota. We flew from New York and went and did that, and then came back to New York and played somewhere else again in the east—once again, it'd be written down in that book. So we played a couple of gigs there, and then even had one, I think in California, in Long Beach when we got back, and that was the end of that tour—that trip. That's when we just went to being Country Gazette and trying to get gigs. But Eddie Tickner and Jim Dickson, who—Eddie Tickner was a management guy, and Jim Dickson was a record producer—and Dickson just died here, this year. Eddie Tickner died several years ago. But Jim had produced—started back in the fifties and produced Lord Buckley.

AW:

Oh yeah? Oh, I love that stuff.

AM:

Well he produced some Lord Buckley stuff, and he produced some of the early folk music things, and he did, actually—

AW:

That Lord Buckley, that's about as hip as you get. My goodness.

AM:

Oh yeah, he was real—he talked about Lord Buckley quite a bit.

AW:

Yeah, that's right on the edge. I love it.

AM:

Well, he might not have done all of Lord Buckley, but he did some of it. Dickson had recorded and produced the Dillards and Eric Weissberg and Marshall Brickman—and album called New Dimensions in Bluegrass and Banjo—which became, down the line, the album they put Dueling Banjos onto that and then called it Dueling Banjos, but Dickson had produced that. He did the Greenbriar Boys, he did the Hillmen—which was Rex and Vern Gosdin and Chris Hillman and Don Parmely. He did quite a bit of producing on the west coast, and so he was going to be our producer, and I really, really liked him a lot.

AW:

Well, can that—even as a—I guess you weren't quite so naïve after two years of Jimmy Martin,

but as still this young guy, it must have felt good to be in with a crowd that had some good credit.

AM:

Oh yeah, yeah, and it was a whole different world. When you went and recorded in Nashville, they were very, very good—very good—but they did it in a real specific way, which is you went in, they set up microphones in some fashion—and this was all at Bradley's Barn, that's the only place I recorded—they set up some live way, but still with some separation, and you recorded the song from beginning to end.

AW:

Straight up.

AM:

Straight up. So every song that I—all those thirteen songs I did were all done, complete, from beginning to end. If it didn't sound right, we did it again—and we didn't do that very often. And you did—you had three hours and you'd record as much as you could in three hours, then you were out. So when I went to LA, you booked the studio for five or six hours and you tried things and you went back and overdubbed and you did all the artfulness you could, recording technique-wise. So that was a real different experience, and Jim Dickson talked about music in a really different way than Jimmy Martin did—you know, just the importance of music, and the importance of the sound of the music, and the feeling that people got when they heard it—where Jimmy never really talked about what people—he just assumed that if he did it the way he wanted it, people would like it—and he was right. That's one approach. But Dickson talked about it from the listener's side, you know, "Here's what I want to hear."

AW:

Is it D-i-x-o-n, or c-k?

AM:

Oh, that's a good—I think it's D-i-c-k-s-o-n.

AW:

I need to learn more about him.

AM:

Yeah. I looked at Wikipedia—

AW:

You said he'd died, right?

AM:

Yeah, I looked at Wikipedia and he's not there, which is disappointing. If you look under The Byrds, you know B-y-r-d-s—because he produced The Byrds, too—and he's the one that produced "Hey Mister Tambourine Man," although he may not—

AW:

Well Roger McGuinn started off folk and bluegrass.

AM:

Oh yeah, yeah, Dickson knew him from those days. Do you know the Byrds' original name?

AW:

Oh, I knew it at one time. What was it?

AM:

It's The Jet Set.

AW:

The Jet Set.

AM:

They were going to call themselves The Jet Set.

AW:

There's train wrecks that are narrowly averted—that's one of them.

AM:

Right. So Dickson was really, really good, and Eddie Tickner was a real revelation. He was a Jewish fellow who had been an accountant—and he was from Philadelphia. I asked him one day, I said, "What did your dad do?" and he said, "Oh, he was a criminal." I said, "What do you mean?" and he says "Oh, he was a numbers runner in Philadelphia." Eddie had got in accounting and was an accountant for the army—I don't know how he wound up in California, but he had a friend who was in music management, and said, "Eddie, you ever interested in managing somebody?" and he says, "Sure, I'll try," and he says "Well, I've got this black female singer I want you to try. I'll give you her and you can try that," so it was Odetta—So Odetta was his first client, and he just stayed in it—and he was real brutally, sarcastically honest. We'd be sitting there talking to him about what we were up to, and he would just stop and say, "Well, you've got to go now" "Oh, okay," and we'd get up and leave. What he meant is "We've talked about all that we're going to talk about—that we need to talk about—and I've got other stuff to do. You need to go." It wasn't offensive or anything, it was just that way. He came back one day from

meeting with United Artists, who he was negotiating the Country Gazette with—and had already made the deal—and was talking about promotion of the album. He said—here we are at a big table, and they just went around the room and each of these people had a different idea for promoting the album. It got back to Eddie, and says, “What do you think, Eddie?” and he says “Do it all.” He’s just—and he managed—oh, he was with The Byrds’ Clark—who would it have been—Jim Clark—no—not Dave Clark—anyway, the Clark that was with The Byrds who left The Byrds and was a solo—and Eddie had arranged for him to play a place called The Bluebird in Santa Barbara, up the coast. The next day he got a call from the club owner, just screaming at him how awful it was—and this would be—I got out there in ’72—so it’d be ’72 or ’73 at the latest—and he got him fifteen hundred dollars, which is a lot of money out of the old club. The guy was saying he was so stoned and drunk that he could not find his guitar on the stage with him, and then when he did, he couldn’t remember the songs, and he couldn’t get through any song, and just how terrible it was—and Eddie said—I wish I could remember this—Gene—he said, “That’s the Gene Clark Show. You hire Gene Clark, that’s what you get. Thank you very much”—which I thought was just beautiful.

AW:

If you don’t know any better what you’re hiring, don’t do it.

AM:

That’s—and he would do that. He managed, early on, Emmylou Harris and Parsons—he managed Graham Parsons when Graham was going to make his comeback. So he booked him, again, at the Bluebird.

AW:

The people were still talking to him, huh?

AM:

Yeah. Well they—you know, after a while—or it might not have been there; it was some place—called up and said “I understand Graham Parsons is back playing. We’d like to book him.” He said, “Okay, it’s fifteen hundred dollars,” and the guy says, “Well, I don’t think he’s worth that” and Eddie says “Well, he’s not, but that’s what we want.” Another guy called up one time and had this idea for an album, and says, “Eddie, what do you think of this album?” and Eddie says, “That’s a really great idea. Do you mind if I rip you off?” and the guy just “Well I guess it’s okay.” You know, Eddie was just a real straight—you talk about straightforward.

AW:

That must have been such a shock out there that it was probably—people looked up to him.

AM:

Or they thought, Boy, he's weird. He just didn't fuck around. He wound up managing Graham until he managed himself into the ground, then he really—where he really made his money is he managed Emmylou Harris for several years, and she finally dumped him.

AW:

Do you remember what album years those were? I'm trying to relate the—

AM:

Well, whatever her first album was—

AW:

Oh yeah, *If I Could Only Win Your Love*.

AM:

Yeah. That and—to the point where he moved to Nashville. When she moved to Nashville he moved to Nashville. I'd see him in Nashville, and he was always, always very nice—I mean, in his way—he never ever pretended not to know you or any of that kind of bullshit. But he knew who you were and how much time to spend with you.

AW:

How do you spell Tickner?

AM:

T-i-c-k-n-e-r—you know, if you look on Country Gazette records, his name is on there. I called him—I needed to know something one time many years later, and got a phone number for him out in Tucson. He had just turned sixty-five, because he told me he was getting Social Security and Medicare—and seemed to me on the phone, to be very happy to hear from me. I asked a question—the question I needed, which I can't remember—it was about trying to lease those first two Country Gazette records, and who had them and how to go about doing it. He told me as much as he knew. I asked him, "How are you doing?" and he said, "Alan, I'm going to go out—I'm in Tucson, Arizona, I'm going to go out on the golf course here this afternoon, I'm going to really enjoy myself. You know, I'm really enjoying myself on the backs of many, many, many hardworking musicians."

AW:

That is straightforward.

AM:

Well, you know, he never cheated anybody out of anything. He didn't have to. He was just—you

know, he would sign musicians and manage them, and then get their songs with his publishing company, and some of them hit, some of them didn't, and he'd make money on some and wouldn't on others. I mean, he worked the deal. He would get a cut of everything—of all those musicians he booked. I think he managed Linda Ronstadt for a while. He did a lot, a lot of people, and they would always find somebody bigger—some big management thing. He was real—for a certain level of management—and I think he would even dump people, or encourage them to move on if he thought it was more work than he wanted to do. He didn't have like an office and a staff—he may have had a secretary, but I don't even know if he had that. He just did it all.

AW:

So was he always the manager for Country Gazette?

AM:

He was for about three or four years, until it became real clear it wasn't going to go anywhere. It was "Y'all need to decide whether you want to continue as a band or not, without me." Why don't we call that—that's a good—

AW:

Yeah, that's a good place to stop.

AM:

Yeah. 1972 was a real interesting year for me.

AW:

We can—let me shut this off. I've got to remember to tell you, if I haven't told you about one Jimmy Dickens story.

AM:

I've got a good one to tell—let me tell it on the tape here, because it's real indicative of the industry. When I first moved to Nashville, and I would go hang out at this Bobby Green's Dusty Roads Tavern, one of the first characters I met was a guy named—and I remember his name, because his name was T. Moroney.

AW:

T. Moroney?

AM:

T. Moroney—I guess just the letter "T" —and he played bass with Little Jimmy Dickens. He told this story, he says, "You know the Little Jimmy Dickens Band; they all dressed in these really

sharp outfits. So I asked Little Jimmy Dickens, ‘What kind of bass player are you looking for?’ and Little Jimmy Dickens says ‘A forty-two long.’”

AW:

That’s exactly the story I was going to tell you.

AM:

Oh.

AW:

Jimmy Dickens was doing this much later, because I went out to—that’s a great—I love that story, but I went out to Nashville, and I can’t remember why I was there, but I went over to Stephanie Davis’ house—it was a Sunday and she invited me to come over there; we were going to have a guitar pull and potluck—so I went over and it was, you know, everybody brought something to eat except me—I was from out of town, so we were trading songs, and this couple comes in—a guy and a gal—and I got the idea that they were like bluegrass or like Appalachian kind of music—and I cannot think of their names to save myself—but they were laughing as they walked in the door. Everybody had been there for a couple of hours—they had flown in—and everybody says, “What’s so funny? You’re having a good time” and they had run in to Jimmy Dickens in the airport, needed a bass player—

AM:

Same story, thirty, forty years later.

AW:

Same story, exactly. They said “What kind do you need?” he told them—

AM:

— “Forty-two long.”

AW:

Oh this is great. This makes the Jimmy Dickens story even better.

AM:

Yeah, I know. It’s a standard—and I’m sure it was probably true in Ernest Tubbs’s band and Hank Williams—or whoever, you know—they needed a guitar player, but they needed them to fit.

AW:

Right, in more ways than one.

AM:

Yeah. It's a funny ole world.

AW:

All right, we'll stop there. That's a good one to stop on.

End of interview



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