

**Oral History Interview of
Sylvia Holmes**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
June 13, 2014
Abilene, Texas**

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

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library**

15th and Detroit | 806.742.3749 | <http://swco.ttu.edu>

Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by Sylvia Holmes on June 13, 2014. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

This oral history transcript is protected by U.S. copyright law. By viewing this document, the researcher agrees to abide by the fair use standards of U.S. Copyright Law (1976) and its amendments. This interview may be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes only. Any reproduction or transmission of this protected item beyond fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the Southwest Collection. Please contact Southwest Collection Reference staff for further information.

Preferred Citation for this Document:

Holmes, Sylvia Oral History Interview, June 13, 2014. Interview by June 13, 2014, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses almost 6000 oral history interviews dating back to the late 1940s. The historians who conduct these interviews seek to uncover the personal narratives of individuals living on the South Plains and beyond. These interviews should be considered a primary source document that does not implicate the final verified narrative of any event. These are recollections dependent upon an individual's memory and experiences. The views expressed in these interviews are those only of the people speaking and do not reflect the views of the Southwest Collection or Texas Tech University.

Technical Processing Information:

The Audio/Visual Department of the Southwest Collection is the curator of this ever-growing oral history collection and is in the process of digitizing all interviews. While all of our interviews will have an abbreviated abstract available online, we are continually transcribing and adding information for each interview. Audio recordings of these interviews can be listened to in the Reading Room of the Southwest Collection. Please contact our Reference Staff for policies and procedures. Family members may request digitized copies directly from Reference Staff.

Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

<http://swco.ttu.edu/Reference/policies.php>

Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 44.1kHz/ 16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Andy Wilkinson

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Paul Doran

Editor(s): Walter Nicolds

Interview Series Background:

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

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Sylvia Holmes. Holmes discusses her career in radio broadcasting in various cities in West Texas.

Length of Interview: 02:03:18

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Biographical information and youth	13	00:10:14
The Pasadena Playhouse	30	00:25:58
Working at KDUB Lubbock	36	00:31:13
Working at KNIT Abilene	44	00:38:03
Working as a "Radio Wife" at WHFE New Orleans	45	00:39:13
Sid Holmes and <i>The Cavaliers</i>	51	00:45:45
Working at WHHM, Elvis' Station	61	00:53:36
Living with Brother Dave Gardner and Miss Millie	83	01:19:05
Move to property outside Tennyson, Texas	94	01:32:01
Working at KWFR San Angelo	99	01:37:29
Hong Kong Flu lead to working at KTXS Abilene	101	01:39:47
<i>The Texas Tumbleweed</i> story	113	01:55:17

Keywords

Pasadena Playhouse, KDUB, Elvis Presley, Brother Dave Gardner, KTXS, Sid Holmes and the Cavaliers

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

As you can see, it's got view meters on it, and I'm recording stereo now at twenty-four bit and forty-eight k.

Sylvia Holmes (SH):

Wow.

AW:

Yeah, and I'll set it right here.

SH:

You can just sit it right there and we can talk?

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

SH:

Unbelievable.

AW:

And I can watch the meters, so if it's not picking up I can move it, or I can turn it up a little bit and it records to a little SD card, so you can pop the SD card out, stick it in your computer and copy it right onto your computer.

SH:

See this is way beyond me, because I got out before I learned this stuff. Every year it's something different.

AW:

Oh yeah, it is something different.

SH:

I can't believe that.

AW:

No you can't.

SH:

Gosh.

AW:

It moves so quickly now.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

But it's so handy, and especially for the interviewing that we do, because you know from being in the business that when you put a microphone in front of some people, they panic.

SH:

Right.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Right.

AW:

Well they forget about this, you just lay it on the table and after a while they don't even think about it.

SH:

Yeah, and they just get real comfortable about it and everything's good.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

That's great.

AW:

I need to make—

SH:

So you go around and record people that are in the music business, or radio, or what?

AW:

Well we do lots of different of business—I'm going to borrow this stool over here.

SH:

Oh sure.

AW:

Just set the recorder a little closer to you. Well our archive is at the university—and I'm going to move this close enough, but far enough so that Sherlock and for the recorder that's Sherlock the great Pyrenees, in case he wants to go outside—we have in our archive, which began about the same time the university did with the collection of the Espuela Land & Cattle Company ranching records. So we started with that, and then over the years we've been building up things in a number of different areas. One of them would make sense of course would be ranching since we started with ranching records, and we have now a huge collection of ranching records. We also began to collect records of our local culture, and by local I mean in the Southwest, so that we have one great example that you would know something about is the Minter Hardware Store [Minter's Dry Goods] from Abilene.

SH:

Oh yes, yes.

AW:

We have a hundred years' worth of their legers. Of course most of them done in the early years in pencil.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

So if you wanted to know what a pound of nails cost in 1921, well you could figure it out by going to look at that. So those are the kinds of things we're interested in is what is the—not so interested in the headline news of the time, but what's page two, the kinds of things that it's going to be hard for a researcher to go back and find out if they're interested in a time period, or a place, or an event. So along with that we've developed some other interests. We have a great collection of writers, Elmer Kelton for instance, you'll remember him from the San Angelo as well, he—

SH:

That name's not familiar.

AW:

Well Elmer wrote a number of—he worked for the Livestock Weekly for many, many years. And then he wrote a lot of novels, *The Time It Never Rained*, and *The Good Old Boys*, *The Good*

Old Boys became a movie with Tommy Lee Jones later on. So we have his papers, but some ten years ago, twelve years ago, we began to concentrate also in the music and arts, because as you well know, our part of the world has lots and lots of musicians and artists who come from here. And I was in the music business as a singer and songwriter and was interested in doing some of this work, so I got a chance to come to work for the university to do what I'm doing today, which is get to record oral history interviews from people in the arts. The oral history review is something that we really like to get, because it allows you to tell your story in your own words, and in your own voice, and so that a hundred years from now, two hundred years from now, somebody can hear you talking about—

SH:

Well, yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I can see how that would be interesting.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I only wish they'd started it a hundred years ago.

AW:

I do too.

SH:

But then we didn't have this technology then.

AW:

No we didn't.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

We didn't have tape recorders—

SH:

No.

AW:

Until the Second World War.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

We had wire recorders and other things.

SH:

See I remember when my brother and I were young, we played on a wire recorder, I remember it.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah, and they were kind of cumbersome and although actually the sound quality is pretty surprisingly good.

SH:

Yeah

AW:

We still have wire recorders at our archive so that we can—

SH:

Really?

AW:

Listen to the wires that we might get in. One of the things that we do with analogue tape, when we come across it now, we digitize it. We take it to our lab and if it's not in good condition, we bake it so that the coating doesn't come off when you run it through the tape recorder.

SH:

Oh.

AW:

And then we convert it to digital information, so that it's easier for researchers to listen to, and it's preserved, a digital copy as you may know is—back in the days when we were copying tape to tape—

SH:

Yes.

AW:

Every time you'd copy, you'd lose a certain amount of fidelity.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

And that's not the case with digital, there's no—

SH:

Yeah I guess that's one of the greatest things that's happened is the digital, but that's a shame for me, because I'm a collector, I save everything.

AW:

Do you?

SH:

And I had copies of all of my shows and people that I interviewed and all, but like in television, it went from two inch, to one inch, to three-quarter, to one and a half, and I ended up with not having anything, because it never got transferred again.

AW:

Oh really?

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

So do you have any of that left at all, in any format?

SH:

No.

AW:

Oh gosh. We collect old machines so that if we come on to a piece of tape that's from a particular format, then the odds are pretty good that we can play it.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

And if we can't play it, we have sources around the country we'll ship the tape to and have them play and digitize.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah and I know in the TV world especially it's bad, because they were pretty quick to record over things.

SH:

Oh yes, yes, yeah because tape was expensive.

AW:

Very expensive.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah, but that brings up another good point—in our archive we like to supplement the interviews that we do with physical materials like photographs, letters, journals, business records, any and all kinds of things, that again in a couple of hundred years from now when someone's studying

on-air personalities for instance in the twentieth century, well they're going to be interested in you, because not only did you have a long and good career, you were a woman having that long good career, when there weren't that many women doing it.

SH:

I know, yeah.

AW:

Yeah, and so you'd be particularly interesting. Well they'll want to know well what did you make in 1974, and where you were at, and how'd that compare to what else was going on, what were the other things that were happening. And so we collect every little bit of scrap we can about a person's life, and their career, and their work, and we put it all in one collection so that it can be accessed by researchers. We have protections over intellectual material, you don't give up your intellectual property, for instance, by putting an archive with us, but it's there for people to study who are interested in that. So that's what we're doing, and let me preface the tape by saying, because we just started talking, and now nobody's knows what it is. Let's see, this is the twelfth, I want to make sure—June 12, 2014, Andy Wilkinson with Sylvia Holmes in her beautiful home on the Lake Fort Phantom Hill, just north of Abilene, and the giant white great Pyrenees Sherlock Holmes sitting right here with us. So that's what we're doing, and when we finish up I'm going to ask you to sign a release that says, "Yes, people can listen to your interview."

SH:

Of course, of course.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

I knew you'd understand that—

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Because of your business.

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
So if you don't mind, I'd like to—well, one other little housekeeping thing—

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
Joe Specht, you know Joe?

SH:
Oh yes, yes.

AW:
Joe and I are going to have lunch when all this is over, and we're inviting you if you'd like to join us, so be thinking about that, but I was doing what reading I could on you and I saw that you were born in Winters.

SH:
Yes.

AW:
Graduated from Kermit High School.

SH:
That's correct.

AW:
Before we get too far, and I know this is not polite to ask a lady—

SH:
Oh my age?

AW:
Her birthday.

SH:
Let me tell you an interesting thing about age—when you're young, you don't want anybody to

know what you're age is, I mean as you're getting to your twenties, your thirties. But oddly enough, when you get into the sixties, seventies, and eighties, especially in the eighties, you start to want people to—well guess how old I am?

AW:

Okay.

SH:

Well, I'm eighty-two years old.

AW:

You don't look it, you don't look it at all.

SH:

Thank you.

AW:

What's your date of birth?

SH:

Two-five-thirty-two, I'm Aquarius, which fits in well with what I do.

AW:

Yes it does.

SH:

Which is a little bit of everything.

AW:

And you were born in Winters?

SH:

Yes.

AW:

Yeah, now what did your folks do, why were they in Winters, what was the family?

SH:

I've always wondered that.

AW:

Oh really?

SH:

They weren't in Winters, I figured it out.

AW:

Oh.

SH:

They were in Bradshaw.

AW:

Bradshaw?

SH:

Which is a small town close—I'm thinking that—

AW:

Winters is pretty small, it's smaller than—so it's north toward Abilene, isn't it, Bradshaw?

SH:

Well I'm just guessing, I don't know, I was just guessing that. I know they worked for a while in Bradshaw, I do not know what they were doing there at the time, I never asked about it, but it seems that Winters didn't have a hospital, I don't know where I'm getting this, so they went from Bradshaw to the hospital in Winters.

AW:

Okay.

SH:

That's what I'm thinking I got, but I had some old pictures that I saw when I was a little girl in Bradshaw. But my father was in the grocery business.

AW:

Oh, okay.

SH:

And an interesting thing, a couple things that are interesting about my father—he really was born to be a musician, a classical musician.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
I don't know where he got this love, but he had the finest collection of classical music. Even as just my father, he was a very brilliant person, but his family was in the grocery business here in Abilene, and when the father died, he had to quit school—well, not quit school so much as go to college and go into the grocery business. Now my father was the youngest member of the Hardin-Simmons band.

AW:
Really?

SH:
Yeah, and all that was interesting, but anyway, he still maintained his love of music, but the grocery business was what he was in.

AW:
What was the name of the grocery store?

SH:
Well I think it was Holmes' Red and White here in Abilene. Later on when we moved to Kermit, it was the Holmes Food Store, "No Place Like Holmes," I remember that, and it was just a little small—

AW:
So naming your dog Sherlock Holmes, this is a family tradition.

SH:
It's a family tradition, that's correct. But anyway, in Kermit it was a very interesting place, in that—

AW:
You would have been there when Kermit was really booming.

SH:
Absolutely.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Yes, absolutely.

AW:
Some told me it was the toughest town in Texas for a while.

SH:
What was so interesting was seeing the lights at night when the flares were going when you'd drive from Odessa to Kermit. We had never lived in a town like Kermit, and it was really new, and it was the most fortunate thing for my brother and I, to have gone to school in a small town where it was so rich, the school itself was so rich because of the oil wells, that they had the finest of teachers.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
And it was a wonderful place, I'll never forget and will always love Kermit, Texas for what it was. Nobody was bigger or smaller, everybody was the same, people lived out in the outer areas with houses, all these oil companies had houses for them and everything, and there was only one rich person and he was—now I'm going to forget his name, but anyway—Walton, yeah, very well-known person, he owned all the land and of course very rich. I remember that his son, his young son, the limousine brought him to school.

AW:
Wow. When did you move to Kermit from Winters, were you [inaudible]?

SH:
Oh gosh, we were in Fort Worth for a while. Daddy was working it seemed like just—remember now, this is during the war, and I believe that daddy was working in someplace that had to do with defense I remember. But he got back into the grocery business by going to Kermit.

AW:
So did you start school in Kermit?

SH:
No, I spent the earlier years in Fort Worth.

AW:

Okay, yeah.

SH:

Until I guess I was a sophomore—no, no I was a freshman, the last four years—we weren't in Kermit all that long.

AW:

But for you high school years.

SH:

Very important years.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But the interesting thing about daddy was that he was of the old school of hard work, and he built this little small grocery store. It was so successful that he had the first supermarket in West Texas.

AW:

Really?

SH:

Yes.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And back then, they didn't have meat that was wrapped, and I remember we had this grand opening, and he had a—I guess this is called a frozen food building that went along with it, and it actually had meat that was cut up and wrapped and everything, I just remember it. And I was just going to school, I didn't pay that much attention—

AW:

Sure.

SH:

To it.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But it was kind of like something new, the beginning of a different kind of a grocery store.

AW:

Yeah, oh yeah that's really interesting. So that was in Kermit, this first supermarket?

SH:

The first grocery store that belonged to us, because before that it was the family, but he was on his own.

AW:

What was your father's name?

SH:

Sidney Holmes.

AW:

S-i-d—

SH:

S-i-d-n-e-y.

AW:

So your brother was named—

SH:

Junior.

AW:

And I also forgot to ask if your brother is older—

SH:

He's my older brother, he's two years older.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

AW:

Two years older.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Now do you have any other siblings?

SH:

No.

AW:

And do you have a middle name?

SH:

No I don't.

AW:

Oh cool.

SH:

No.

AW:

That's easy.

SH:

I don't know why they didn't name me, but Sid didn't have a middle name either—well actually, yeah it was daddy's name—I don't know if daddy had a middle name, most people do, but I didn't.

AW:

And your mother, what was her maiden name?

SH:

McMahon.

AW:

M-c—

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

M-c-M-a-h-o-n.

AW:

H-o-n.

SH:

I know it doesn't sound like this, it looks like it should be MacMahon.

AW:

No, no, we have a lot of McMahons in my part of the world.

SH:

Oh really?

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah, and what was her first name?

SH:

Betty Rose.

AW:

Betty Rose.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

T-t-y?

SH:

Yes.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

AW:

My mother's name was Betty.

SH:

And she was from the South, from Mobile, Alabama.

AW:

Oh really? How did they meet, do you know?

SH:

Well Abilene seems to be the home of all the Holmes, and the McMahons had moved here from Mobile, and back then you had big families, and there were I think six or seven in each family and I'm not sure where they met, but the first time he saw her, he said that's the girl I'm going to marry, and he did.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Some of the interesting people—Tom McMahon was an attorney, and he was known as the judge in Abilene, he was very well known and famous in a sense if you can call it, I mean to the point when he died his picture was on the front page.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

That's Tom McMahon, very, very important in Abilene, and then his brother was Jack, and Jack is the father of Susie. But you didn't get to meet Susie, did you?

AW:

No, I didn't.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Oh you mean Susie Lang?

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
Oh yeah.

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
Okay that Susie, yeah.

SH:
That Susie, yeah.

AW:
Oh yeah, I know her well.

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
Yeah, I stay in her house when we go down to—

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
Okay.

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
So now I'm figuring out how all the family's connected, well this is great.

SH:
Yeah, anyway then there was Mary Ellen. She's married to Carl Shultz, and they were in the oil business, he was geologist. And all of them had money, I mean they were well fixed and educated and everything—really from a nice family, and the same thing on my grandmother's

side. Now the father had died earlier as I'd mentioned, and one of the daughters—I forget which one was the first female to graduate from Hardin-Simmons, but anyway, Abilene has been pretty much where all the family is, except Jack went to Ohio, but anyway.

AW:

Right, that's where Susie grew up, right?

SH:

Yes.

AW:

Yeah, right.

SH:

That's where she grew up.

AW:

Right.

SH:

And—trying to think—Oh, an interesting thing that the house that my grandmother lived in is one of those that has the sign on it that says it's a special house that—

AW:

Oh like a historical marker?

SH:

Yeah, it was a historical marker.

AW:

Oh really?

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

It was built—Sears & Roebuck—it came in parts.

AW:

Oh yeah.

SH:

Actually Sears & Roebuck.

AW:

Yeah, yeah those are really interesting houses, you ordered them from the catalogue—

SH:

Yes, it was the catalogue.

AW:

Then put them together, yeah.

SH:

Yes it was the catalogue.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

It's on 8th & Mulberry, and it was a large house and it's still there.

AW:

Is it still there?

SH:

Oh yeah.

AW:

8th & Mulberry?

SH:

8th & Mulberry.

AW:

Good.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Think I'm going to drive by.

SH:

Yeah and they did a terrible thing recently, and I didn't think they could do this, they painted it yellow, it was a white house, but they painted it yellow and just ruined it. And I thought that when you had a historical house you couldn't change things.

AW:

Yeah I thought there were regulations about what you could do to it.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Especially the outside.

SH:

But anyway, then from Kermit we moved to San Angelo, and in San Angelo daddy did something else interesting in the grocery business—he created the first drive-in grocery store.

AW:

Really?

SH:

I'm saying this now, I mean I don't know how true this is, but there was no 7-Eleven.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

What he did was he cooked barbeque and beans, and it was actually a drive-in and you could be waited on. They'd come out and ask what you wanted—milk, or bread, or whatever—but anyway he sold beer, and the barbeque and beef, and it was really popular.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

You can imagine in San Angelo.

AW:

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

SH:

Especially on the weekends, and so it was so popular that he put one of the other side of town. So here was the name.

AW:

Yeah, what is the name?

SH:

The name is because he opened at seven in the morning and closed at ten, so his stores were called the 7-10 stores.

AW:

That's pretty interesting.

SH:

Yeah I think that's maybe where they later on came up with it, but he—

AW:

Where was that first one in San Angelo? Where was the location, do you remember?

SH:

Oh no.

AW:

Oh.

SH:

I don't remember, I know one was on one side of town, and one was on the other side of town.

AW:

Well and were you even living with them in San Angelo, or had you gone to college by then.

SH:

Okay.

AW:

Because I remember reading that you went to the—

SH:

Yes, I went to The Pasadena Playhouse, okay.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Alright here's what happened there—I had graduated from high school and I didn't want to go to college, there was just something in me that—well one of the things I asked my mother, I know this may—[phone rings] We'll just let it ring—

AW:

But you can answer if you like.

SH:

No I'd rather not.

AW:

Okay.

SH:

Anyway—I get so many phone calls I'm going to tell you, in fact earlier before you came, I got a free trip somewhere.

AW:

Oh yeah, right.

SH:

But you know what I'm talking about. But anyway—where was I—Oh, I was talking about I asked my mother, I said—[answering machine starts talking and dog barks] I forgot to tell you he—Sherlock—I didn't know what that was, well I thought it was selling me something, but that's a bad thing, when the phone rings he barks—Sherlock, you're showing off—but anyway, I asked my mother, I said, “Do I have to get married and have kids?”

AW:

So what'd she say?

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

No, but I think it startled her. You got to remember that back then that's what you did.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Women did not have careers.

AW:

So you graduated in 1950?

SH:

1950, yes.

AW:

Yeah. No women didn't have careers except in the home career.

SH:

Yes, exactly right.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And I wanted to do something, but I didn't know what. To be honest with you, I couldn't sing, I couldn't dance. I knew I had some talent, but I didn't know what it was.

AW:

And you'd grown up in a house listening to a lot of music it seems like.

SH:

Absolutely. Yeah, and so I just didn't know what I wanted to do. Well, I thought that I wanted to be an actress. This is what everybody wants to be at that age.

AW:

Well, and as I saw younger pictures of you, you look like an actress.

SH:

Oh, thank you.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

AW:

You did, I mean you had the look of that day in particular.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Did you do any acting in high school?

SH:

Oh yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Just your normal—yeah, oh yeah, I was very into all that acting. But so anyway, *Photoplay* Magazine was the big magazine back then, in those days, and of course movies back then were different than they are today. I wouldn't want to be in a movie today. But back then they were different, they were romantic and they were beautiful and all that. But this magazine had a contest, and it was to win a scholarship to The Pasadena Playhouse, that's how I knew about The Pasadena Playhouse.

AW:

Okay.

SH:

And so I entered the contest, and my family drove me to Dallas. I did an audition there, and I found out later that I actually won in the state of Texas. They had winners from the states, then they had a one winner than won, and it wasn't me of course. But that really surprised me because all the people that were auditioning had coaches and I knew nothing.

AW:

You showed up to be yourself.

SH:

Yeah, I was just me, and so that made me want to go, and daddy, he said if you want to do something—get educated about it, learn everything you can about it. So I remember that we all worked of course, and I saved my money and then they sent me to The Pasadena Playhouse, and that's how I got there and the reason I got there.

AW:

That's great, so now your father was not opposed to it?

SH:

No, no, of course it's kind of odd that his kids turned out to be rock and roll—

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And a disc jockey, and here he is with all this fabulous music that he plays.

AW:

Now I would guess since Sid is a couple of years older than you, that he was already playing music probably—was he not in—

SH:

No, no he wasn't.

AW:

He wasn't—

SH:

No.

AW:

In Kermit?

SH:

No.

AW:

Really?

SH:

No, I will tell you the story on that.

AW:

Oh that is interesting, yeah.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

It is, how he became a musician, the way he went to New Mexico Military Institute.

AW:

In Las Cruces?

SH:

Yes.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

His first year of college, and then he was drafted. I remember that when I was in San Angelo, he was in the service, he was in Korea?

AW:

Yeah, Korea.

SH:

Yeah, yeah, and so anyway I went to Pasadena Playhouse, and this was a real cultural shock for me.

AW:

Oh yeah.

SH:

I'm a real—I don't know, I'm just not a forward-type person, I'm not an extrovert.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And to be in this business, you have to be an extrovert, and I was thrown in with all these people—

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

That were extroverts.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But anyway, they also had a television department too, so I learned how to fence, I was educated into the arts, the history of acting, and music, and it was really quite interesting.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And a lot of famous people came out of The Pasadena Playhouse.

AW:

Oh yeah. No it's a well-known spot, and that's why I was so interested to see that on the information in your résumé about growing up, how you'd gotten from Kermit to The Pasadena Playhouse.

SH:

Yeah, do you remember The Show of Shows, a television program?

AW:

Oh yeah.

SH:

Okay.

AW:

I watched it.

SH:

Really?

AW:

Oh yeah.

SH:

Oh great, well I'm glad that you understand some of this stuff that a younger person, they would not know what I'm talking about. Well it just so happens that the director of The Show of Shows was the director of the television department at Pasadena Playhouse.

AW:

Do you remember his name, because I bet I would recognize it if I heard it.

SH:

Oh gosh.

AW:

Well did that help get you into television?

SH:

Yes, he took me under his—the reason he was there, he had a heart attack, he had to leave, he could no longer direct.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And he really took me under his wing and taught me everything, and—what was his—oh, gosh I can't remember—but anyway he felt that television was what I should get into.

AW:

Well what a great time, because television was really coming into its own—

SH:

Yes.

AW:

About then.

SH:

Yes.

AW:

Yeah.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

And one of the things that I remember is that the cameras were real tiny on the tripods, and they were very little, I've got a picture packed up that I can show you of the television set, and it went from that to huge, and now it's back to small.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

It just kind of made a circle around.

AW:

Yeah, I don't think I've ever seen a picture of an older camera that was small.

SH:

Oh really?

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Yeah you're thinking—

AW:

I'm used to those big ones that—

SH:

Yeah, well this one maybe it was just because they were using it, but no I remember the first cameras at KTXS [Said: K - Texas] were huge, yeah.

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

SH:

But anyway, I graduated. I went two years, I graduated, and I came back and about now I'm finding out that you have to have a job in order to get rolls—in other words if you're in Hollywood and you're looking for roles, you have to make money on the side, and I stopped at KLBK in Lubbock, Texas, which is now K—

AW:
KDUB.

SH:
It was—yes, you remember KDUB?

AW:
Well, my house we moved from Slaton to Lubbock in 1953, and our little house was across a very large open field from where they built KDUB, and we watched it being built.

SH:
Oh my God.

AW:
And the minute it was finished, my dad went out and bought a television set. He worked at a cotton oil mill—

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
Which was down the road.

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
So I was watching KDUB from—

SH:
Oh my gosh.

AW:
Wasn't it—no it was KCDB that had the "Hey, Bud, what you looking at?", channel eleven, because KDUB was channel—

SH:
I don't remember.

AW:
Thirteen.

SH:
Oh yes it was.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Thirteen.

AW:
Dub Rogers.

SH:
That does make sense. Dub Rogers.

AW:
KDUB, so—

SH:
Named for KDUB, yeah.

AW:
So when did you go to KLBK?

SH:
I'm trying to figure out the year and I can't remember, it would be like '57.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
'56, or '57.

AW:
When did you graduate—

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

That's what I can't remember.

AW:

From Pasadena?

SH:

See I don't—

AW:

Okay.

SH:

Okay I didn't know what I could have gotten all that, but I didn't—

AW:

Oh that's alright, we can always figure that out.

SH:

But I didn't know you were going to go into all this—I had made a list of all the things, but here's the interesting thing—a lady named Misty was the disc jockey.

AW:

Oh yeah, I knew Misty.

SH:

You knew Misty?

AW:

Oh yes, yeah.

SH:

Now I think she was the first female disc jockey, I may be wrong, but I think she was.

AW:

No I think you're right.

SH:

And I was fascinated, absolutely fascinated by this lady.

AW:

She had this wonderful low voice.

SH:

Yes.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And the station had the radio station together, so naturally the thing that I did, I got to meet everybody and I learned from people.

AW:

Was Bob Hoddle still there? He had a children's show called Cowboy Bob Hoddle.

SH:

I believe so, that sounds familiar.

AW:

Yeah we little kids thought that was a big deal, because he would have us on—

SH:

What I thought was fascinating was they had a cafeteria there.

AW:

Oh really?

SH:

Yeah, I mean this is a big deal, a station that has a cafeteria. But they had a food show too, which you could actually eat at the cafeteria at KDUB. I was impressed, but then I realized, "Well wait a minute, this is what I'll do, I'll be a nighttime disc jockey and then I'll have my days free.

AW:

Oh, well before you go to the disc jockey—

SH:

Okay.

AW:

What were you doing at KDUB, what was your job?

SH:

Besides sitting on cars and opening to refrigerator doors?

AW:

Yeah, so you were Vanna White?

SH:

Yeah, I was doing that, I really was. But I also did some work for, I'm not sure, but I think it was in the—well, what is the department that has money?

AW:

Like finance or advertising?

SH:

I really forget.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I wasn't impressed, I just did it.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I learned how to do it, but—

AW:

Accounting, or—

SH:

Accounting, that's what I'm—

AW:

Yeah.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

That was—

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I can't remember—

AW:

Yeah. Well so, and let me ask you this, because again, I've seen photographs—

SH:

Where did you see these photographs?

AW:

Well there's some on the web, there's a picture of you on the cover of the album with—

SH:

Pete Fountain.

AW:

Pete Fountain, and you're just gorgeous and had the look, so that could have been a help, but was it a hindrance to get people to take you serious as to do work in the business besides opening doors and pointing to refrigerators?

SH:

I never—That's interesting you should bring that up, because I don't remember ever being pretty.

AW:

Really?

SH:

Oh, no.

AW:

Well you need to get your memory checked.

SH:

Well I've looked back, I went through some of my stuff and I said well gosh I was pretty.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I didn't know it, I was natural, now let's face it—I am not so pretty as I am photogenic, that makes a difference. Some people look better than others when they take pictures.

AW:

Right, and some people that are pretty don't take a very good picture.

SH:

They don't show up as much, but I never thought of that as being a hindrance.

AW:

Well I just wondered if it type cast—

SH:

Oh yeah, I wasn't that person.

AW:

Type cast you for here's a beautiful girl can sit on the hood of the car—

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

As opposed to here's a woman who can be an on-air personality, or do the other things you might have been interested in doing as well. I just wonder because of the time, the era, because I kind of can remember the first women that they let on local news shows and weather and things and it was much later, twenty years after that.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Yeah. You know, I never really thought of myself as being prejudiced against because I was a female.

AW:

Really?

SH:

I never did.

AW:

That's very interesting, yeah.

SH:

I never resented men having more money in the business, a lot of people did. I always felt like they deserved to make more.

AW:

Oh really?

SH:

Yes, because they're the man of the house and they had a lot of more responsibility.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And it just didn't bother me and to tell you the truth, I love men. I really appreciate them and they're my best friends, I really do. I don't have a lot of girlfriends. But I really like them, and they liked me.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And so I got along real well with everybody. But that was the interesting thing, I was able to get along with the women too.

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

SH:

I was friends with everybody.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I was very friendly.

AW:

Well that's cool. Well so here you meet Misty, and you get this idea, "Well I could work at night, and work at the daytime." Where did you start in radio?

SH:

Well I'm fixing to go there.

AW:

Good.

SH:

It's the next trip. I wasn't there for a very long time.

AW:

At KDUB just a short while?

SH:

I heard that at KNIT in Abilene, Texas.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Slim Willet, does that name—

AW:

Oh yeah.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Alright it was Slim Willet's station.

AW:
"Don't Let The Stars Get In Your Eyes."

SH:
Yeah, exactly. Anyway, it was his station and they hired girls. So I went there and Andy, I've got to tell you this—in going through this, I never really had done it before, but for you I was trying to find out exactly what all I did, and how I did, and when I did it, and it seem liked the doors just opened to me, I am just so fortunate.

AW:
Wow, yeah.

SH:
I mean really, I go to KDUB, and I'm hired; I go to KNIT, I'm hired. Now here, you're going to love this story, this is a great story. I'm at KNIT and I'm not doing anything just the time and temperature, that's all they did, it was a daytime station and all that. But, there's this magazine called *Broadcasting* which I'm sure you're familiar with, and that's where all the ads are—you put an ad in there to find another job, and I was happy doing what I was doing, learning. That was the main thing I was trying to learn everything I can. And I came up with an ad as a joke, and I remember the engineer said, "Oh, put it in!" And I said, "No, no." It's a dollar ten cents I think, I put it in.

AW:
So what did the ad say for the joke?

SH:
I'm sure I've got it somewhere; I remember it said "Employed - not looking, unless you're looking for—" and I don't remember, but it was clever.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
It was clever and I did put it in there, and my gosh I got an offer.

AW:
Really?

SH:
Right away, and it said if you're interested in moving to a southern metropolitan station, send your tape and résumé to—and I forget where it was, but so I sent it in. This was a joke, so I sent it in and they called me up and they asked me how much money did I want to move to New Orleans, Louisiana.

AW:
Really?

SH:
My gosh, I couldn't believe it.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
So anyway I was making fifty dollars a week.

AW:
In Abilene.

SH:
In Abilene. So I said, "Well, if I doubled it that would be great", so I said a hundred. And I found out later I could have said a lot more, because they were paying pretty good salaries. So anyway, what it turned out to be—now, you seem to know everybody—do you remember Connie B. Gay? He was a famous producer.

AW:
G-e—

SH:
G-a-y.

AW:
G-a-y, yeah.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

He was a producer, he owned radio stations, I don't know. He was from Nashville and he did a lot of things, and this was his new station. He had a bunch of stations, and he created this station and he called it WHFE, and that stood for your radio wife.

AW:

Yeah, because you would pronounce it "wife".

SH:

Right, exactly.

AW:

W-H-F-E.

SH:

And the whole idea was it would be three pretty, single, young ladies as radio wives, they would be the disc jockeys, and they would be dressed in costume all the time.

AW:

So if you went out to do a personal experience you had a particular look.

SH:

You had an outfit.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And we had all these different outfits.

AW:

It's kind of like Southwest Airlines and the—

SH:

Yeah, we had a working outfit and we had a black and white outfit I remember, but for night when we went to cocktail parties we wore white satin, so it was a dream come true. I mean here I am just not a year into my quest, and I'm already in New Orleans, Louisiana.

AW:

So this is about '59 or '60?

SH:

Yeah, '59.

AW:

So which—

SH:

Or '58 or fifty—well we all had names.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

It was Dawn in the morning, Sunny doing the day, and I was Eve in the evening.

AW:

In the evening.

SH:

And they also had a guy named Cowboy Jim, seemed like to me they always put some cowboy with girls. But anyway, we went to cocktail parties, I met all kinds of celebrities. I never forget I met Joan Crawford, did an interview with her, and she became a friend.

AW:

Wow.

SH:

This was right when her husband had died that owned Pepsi-Cola wasn't it? And she wanted a copy of the interview, and she kept in touch with me, and years later when I was in Hollywood, she had me come down as a guest while she was filming a movie.

AW:

Oh, how nice.

SH:

But do you remember Zsa Zsa Gabor?

AW:

Oh yeah.

SH:

Oh, let me tell you, I touched her back.

AW:

Really?

SH:

Accidentally, I'll never forget—she was wearing some kind of strapless and I accidentally touched—that was like a baby's bottom, it was so soft, it really was. Gosh, they were beautiful.

AW:

Yeah

SH:

She had the most soft skin I ever—gosh—Zsa Zsa Gabor. But anyway, that was when I got to be on the cover of *Pete Fountain Day*.

AW:

How did that happen?

SH:

I don't know.

AW:

Really?

SH:

Why did they pick me? But Sunny was the other one that was real gung-ho. They came to us, I mean somebody told me that they wanted me to meet Pete Fountain, and that Sunny and I were going to be on the—I guess because I was a radio wife, I don't know. But anyway, I got pictures with him and now it's a stretch to say I'm on the cover, because I'm blurred out, it's not as—Sunny got the better side—

AW:

Oh, okay.

SH:

Hers is more in focus than mine was.

AW:

So—

SH:

But I've got that, I'll show you the album.

AW:

Well I've seen that album, and not in person album, I saw on the web.

SH:

Oh, yeah.

AW:

And it's kind of hard to tell who's who.

SH:

Exactly.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

On the web.

SH:

Yeah, well Sunny's got her hands up like this and she's almost coming out of her clothes.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

That was her.

AW:

That's why they had her clear.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

Yeah, but like I said, I don't know why, but we also had a billboard. Now this is to show you how blasé I was—I had no idea that I was into this big stuff already. They had this giant billboard on Canal Street downtown, and all I've got is a picture from far, far away, it was a huge picture of us on the billboard, and I don't have a picture of it that—

AW:

Oh gosh how sad.

SH:

And I thought, "Why didn't I get a—"

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I mean I was on a billboard.

AW:

Yeah, it's easy to remember that looking back.

SH:

Yeah. But anyway, yeah I had the keys to the city and it was a fabulous time. But, now here's where we need to backtrack just a little bit.

AW:

Sure.

SH:

Let's go back to San Angelo, where I wasn't in San Angelo, Sid was out of the service—now he was still in San Angelo, and he had gotten up a band called *The Cavaliers* along with another guy, and the reason they had was because of Elvis, Scotty and Bill.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

They were touring—Texas was real important for them, they toured all over. And Sid, he became enamored with the guitar, and with Scotty playing the guitar.

AW:

Oh yeah, oh yes. Well Keith Richards, you know the Rolling Stones always said—

SH:

Yes, yes, yes.

AW:

Said “Everybody wanted to be Elvis, except me. I wanted to be Scotty.”

SH:

He wanted to be Scotty, he wanted to be Scotty. So anyway, so when I got to Memphis, who shows up on my doorstep? Sid.

AW:

Now Memphis, not New Orleans.

SH:

No, New Orleans.

AW:

Oh

SH:

He follows me everywhere I go.

AW:

Yeah, so—

SH:

Because of the—

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Being able to get gigs.

AW:

So he comes to New Orleans.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

So anyway, Sid had this talent for finding singers, he was good at this, and he discovered this young kid named Tommy Ruble—didn't have front teeth, and I don't know what happened, he was just a poor kid, but he had a great voice. And so Sid got him teeth, fixed his mouth, and they played around New Orleans. Then later, when I went to Memphis, he followed me to Memphis with Tommy Ruble. Ruble ends up being the number one singer in Memphis. He was voted the most popular singer, he was on "Walking To Memphis", he's the singer on that, but he never left Memphis.

AW:

Well how do you spell that last name?

SH:

Tommy R-u-b-l-e. Tommy Ruble, yeah, and he became real famous in Memphis. Now how did I get to Memphis, let me tell you that.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Okay.

AW:

Oh, and real quick—

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Before we go any further—did Sid, was he the one that found J. Frank Wilson?

SH:

Yes, yeah, I should say he found two people that turned out to be—

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Yeah, he hadn't found J. Frank yet.

AW:
Right, but he's the one.

SH:
But he's the—

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Oh yeah, he's the one

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Because Sid, he was in charge. He was head of the band.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
But anyway, here I am in New Orleans, and the door opens up—oh, I also made the program director. Everywhere I go I made program director.

AW:
Good, because just until we got all involved in this other, I was going to ask in terms of the music you were playing—

SH:
Yes.

AW:
What kind of format—

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

Town and country.

AW:

Town and country.

SH:

This was both.

AW:

What was town and country?

SH:

Town and country was pop music and country music.

AW:

Okay.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah, and country music at that time would have been really country—it would have been Hank Williams, and that sort of thing.

SH:

Right.

AW:

And the pop would have been Frank Sinatra or—

SH:

Well no it was a little past Frank Sinatra.

AW:

Yeah, so Tony Bennett, past that?

SH:

Yeah.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

AW:

Because we're in the sixties now.

SH:

No we're not in the sixties yet, I mean because in the sixties I'm in Memphis. Well I think it's '59.

AW:

Yeah, okay.

SH:

Yeah I wish I could remember my dates, I think I might have been in New Orleans in '67 and '68—I was there for a year.

AW:

You mean '57 and '58.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

'57, '58.

AW:

Well, so as program director, you picked—

SH:

The music.

AW:

What was on rotation.

SH:

Yeah

AW:

And how often it was played.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:
Exactly.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Yeah, and that made me real popular.

AW:
I was going to say that made you real popular.

SH:
Oh yeah, because that was back in the payola days too.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
You were wined, and dined, and taken out to places. And so anyway, the door opens up and here's Scotty Moore—comes into my office—

AW:
Wow.

SH:
With a guy named Thomas Wayne, who had the song "Tragedy". I don't know if you remember, do you remember "Tragedy"?

AW:
Yeah, "Oh tragedy..." yeah.

SH:
Yeah, yes.

AW:
Yeah, oh yeah.

SH:
But anyway, that had been a big hit, and they were going around promoting his second record,

and they came to me because I was the program director. And so that's how I got to meet Scotty, and we became friends, and we ended up—Sid got to meet Scotty—can you believe—I mean this was dream come true.

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

SH:

And they played behind Scotty and Bill.

AW:

Yeah I've seen some photographs of The Cavaliers playing behind Scotty.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Yeah, and one time I remember we were on the Pontchartrain going to some small town, and had a flat. But we were just in the midst of all this wonderful stuff—

AW:

Oh, yeah.

SH:

You just couldn't believe it.

AW:

So what was Scotty like?

SH:

Huh?

AW:

What was Scotty like?

SH:

Oh gosh. Wow, the best person I've ever met.

AW:
Really?

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
I'm so glad to hear that, because he's an idol to all of us who played guitar.

SH:
Oh, gosh, I mean he just—it's just hard to—he was very quiet by the way.

AW:
Right.

SH:
He didn't jump around and all that, and he was a very shy person, but he was the greatest person in the world.

AW:
That's cool.

SH:
And he loved Elvis. People don't realize how he was hurt by Elvis, because Elvis—well, it wasn't Elvis it was the Colonel—the Colonel didn't want his boys—he wanted just Elvis, he wanted to get Bill Black especially out of the scene, because Bill was a clown, he jumped around and was funny. But anyway, they talked to me about the situation, and they hoped that when he came back from the service—Elvis was now in the service, it's recent that they were going around with other musicians.

AW:
Yeah, yeah.

SH:
But Scotty is the best person I've ever met.

AW:
Wow.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

And everybody loved him, every single—and I mean he was a great guitar player.

AW:

Oh—

SH:

Sid knows more about that than I do.

AW:

And not just a great guitar player—he was—it's like people talk about well we just mentioned Keith Richards as a great guitar player—it's not just how fast they play or anything, they had distinctive sound.

SH:

Yes.

AW:

And they came up with a new way of thinking about the instrument.

SH:

Yes, this was revolutionary.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Yeah, "Mystery Train" was one of—

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

The—and it was amazing what three people—

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

The music that they could make.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Just the three of them, before they got D.J. But, so I ended up getting to know Scotty, and Sid got to meet Scotty and play with him and everything, and then the station sold. And this is going to be what happens everywhere you go. I don't know why they sold the station, they hadn't had it that long, but there was a station in Honolulu, and Connie B. became real good friends with me, he was a really nice guy, and he said, "Come go to Honolulu." But Scotty told me that if I ever left New Orleans, come to Memphis, I'll help you get a job in Memphis. So Sunny and I drove to Memphis and met with Scotty and another guy and had supper, and the next morning he took me to meet another station—this is the WHHM, which is Elvis's station.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

That's the station that had the guy who played his first record, Louis Phillips, it had George Klein, his best friend from school, and Anita Wood, his girlfriend at the time, the one he left behind as they said in the books.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But anyway, and so I am so unbelievably naïve that I can't do something, because I've been doing it, seemed like I'm not having problems at all. Anyway they said that they were a twenty-four hour station, but they had gone off the air at midnight, because it wasn't feasible—they couldn't make any money off of it.

AW:

In their ads.

SH:

And I said, "Well I could sell it," I didn't know that I couldn't, you know? So anyway, to make a long story short, I owned the show. I took the show and we had a little deal where—

AW:

Now would you explain for the people listening to this—

SH:

Yes.

AW:

What owning a show means. Because that's kind of a radio term, right?

SH:

Yeah, well, I sold the show and what I made I split with them. And I don't know if that's called owning the show or not.

AW:

Yeah, so when you got an advertiser—

SH:

But I actually wasn't paid a salary, I didn't work for them, I worked for myself.

AW:

Yeah, so you'd get quality check milk to buy an ad, and half that would go to the station, and half of it would go to you.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah, okay.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah I just wanted to make sure that it was clear for people listening.

SH:

Okay sure, I understand that. So anyway, my job was to go out and sell this six hour show all night long that nobody is listening to.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And I did.

AW:

And you did. What kind of advertisers did you take this to, because this—

SH:

Oh that's a good one, that's a good one. I had a Cadillac dealership for twelve to one, and he supplied me with the brand new Cadillac to drive.

AW:

Just gets better and better.

SH:

And then the bowling alley that was on all night long, an all-night bowling alley. And I forget what I sold the morning show, and I can't remember it right now off-hand, but I do remember the Cadillac, because that was really great, I got a Cadillac.

AW:

Oh yeah.

SH:

And anyway then I got a manager. And the name of the show was "Sylvia by Candlelight".

AW:

Right.

SH:

Now, it was really by candlelight—I had candelabras and—

AW:

Really?

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

In the—

SH:

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

Yeah, I still got the candelabras here.

AW:

Well but this is in radio, right?

SH:

Yeah, this is radio.

AW:

Yeah, so nobody's going to see your candelabra except you, and the engineer.

SH:

But it gives you that mood.

AW:

Oh sure.

SH:

So anyway, I played anything, I mean anything, and I interviewed people.

AW:

Oh really?

SH:

It was completely—

AW:

So you had on-air interviews.

SH:

Yes.

AW:

And then you would—

SH:

I had an interview with Bill Black that was one of the most interesting interviews, and I lost it somehow or another, I missed it. But anyway, I read poetry.

AW:

Really, who were your favorite poets?

SH:

Huh?

AW:

What kind of poetry, were you reading beatnik material or?

SH:

Well, I have a book of poems and stuff that I had in a book, and I can't remember off-hand, but it would be romantic-type poems, or just beautiful, nice poetry.

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

SH:

And I played any kind of music, every different kind, and to give an example of my interviewing people—Conway Twitty—I had people spotting where everybody was, because Memphis was full of recording artists and things, and I had this guy call me up, he said, “Conway Twitty just got off the plane and he’s heading back to town.” This was late at night, and I said, “Okay good.” So I got on the air playing a Conway Twitty song, and carried on a about Conway Twitty, and then just counted the time and sure enough he came up to the station and I got pictures of him. And he never knew that I—

AW:

Were you the first disc jockey of any kind to read poetry.

SH:

Oh I'm sure I was, yeah. I don't know why I was reading poetry, but I'm a romantic, but you know.

AW:

That's a great idea. So, how did you decide what you wanted to play in terms of music? What was the Sylvia set of criteria for music that you played?

SH:

Well I played anything that's popular.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
I played the kind of music that people—

AW:
So you read Billboard and—

SH:
It's not what I liked so much as what was popular.

AW:
So you knew what Billboard was saying—

SH:
Now I got an award from RCA for breaking the term—I broke "Last Date" by—

AW:
Floyd Cramer?

SH:
Floyd Cramer.

AW:
Oh my gosh.

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
That's a great song.

SH:
They came to me again—remember I'm playing these records that I'm going to have all these guys coming to want you to play their song.

AW:
Yeah.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

Of course I'm at a disadvantage because I'm on late at night.

AW:

Right.

SH:

So I'm my own program director, but yeah they couldn't get it broken in Memphis, and they came to me. I got real friendly with all the RCA people, and they got me all kinds of albums and things. I've got a beaucoup of record collection as you can imagine.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But I played it consistently every night and they said that I actually was the reason, because nobody else was playing it but me, and that helped, so they were real pleased with me on that.

AW:

That was such a great record for us as teenagers. We wouldn't have listened to a piano record for nothing until that record came along.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

And then it was like—

SH:

It was so simple and yet so beautiful.

AW:

Yeah, well and it was just soulful.

SH:

Yeah, yeah it was.

AW:

A lot of piano music to us was—we thought of piano music as Liberace—it was a little too mechanical, but here's Floyd Cramer and it's got soul.

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
What a great record.

SH:
Well you can take a piano and make it sound different, just like a guitar.

AW:
Sure.

SH:
It's the talent—oh it was great.

AW:
So did you get to know the other big Memphis people like Sam Phillips?

SH:
Oh, Sam.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Yeah, Sam, I knew Sam real well, oh gosh. Sam would come up to the station late at night, drunk. I'm trying to think the guy that was with him. Oh my gosh—Rich—I find that getting old, gosh you forget names more than anything else.

AW:
Yes, that's exactly right, or dates, that's the thing I forget.

SH:
The station was upstairs, it was located in town and part of it was a ballpark, and anyway there was the stairway going up to it and my show became a place where people came all the time. They just hung around on the stairway, and come in.

AW:
How cool.

SH:

It was just the place to go, come in and spend time with Sylvia and get on the air, so it was a great time. Now, this you're going to like. Remember now, I love Scotty, and I love Bill, and I know how they feel, because they helped make Elvis, let's face it.

AW:

Sure.

SH:

Elvis would not have made it without them, at all. So I get on the air one night and Elvis had come back from the service, and he was staying at Graceland, and he had made a comment that when asked who he was going to have for his band he says, "Well, I was thinking about the Boston Pops Orchestra." You got to understand that Elvis thought he was a comedian, he's always saying things that weren't really funny.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But anyway that's what he said, and I read that and I got mad. So I get on the air and I honest to goodness, I told the story, I said, "Well Elvis doesn't need Boston Pops Orchestra, all he needs is Scotty and Bill, who were with him from the beginning." And he called me.

AW:

Elvis did?

SH:

I know, it doesn't sound like a true story, it's like something you'd write. He calls me up, and Elvis stuttered a little bit.

AW:

I didn't know that.

SH:

Yeah a little bit when he—and he said he was Elvis, and of course I didn't believe him at first.

AW:

Right, right.

SH:

And yeah sure, but then I realized it was.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

He says well he loved my poetry, he listened to me all the time and I didn't realize he was up all night.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And he was listening to me, but then there was the Elvis Presley Station anyway.

AW:

Yeah, right.

SH:

But anyway, and he assured me, he said, "No, I'm going to use Scotty and Bill, I was just joking. I want to meet you. I'm going to come down to the station and meet you." And so I said, "Yeah sure." But of course one thing he said "Don't say anything."

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And I didn't. Now this is the one thing that Elvis loved about me was I never used him, or said he was here or told any stories about him, because this was really important to him that you be let in into the inner sanctum I guess you might—but turned out to be. But anyway, three days later he shows up—

AW:

Really?

SH:

Three o'clock in the morning in a tuxedo, and a cumber bun, and a shirt with no buttons—I don't know why the button thing got me, but it was so fancy, it was just unbelievable and I said where'd you come from? Of course he was always with his boys.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

His entourage, and he said that he had been to the movies.

AW:

Dressed like that.

SH:

But he didn't go to a movie house, he had movies come to him.

AW:

Right.

SH:

He rented the movie house.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And then he rented a roller rink, and everybody at night would go to the roller rink, and then they would go to—what was the third one—oh, the fairgrounds, he'd rent the whole fairgrounds and everybody would play on the fairgrounds. And there was this bunch of fans every night that he was home they'd do that.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But anyway, he would just come from having seen some movies, and first thing he said was that I reminded him of Dixie. Dixie was his first girlfriend, and so that put me in good stead with him right away, he really liked me, we hit it off real well. And I really liked Elvis, I wasn't one of these jump up and down fans like these young girls. I mean he was just a human being and he was real sweet, he really was. And he was very sad in many ways, and he's very lonely.

AW:

Yeah it's got to be very difficult to lead that life.

SH:

Oh yeah.

AW:

In terms of encumbrances it puts on you, because you have to rent a movie theatre, because you can't go on your own.

SH:

Yeah, and you can't go to the roller rink.

AW:

Right.

SH:

So he had the right idea, but anyway, I'm going to drop another name—gosh I hope this name's familiar to you, may or may not be—Brother Dave Gardner.

AW:

Oh gosh yeah.

SH:

Oh my God, you know Brother Dave? Say no more, Brother Dave Gardner. Well, Brother Dave. I got Brother Dave—everybody loved Brother Dave.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

You can't explain who he is if you didn't know who he was.

AW:

No.

SH:

There's no way—

AW:

No.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

I could explain him to you.

AW:

Right, yeah he was sort of his own spot in the dictionary.

SH:

And he was brilliant.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

You know he was really a preacher? He really was, I read that—

AW:

I read that, but I don't know much about it, but I heard that's why they called him Brother Dave.

SH:

Yeah

AW:

Kind of like—

SH:

But then he also did church bits.

AW:

Lefty Frizzell got to be Lefty because he actually was in the Golden Gloves [boxing] right?

SH:

Right, yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Yeah, but anyway Brother Dave was a big, big deal with Elvis. Elvis loved Brother Dave—everybody—"Rejoice, Dear Hearts", you know?

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
And so anyway, Brother Dave, I wanted him to come—I wanted to meet him, because I'd heard so much about him. Oh and by the way, where Elvis came in, he was there and I didn't get to talk to him as long as I wanted to, because Anita Wood his girlfriend heard that he was up there, and she came after him. So that was the end of my—

AW:
Well, she didn't want him hanging out with a pretty girl named Sylvia in candlelight.

SH:
She's working at the same station see?

AW:
Oh she was working at the station?

SH:
Yeah, she was a disc jockey.

AW:
Oh.

SH:
Yeah that's what I'm saying, it was Elvis's station—Anita Wood during the day.

AW:
Oh, she was Dawn?

SH:
Huh?

AW:
She was Dawn?

SH:
Oh no, that was, remember—

AW:

Oh no, no that's back in New Orleans.

SH:

No I don't—just had regular—

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

She just had a regular—a daytime show.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But yeah she was real jealous of me.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Not jealous of me, but she didn't want Elvis around anybody but her, she was very—and you can understand why.

AW:

Right.

SH:

You got to hold to him. But anyway, I heard about Brother Dave, and I wanted him to come to the station, and so I played his record on the wrong speed. I said I was going to play it on the wrong speed until he showed up.

AW:

Was it too slow or too fast?

SH:

It was too slow I think. Anyway, are you familiar with Miss Millie, his wife?

AW:

No.

SH:

Well she was a character, oh what a character. But fortunately she liked me too, so—because you won't believe the story with Brother Dave, how I ended up with Brother Dave. But anyways, here he comes, so I get to meet Brother Dave, and he did a skit on the shirt with no buttons about Elvis, it was so funny, God it was so funny. But we hit it off so well, he was just hilarious. And so one night Brother Dave—he would come every time he was in town, he'd come up to see me and I'd interview him. And this one night, Elvis wanted us to come out to the roller rink, and so he sent a limousine to pick us up to go out to the roller rink. I have to back up just a little bit more now—before I get to the roller rink, I have to tell you about Hugo. Hugo is a frog—

AW:

Oh, yeah.

SH:

He's the beanbag frog.

AW:

Right, I read about some about Hugo.

SH:

Sid was still living in San Angelo, and he was paying his rent, and this lady had this beanbag on the floor keeping the door open, and it was just something special about him, and he thought it was great and he wanted to know if he could buy him, and she says, "No you can have him." He was handmade, so it was one of a kind. So he brought that frog to Memphis, and he named him Hugo after Hugo Winterhalter, and he said "We need to come up with a deal with Hugo." Hugo became Elvis's biggest fan, everything Elvis did, Hugo did. If Elvis broke his finger, Hugo's bandaged.

AW:

Right, I read about that.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

It was the greatest thing ever.

SH:

And I have a—

AW:

Now, and of course you're doing this all on radio—

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Where people can't see the frog with the bandage.

SH:

No.

AW:

So you're having to tell them about it—this is great, even better.

SH:

So anyway, I always kept Hugo with me, and I will have and hope that you'll have time to see—
I have a costume of Hugo of all the movies that Elvis made.

AW:

Really?

SH:

Yeah, I mean Hugo became famous. So Elvis named his dog Hugo too even. But Elvis loved Hugo, and I came to the roller rink with Hugo, and of course he allowed no pictures, no cameras, no nothing—today you couldn't get away with that with all the iPhones and everything.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But anyway, you can imagine this, here's Elvis, I'm holding one side of Hugo, and he's holding the other side and we're roller skating. Wouldn't that have been a great picture?

AW:

That would have been a great picture.

SH:

Oh, gosh, but anyway, during the evening Hugo was stolen.

AW:

Oh.

SH:

And they called the police. He closed down the deal and they found him up on one of the little girls that was there, fans had taken him, because Elvis had touched him.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But anyway, so Elvis, he was really a fun person, and he had a good sense of humor, and he loved all that. So anyway, how do I top this—but, well actually I can. But, we did have a fire though, unfortunately they blamed it on my candles, but the station burned up. The baseball deal, the whole thing—we were on our way out to Elvis's house when we heard about it. By the way, let me tell you about Elvis's house. It was eerie, I mean you go out there, and there's all these—

AW:

Now we're talking about Graceland?

SH:

Graceland.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And very gaudy, very funny. But Elvis, he let these fans come in, but they're real quiet. They just sit there and it's so weird, it's so quiet. They don't talk or anything, it's really strange. But anyway, I remember one night—I never went there very often—well I had to work for one thing—but I remember distinctly one night I was wandering around the house, and I ended up falling asleep in a chair, and it turned out to be in Elvis's room. And he woke me up, and he sat down and talked to me about how lonely he was, and how he didn't know if anybody really cared for him for himself. He really was a sweet guy.

AW:

Yeah. Well you would have that when you were that famous, you would have to worry about—

SH:

Oh, yeah.

AW:

Why people were being nice to you.

SH:

Exactly, is it me or is it—and as it turned out, in a lot of cases it was, because he was Elvis. But anyway, the station burned down, and they put a trailer until we could get another station built, they put a trailer out at a lot. It was next to a cemetery, and that's where I was now late at night in this trailer, and I had a big party—I'll show you the pictures—I was in a movie magazine, and anyway I had a big party because I'm a manager now and he's coming up with all these ideas.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And we had hot dogs and everything, and we did the show out there, but then Elvis, he went to—oh, Sam, Sam Phillips. He was a real close friend, he really was, and he was really, really interesting person. But he did have a drinking problem, he drank a lot.

AW:

Now those of us who admired Sun Records, and all that went on there, and all the choices he made and the people—I think of him as a genius.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

Was he? Is that too far off for Sam Phillips to—

SH:

Oh, I would say so, yes, absolutely.

AW:

He just had an ear for things.

SH:

He did, and he discovered so many people. And they still have the studio, the old studio's still

there. Yeah, yeah, he was. But if he hadn't sold Elvis to the Colonel, I don't think Elvis would have been as big maybe, I don't know. But he had a lot of big names.

AW:

Oh gosh yeah.

SH:

God, I can't remember all of them offhand, but he was—and then he built this big new studio.

AW:

Did Elvis ever talk about music?

SH:

Okay well I remember asking him his favorite song was back when he first came there—oh don't tell me I'm going to forget the name of the song—because he recorded it at—

AW:

Oh it was one of the songs he recorded?

SH:

But it was a big hit by somebody else—oh gosh. Maybe I'll remember it in a minute. But anyway that was the only song that he even mentioned—

AW:

Really?

SH:

That he liked.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And later on down the line I think that I was responsible for him choosing a song to be on a single, but that's later on down the line. Let's go from there to—Roy Peterson, [Ray Peterson] it was Roy Peterson's song "The Wonder Of You", I knew I'd remember it.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

“The Wonder Of You”.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And that’s one of his—he turned out to have a really good cover on that one.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

That was beautiful. That’s the only thing I remember him ever saying.

AW:

Really?

SH:

Yeah, I never—I was too shy to talk to him really, you know I was. I’d love to have, today knowing what I know, I’d love to sit down and talk to him, and ask him his philosophy and things like that. But he was just thrown into being a famous person overnight it seemed.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But I got to know the boys and all that. But anyway, as usual the station sold. Well alright—oh, by the way, Sid had moved his band to Memphis, and he played guitar for Jerry Lee Lewis.

AW:

Oh did he?

SH:

Yes, Jerry Lee was—

AW:

That, was it just a—

SH:

Jerry Lee Lewis was as crazy as the axe.

AW:

Yeah he was, yeah I—

SH:

He really was.

AW:

I've only been around him one time when he was doing his show in Lubbock, and he struck me as being pretty crazy.

SH:

Yeah he really was, and he actually did tear down pianos. Sid was very different as in he didn't take drugs, or drink, or smoke, and he didn't jump around. He was just a real serious musician.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And he had recorded a song called "Crazy—I'm going to lose my voice before this is over—

AW:

Well I've got some Ricola cough drops if you need one.

SH:

Okay. He had recorded "Crazy Guitar", which was a real good song, but it never made it. But anyway, here's where Brother Dave comes into my life again. Oh thank you that might help. So anyway I don't know what to do, I mean because they come in with a whole new set of people, nobody—

AW:

After the station sold, yeah.

SH:

So my deal is gone. And so Miss Millie, I had met wife, and I don't know why she liked me, she liked me. Because really he had a wandering eye, Brother Dave did, he couldn't help but have a wandering eye. But she knew I was different, so anyway they said, "Come to Memphis."

AW:

Yeah we can take a moment if you need a glass of water or something.

SH:

No, I'm okay. "Come to Hollywood", so I went to Hollywood to help them edit his records. Now you know the way he did his albums—he would go out on the road and tape his shows to the college kids, that was his big deal, he had college kids for—and anyway, so Miss Millie and Brother Dave had just come into a whole bunch of money, because they had sued RCA, they were not in Capitol, and they were the original hillbillies—or am I thinking of *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

AW:

Oh *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

SH:

The Beverly Hillbillies. They bought a mansion, a three-story mansion with a bowling alley, an organ opened up with the pipes coming out, an atrium with overlooks of Sunset Boulevard. It was just beautiful, and they bought a plane, and it was a real important plane because they later sold it to the President of Mexico.

AW:

Wow.

SH:

That's how fancy the plane was. They bought a boat, the *Milderdam*, and they had a captain that they paid to stay with the boat, and brought it around. And they had about five cars, neither one of them drove. But they were real good friends with the Colonel, Colonel Parker.

AW:

Oh they were?

SH:

They were very close friends with Colonel Parker. I have a piece of paper that was torn off of a grocery thing—it was from the Colonel, that I was here, I'll talk to you later. Well the Colonel and Brother Dave would rent a limousine and drive around town. Don't ask me why, they were crazy.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But yeah he was real good friends with Miss Millie.

AW:

Did you know the Colonel very well?

SH:

No, I met him one time, and he came in and they had this kitchen area, but I just was introduced to him, but I never got to know him, and I don't think that he would have—he didn't care, he lived in another world. And I really, I don't like Colonel Parker.

AW:

No, well that's why I was just wondering if you knew him, because you don't find people who do like him. Yet, he had something going with Elvis.

SH:

Well he was brilliant too.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

He really was. But anyway—

AW:

So, Brother Dave would go on the road and do these—because the college circuit was really big at that time, right?

SH:

Yes.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

And so he'd record those live and then edit them down into an album.

SH:

And that's what Miss. Millie did.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And that's when I wasn't working. I lived with them in this mansion.

AW:

Wow.

SH:

I had my suite of rooms—they had two kids, and they were zonked out all the time on pain pills, or prescription drugs.

AW:

The kids?

SH:

No not the kids. Oh no, Miss. Millie and Dave.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

They didn't believe in drinking, oh that was terrible. But they didn't think there was anything wrong with prescription pills, so they were high as a kite. And I didn't do any of that, so I was there for the kids.

AW:

Yeah. How did you escape that, you and your brother?

SH:

That's interesting.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I never liked beer, I never liked wine. I liked scotch. When I was at Pasadena Playhouse, I didn't know what mixed drinks were, and I went across to this bar, and this guy ordered a Cutty Sark and soda with the lemon twist, and said "Well what do you want?" And I said, "Gosh that sounds fancy", so I ordered one, I didn't know I was drinking scotch and soda, and that's been my drink ever since. This is true—we were so grounded somehow.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
We never got into drugs.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
And my brother didn't smoke, and he drank beer, but just not excessively at all. And I'm not saying I don't drink, because I did, but just socially. And I saw it all, but I was oblivious to ever doing it, because I was there during the hippie era too. But anyway about that time I was really ready to get back into radio—oh, I ended up having to edit the album because Miss Millie, she slept all day and all night—that's all they did. And do you remember LSD? I met the man who created it.

AW:
Timothy—not Timothy Leary?

SH:
It's Timothy Leary.

AW:
Well he popularized it, not—there was a chemist back east who actually concocted it, but Timothy Leary's the one who—

SH:
Who would it be—oh well I met—

AW:
No you probably met Timothy Leary—

SH:

I probably met Timothy Leary—

AW:

If you were in California—

SH:

Yeah, he came up the Gardeners.

AW:

Really?

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

It's hard to imagine Timothy Leary and Brother Dave Gardener.

SH:

And this was when LSD was just—you went into a—I don't know what—

AW:

Yeah it was still legal and—

SH:

And I remember—

AW:

So did Brother Dave take a trip on LSD?

SH:

Yes.

AW:

Wow, that's interesting—that's thinking about like Hee Haw and—

SH:

Miss Millie and Dave, and they wanted me to go.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
I was so out of place with them, they just loved me, I was just their—you know. But I was the only straight one there, I really was. I was just living it up, I loved it. But yeah, and I would have never done anything like that anyway, because that's scary. But anyway, Miss Millie did not get to edit, so I went down to Capitol and helped the engineer, and we edited it—I forget what album it was, but anyway after a while Brother Dave would stand on the front porch overlooking Hollywood and say, "Wonder what the poor people were doing tonight."

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
I loved him.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
He was fantastic. Well, they wanted me to go to Acapulco with them, and they were going in this boat. And you'll love this. They actually had this real captain. He had a beard, he wore shorts, he was the real McCoy. And here we were in Los Angeles wherever the boat was, we're taking off to go to—I just went as far as San Diego I think it was, because I wouldn't fly, I never flew.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
I don't know why I never flew, but I went with them as far as that, and I remember they were all sound asleep, and here was me and the captain, and we were drinking coffee and I said this was the—I got to drive, or sail, or whatever you call it—the boat out of the harbor, and I've got pictures of me on the boat.

AW:
Oh cool.

SH:
But anyway, after a while it gets old. I mean I needed to get back and work.

AW:

And do some work, yeah.

SH:

Yeah, so here I go again putting an ad in the paper in *Broadcasting*—someone just always wants me.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And this time it was out in New York, it was—wow, gah, I can't think—wasn't New York City, it was—starts with an "A"—well anyway it was a city in New York, and they want—

AW:

Like Albany?

SH:

Albany, was it Albany, yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I guess it'd be Albany.

AW:

That's the capital, right?

SH:

I think so.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I never made it by the way, because—

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

AW:

Oh you never did get to New York?

SH:

No I never made it to New York. No, what happened to me then was really strange—I had all this memorabilia, I had all these records, I kept everything with me, so I bought a travel trailer to bring it all with me, because it made sense, it was a cute little cabin deal that had a stove, and refrigerator, and a bed, but it was real tiny.

AW:

Like an Airstream?

SH:

Yeah not that nice though.

AW:

And about what year would this have been, would this have been mid-sixties?

SH:

Okay, where are we in time now, I lost—yeah, yeah that's right I'd be in the sixties, because I was in Hollywood in '62 or '63.

AW:

Okay, oh great.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

I want to ask you more about '62 and '63 here in just a minute.

SH:

Okay, go ahead.

AW:

Well, just what was it like? '62 and '63 in California?

SH:

It was beautiful.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
It smelled of flowers.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
It was cool, the people were great, there was a constant light above you because of the lights from the city, and it was always kind of foggy. I loved it, I really did. The people were nice, and today it's not the same.

AW:
No.

SH:
It's not the same.

AW:
When I'm out there though, occasionally you'll take your walk in the morning and you'll smell the flowers.

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
And you'll think I'll bet this place was something before it got so crowded.

SH:
Oh, yeah.

AW:
Was the traffic bad in the early sixties?

SH:
No, no.

AW:

Not at all, huh?

SH:

No.

AW:

What was the radio scene like, because they had some important DJs out there too.

SH:

Well the interesting thing about radio back then, was that FM was nothing—AM was still the biggie.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Which is completely different now.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

AM is just for talk, but I never listened to the radio.

AW:

Really?

SH:

I was completely oblivious to the music at that time, I was busy with my zonked out friends. Living the high life in Hollywood—

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Going to parties and stuff like that. Because actually now, Millie and Brother Dave—oh I remember why I said they were the Richland Hillbillies—that's because they didn't have any curtains, so they put newspaper on the walls. They had no furniture, so they went to Montgomery Ward or Sears and bought furniture.

AW:

For this mansion?

SH:

For this mansion. They had no sense of anything, because they lived in a trailer in years before.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

So they didn't know, they just happy as they could be. But anyway, I can't tell you what it was, I just know that it was a wonderful place back then.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

And it was the smell, and it wasn't smoggy, it was foggy. I don't know, I really enjoyed it, I wouldn't want to go back now, but.

AW:

No.

SH:

But so anyway—

AW:

You have your trailer, travelling trailer.

SH:

I have my trailer, and earlier in the year while I was in California, Sid had found some land in Tennyson, a little town outside of San Angelo, and he wanted me to go in with him on this property, so I did. It was sixty acres, and I didn't why he—

AW:

Now where is Tennyson?

SH:

Tennyson is—

AW:

It's like toward Eldorado, or toward—

SH:

Oh no it's just about fifteen miles outside of San Angelo. It's a San Angelo—

AW:

Yeah, so what direction from San Angelo, do you remember?

SH:

Uh, going north I guess—Robert Lee, does that—

AW:

Oh, kind of northeast—

SH:

It's between Robert Lee and San Angelo.

AW:

Okay.

SH:

And yeah well it was just a stick in the—

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I mean it wasn't really a town.

AW:

Yeah, right, right.

SH:

It was just a post office. But anyway, he was real excited about this land and so I agreed to go in with him on it, and so I decided to come back through Texas to see what I'd bought.

AW:

Yeah, on your way to Albany.

SH:

On my way to Albany. And I never got past the land. I became a different person.

AW:

Really?

SH:

It was Easter, and the family were out there, we brought the trailer out there and I fell in love with the land. It was a fantastic piece of property, it had a lake on it.

AW:

Really, yeah.

SH:

And it had a mountain that was called Mount Margaret, that the Indians—

AW:

Oh, Margaret's Peak.

SH:

Oh you know that story, really?

AW:

I know it well. I paint pastels.

SH:

Yeah.

AW:

And there was a very famous Texas pastelist named Frank Reaugh, R-e-a-u-g-h, who lived in Oak Cliff, and he would take his students every summer on trips around Texas, sometimes further, to paint. It was like you'd sign up and one of favorite places to paint was Margaret's Peak.

SH:

Oh my God.

AW:

Yeah, so I've been to Margaret's Peak, I've been there to paint.

SH:

Wow.

AW:

Yeah how cool.

SH:

Yeah, so the land's right below it.

AW:

Right under it.

SH:

Yeah, right under—I mean it wasn't on it—

AW:

Right, right.

SH:

But yeah.

AW:

Yeah that is beautiful country.

SH:

Oh my gosh.

AW:

Yeah

SH:

Yeah I've got a painting of it—anyway I fell in love with living with nature. I mean I had been in radio, and television, and everything—I never had had time to really open my eyes to the beauty of nature. And so I decided that I was going to live on the land.

AW:

So you were doing this a generation ahead of the hippies and the movement, because they hadn't quite started yet.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

No they hadn't quite started.

AW:

So you were ahead.

SH:

It was getting close—I guess I was.

AW:

You were, you were in the forefront.

SH:

But anyway, my hair was down to here, I was in pigtails. I bought a horse.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I bought three—

AW:

Do you have photographs from that time period in your life?

SH:

Oh sure, I don't know where they are, but I can—

AW:

Well gosh we'd love to see—I'd love to see them, that's just so interesting. So you got a horse.

SH:

Yeah I got a horse, a dog, a German shepherd, three ducks, and six guineas.

AW:

Oh those guineas, my goodness.

SH:

And I decided that I was going to live on the land, just for a little while.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
But so I bought this horse, and I asked the man—well, and I had to buy a saddle, and I says will you show me how to put it on? I didn't know how to ride a horse. I named him Kemosabe. Anyway that was ridiculous that I did that, but fortunately Sid, he was spared and they lived in town, and I could go in and clean up.

AW:
So you lived in your trailer?

SH:
I lived in my trailer.

AW:
Perfect.

SH:
And I rode around the range, and pruned mesquites, I planted fifteen pecan trees. And I had a visitor come by my trailer twice—once, I was sitting out taking my boots off and I saw this animal going by in the darkness and the second time he growled—it was a mountain lion, and I found out later that they have a certain area that they go around in a circle, and it takes a month, so but I actually did have—and Sid wanted me to have protection. I didn't belong out there in the country, nothing, I mean this woman out there. It was crazy, but I didn't know any different.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
But anyway he gave me this shotgun or something and so the night that this cat came by, he came right by the trailer and growled, and my dog went crazy, jumped and hit his head, he didn't want any part of that.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
And I had an granny gown, I'll never forget this picture of me. I jump out of the trailer and I'm carrying—

AW:

In your granny gown with a shotgun.

SH:

Granny gown with this gun, and I look down and I says, "What am I doing?" I would never kill anything, I just don't kill anything. But anyway, in the meantime the station in San Angelo heard that I was there and they wanted me to come to work for them. And by the way, I had told them in New York—I lied, I told them misnomer, I said that my father was sick or something.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I couldn't make it. But I gave them plenty of time and notice. But I knew that I couldn't go to New York. So anyway, this was the station—WF—Foster—WF—or KFR—WKFR—anyway stood for Foster, anyway it was the father, and his son was disc jockey, and again I'm program director.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I can't get out of being a program director. Yeah it seemed like to me there was a hippie movement going on then, because on our little sheets, our records lists, we had Jimi Hendrix drawings and stuff.

AW:

Oh yeah.

SH:

So we were pretty much into the Hendrix—

AW:

So this is mid-sixties now?

SH:

Yeah.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
And so I worked then night shift, yeah, and I'm having a real good time, and again I loved it—

AW:
Are you still living out on your land?

SH:
Well, I finally got a house on the lake, at Lake Nasworthy. No, I finally gave it up, it was too hard. I had to drive home late at night, so I gave it up. But I got a taste of it for several months of living, and even cooking out there and everything.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Because there wasn't any running water.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Finally we put electricity out there, but anyway. And later we actually had oil well drilled on the land, but it was a dry hole.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
But anyway, I was still working there, and I had gone to Fort Worth. Sid was in Fort Worth now, and he had the band there in Fort Worth. So, I remember getting the flu from Fort Worth. I was very healthy, and I didn't have a doctor, I never got sick or anything. And then by then my mother was with me, and we'd come out there to visit him, and I came with the Hong Kong flu.

AW:
Oh.

SH:
Type 2A.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Respiratory. I remember this is why I cough.

AW:
Still.

SH:
Because yeah it affected my—I lost my radio voice, I couldn't speak.

AW:
Really?

SH:
I had a real pretty voice. But anyway, for months I was bedridden here, and I watched television.

AW:
In Fort Worth?

SH:
No we came back here, we had this house by then—well building.

AW:
Oh this house?

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
Okay.

SH:
Yeah we were building on this house. We found the house while I was still working in San Angelo.

AW:

Oh, okay got it.

SH:

And I would come on the weekends to work on it.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

But I wasn't living here at the time.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

I was still in—so anyway, the station had a guy on doing a show called “Henry’s Den”, it was Michael Henry Martin, who was a real genius, a young man. And he had a recording studio, he was recording artist, and he also made demos for demos.

AW:

Yeah, so what was his name again?

SH:

Michael Henry Martin.

AW:

M-a-r-t-i-n.

SH:

M-a-r-t-i-n.

AW:

Okay.

SH:

Yeah Michael Henry Martin. He had a band called The Topics, and his studio was called Castle Sound. He did a lot of work for Nashville. He was a real genius; he was one of my best friends. And anyway, I was watching the show and I noticed they had so much fun, you could tell this was a crazy place. So it took whole month, I couldn't speak without coughing, and so finally I

got well, and thought I'm going to go up and meet these people, they sound like they'd be great people to know. So I walk in there, and this is the start of my new career in television. Okay so I walk in there and—alright, here we go—a manager and assistant manager, or operation manager, whatever—these two guys, and they welcome me with open arms. Of course they heard my story, what I was doing and everything. They were so impressed with me, and you'll never guess why—not because I knew Elvis, because I knew Brother Dave Gardner. They were Brother Dave Gardner fans, and they all talked that way.

AW:

Not this Elvis guy, but Brother Dave.

SH:

No, Elvis was nothing, it was Brother Dave. So anyway, “You got to work here.” And so they threw me literally into this production department where there were nothing but guys. And I didn't know anything. I mean yes, I went to school, but I didn't know anything, it was two-inch tape then. And to show you how everything comes back to a circle, KDUB was the big sister station of KTXS.

AW:

I'll be darned.

SH:

There was connection right there. I was to go to work for the sister station, and I stayed forty years.

AW:

Wow, so back to KDUB in a sense.

SH:

But anyway, I hadn't been there—now I say this, the guys were nice to me, you couldn't help but resent me to some degree, because here was this green behind her ears girl trying to do things that was a guy's deal. And then they made me director of the news—that was really hard. Now, Abilene had one station already, and the FCC wouldn't let there be a license for another one, so we were licensed in Sweetwater, which meant we had to do fifty one percent in Sweetwater. We had a studio in Sweetwater, and that was the reason for “Henry's Den”, and later my show. We'd do an hour's show, and then play it back, and we'd get the time so that they could have the news here in Abilene. And it's still licensed to Sweetwater. So anyway, I directed the news, and I didn't know what I was doing. We had film—I'll show you how far back this goes—the news people went out with a movie camera and took film, and then came back to the station and developed it, and put it on a reel, and that's what aired, on the air with the voicing it over. Live

they spoke over it, and the director had to make sure that it was fitting just right. And if it didn't, you really were in trouble, and I could look behind me to see that this film showing also had the slides, and we had to change the slides, which was a super—it was—

AW:

Yeah, that's like acrobatics.

SH:

Oh my God, when we wanted an a-dub and b-dub, we would send a tape to Lubbock, and they'd play it back on the microwave—we had microwave back then—and it was big two-inch tape, and we'd edit—it was unbelievable. But I learned how to do it, and I directed—and this is where I believe I was told I was the first female to direct a news cast, the six and ten, and seven days a week, or six days really.

AW:

Yeah, yes.

SH:

But anyway, I was certainly one of the first, because women didn't do that. And then I became director of "Henry's Den", which is really what I wanted to do. There's the second thing—notice that I was watching it while I was sick, watching "Henry's Den", and here I am now directing the show that I was watching, that's kind of interesting.

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

SH:

And then so he had so much going, he also had a radio show, so he finally left and I took over his show, and I had "Sylvia's Chalet" for five years. And by the way, this is driving to Sweetwater every day, and doing the show, and then coming back, and then I was made production manager. So I was production manager and doing the show.

AW:

That's a lot.

SH:

Yeah, I had a lot, but I learned and I met so many wonderful people that came from all over the country to work at that station, because they got to learn everything. Nowadays you don't get to do that.

AW:

Yeah, right, right.

SH:

So I wouldn't give for the opportunity, it just sort of laid out for me, I got to do everything, and the station, the people there, they were so much fun. And well now if you were a manager, you got to make more, but actually it was minimum wage plus fifty hours guarantee no raises ever. I had to hire people at that price and tell them you'd never have a raise.

AW:

Golly.

SH:

But you'll learn everything you need to know. They came from California, they came from Miami, they came from New York. Nicest guys in the world, and a lot of them went on to very big successes on that.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

So anyway, I did that for years and then—let me get my—oh, by the way, I have rheumatoid arthritis, that's why my hands are—

AW:

Oh my goodness.

SH:

Let's see if there's anything that I can think of—at KNIT—oh, I didn't tell you about being Miss D.J. USA.

AW:

No.

SH:

I don't know how I got to be Miss D.J. USA., that was in Memphis. Yeah, when I was in Memphis, I was elected Miss D.J. USA., and I went to Nashville, and I did a show there, and I was special guest on the Opry show—this is when it was the old Opry. But that was—

AW:

At the Ryman?

SH:

Yeah, yeah, it was the Ryman, yeah. But anyway I'd forgotten about that. Oh, it was KWFR, that was the name of the station.

AW:

In San Angelo?

SH:

Okay, oh we did commercials, we just did everything. But anyway, I did want to bring up—I know it's getting late—but I did want to—

AW:

Oh no we've got plenty of time.

SH:

Okay, well.

AW:

No I don't want to—

SH:

But this is my big television, I mean I did everything in television except sell, or engineering, I wasn't an engineer either, but I did promotion, I was promotion manager. Unfortunately the original people where we had the most fun was because it was a trade-out station so to speak. The man that owned it, which was KDUB I guess.

AW:

Yeah, Dub Rogers.

SH:

It wasn't Dub Rogers.

AW:

He was probably sold out by that.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

No, no, he was still there I think. But anyway, we did cars. We bought cars and we advertised cars is what I'm trying to say.

AW:

So you got one to drive?

SH:

Huh?

AW:

Did you get one to drive as part—

SH:

No they didn't do that, no.

AW:

Okay.

SH:

But we drove them to Florida and other places where they had a leasing company. So they didn't care whether we made money or not, so we could have all this fun. They were just real lenient.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

The station was run real loose. I mean their bar opened up on Friday at five p.m.

AW:

Now wait a minute, this is Abilene with all the church colleges.

SH:

I know, I know, it really was. My job when they hired me, one of the things I got was the scotch at five o'clock on Fridays. They actually had a bar, a stocked bar.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Late at night, we just did the craziest things. We did all kinds of silly shows, and had parties. It was just unbelievable, because the bosses were in on it too.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
They were drinking.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
But unfortunately the station finally sold because I think they did something wrong.

AW:
Oh the FCC [inaudible]

SH:
The FCC. Yeah I think what it was we sold too many commercials or something. But we were one of those distress stations, where a minority had to buy it. That was interesting, because it turned out to be white people behind the black one that bought it.

AW:
Yeah, right.

SH:
But after that, it was bought and sold many times, and I was fortunate—I got to stay on to the station, because most people left.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
But I stayed on and the things I have noticed is—it's no longer the local station anymore. Television stations now are owned by companies that have thirty, forty stations.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:

Today, the one that owns our station now, the own forty stations, they don't know who we are.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

They don't care about Abilene, Texas.

AW:

Right, and they certainly don't know about what makes Abilene different from Sweetwater, from Fort Worth from—yeah.

SH:

Exactly, and I don't know—each time you had to sell, you had to deal with different people. But it was just no longer the nice local station. And even radio's not the same anymore.

AW:

No, no.

SH:

It's no longer personality.

AW:

Right, I know when I was a kid in Lubbock I had my favorite disc jockeys. And you didn't have your favorite stations, it was the disc jockeys.

SH:

Yeah disc jockeys, absolutely.

AW:

And if they got fired at KEND, and went to KSEL, well you—

SH:

Went with them.

AW:

Started listening to KSEL.

SH:

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

Yeah, yeah you did.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
And they were great, they were talented.

AW:
Well, and they picked their own music, and that was something that was a big deal, was what do they think about it? That's how you heard about music was the disc jockey picked something.

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
And you got to listen to it.

SH:
They made or broke.

AW:
Yeah.

SH:
Made of broke—that doesn't quite—they can make you famous with their—but anyway, the station today has so many, and it's no longer the fun station. And that's just the way life goes, but I stayed and—

AW:
How did you manage to survive all those year's changes at that station? And you'd been going everywhere up to then, what made you stay in Abilene this time, was it having your mom here?

SH:
Well, this house for one thing, this was, like I say, started off real small. We did all the work in the yard, we cleared everything. We ended up buying other little houses around the lake, fixing them up and renting them.

AW:
Yeah, yeah.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

SH:

I was also involved doing that, and—. The question you asked is why I stayed in Abilene?

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

SH:

Why didn't I put an ad—

AW:

Well, I mean because you'd been going around all these different places.

SH:

Yeah, well I was getting up—

AW:

You did say your life changed there in Margaret's Peak.

SH:

Yes, yes it did.

AW:

So was that the thing, and so you wound up—because a station sells here, and you stay with the station, whereas before you were kind of going to different places.

SH:

Well I think it had to do with age, don't you imagine, more than anything?

AW:

Well I guess it could, yeah.

SH:

Although, every once in a while I—

AW:

But you weren't that old, you were—

SH:

I think it was possibly my mother, because she depended on me.

AW:

And had your father passed away?

SH:

No, not then, they got divorced.

AW:

Oh, okay, so they got divorced.

SH:

Yeah, and she needed me and I think that's to answer your question, because there were times when I really did want to go on, you're right. Because it got very boring after a while at the station, it just became a job.

AW:

And up to that point—

SH:

The last twenty years had been just a job.

AW:

Up to that point you hadn't led much of a life of boredom.

SH:

No. No I did want to bring out one thing that of all the things that I have done in my career, the one that I'm most proud of was—at this point I was now program director, and by the way when I was program director, you used to pick programs. Now the big wig up at the station, they block for everybody, got a better deal, so even that name doesn't mean anything anymore. You ended up just being an office worker basically. But anyway, I was program director for the last twenty years that I was there, and I remember that I got this thing from ABC. I dealt with ABC very closely, and I got this thing from ABC saying they were going to have a contest, and it had to have a Christmas theme to it, and that they would pick the one that they thought was the best, and they would show it on "Good Morning America." Now I have got to tell you that I had done a show on Sunday with Dr. Clawman [?] who was the science director of the schools here in Abilene. He was fascinating, and I did that show with him for a while. Well he was an occasional guest, but we did electricity, and all this kind of stuff.

AW:

Oh cool, like the old Mr. Wizard show.

SH:

Exactly.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

Exactly, but then the news department wanted the time back, so we had to give it back to them. But anyway, I had remembered some things about that. I went to the manager at the time, and I said, "Can I enter?" Because it's for the news department really, it wasn't for me, I wasn't in the news anymore. I said, "Can I enter this contest, would you mind?" And it was like, "Oh sure Sylvia, you're up against the big guys here, you know."

AW:

Yeah.

SH:

This is New York, and Chicago, and Los Angeles—all the news departments were going to send in their best story, series, little news clip or whatever. And so I said, "Yeah, I would like to do it." And so what I'm proud of is the fact that I took an idea that was mine, which was about tumbleweeds, and I wrote a story about how the tumbleweed grows up. I get tears—I don't know why I get so emotional about my little tumbleweed. The tumbleweed is a little plant, and it grows up, and then it dies—it doesn't die, but it loses all its leaves, and it starts curling into itself, into a ball, and its seeds are on the ball itself, and it breaks loose and rolls, and that's the reason for the roll, it drops the seeds. So anyway, the tumbleweed has always fascinated me anyway, it's in songs—and you know that Brother Dave had a big hit with "White Silver Sands"—that had nothing to do with tumbleweeds, but anyway that just came to me—but anyway, "rolling along with the tumbling tumbleweeds".

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

SH:

So anyway, I decided that I would write a story about the life of a tumbleweed, and we started it off from the beginning when it was first a child, and grew up and became a real tumbleweed. And told the story of—let's see, I forget what all it was about, but I had video of tumbleweeds that the news had taken some time ago, completely covering up an apartment building. I had—perfect—then I found out there was a family in town that every year their tradition was, they picked up a huge tumbleweed, hung it from their ceiling, and they frosted it of course, and lit it up—it was five feet wide, I mean it was huge.

AW:

Yep.

SH:

And they told me about it, so I got a video of that. And then I made tumbleweed snowmen, you spray it white, and I made tumbleweed trees, and I was able to show that the tumbleweed was also used for Christmas. That was the theme, to get the tumbleweed out, and—. But anyway, I won.

AW:

How cool, about what year would this have been, do you remember?

SH:

Yeah, I know that was December of '89, and Joan Lunden introduced it, and it was so fascinating in that—oh, and see the reason that I'm proud of it—I did everything. First I wrote the story. Then I went out with a big, old heavy camera and I filmed everything, even to a man on his horse with the tumbleweed going along beside of it. I did all that, I edited, I put it together. I put it in a box with a tumbleweed, and mailed it. So it was a one man band, and I was real proud of the fact that I won.

AW:

That's great.

SH:

So, anyway, they kept promoting it all through the show, "Coming up next, *The Texas Tumbleweed*." this that and the other. Well right now, I've written a book—not a book, it's a little story about a little tumbleweed girl, named "Tumblina." So I'm trying to make it into a little children's story.

AW:

Cool, have you published it?

SH:

No, not yet. But I'm working on it, that's my next—I haven't done anything since I retired.

AW:

Yeah. Well when did you retire?

SH:

Two years ago, yeah.

AW:

I knew it was recent.

SH:

Yeah, it's not much fun.

AW:

Being retired?

SH:

Being retired, no, it really isn't. But you make the best of it. Here is the—let me show you what they gave me when I left—they named the—

AW:

Oh how nice.

SH:

The named the studio after me.

AW:

Oh that's great. Now, it's Holmes with an "e", and not without right?

SH:

That's my copy, he—

AW:

No I mean your name is—

SH:

Is, yeah, they made a mistake up there.

AW:

Okay, I was wanting to make sure I didn't make—

SH:

Yeah, that was the first thing I saw, I said, "David, you didn't spell my name right!"

AW:

Oh this is terrific.

SH:

But anyway, I was so proud of that, because I had stuck in—

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

SH:

For the whole long haul.

AW:

Yeah, that's such a great photograph too. I'd seen that on the web.

SH:

Well oddly enough that's me in Memphis, that's not—

AW:

Yeah that's obviously not a TV studio.

SH:

No, but they like that picture so much.

AW:

Yeah, it's a great photograph.

SH:

They took that picture. But anyway, that's where we come to the end, but hopefully—

AW:

Well I was going to ask you what's next, but now I know it's a book.

SH:

It's the book, yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
Good.

SH:
Adventures of a Texas Tumbleweed.

AW:
Yeah, so what should I have asked you that I didn't?

SH:
Gosh, I don't know, I can't think of anything that—

AW:
Well don't worry about it, we'll shut this down, but if you do think of something, I'll leave my card with you and—

SH:
Okay.

AW:
And I come through Abilene all the time, so—

SH:
Yeah.

AW:
I'd love to come back to talk to you again.

SH:
Do you want to see some pictures?

AW:
I do, and I'll go ahead and turn this off, and we'll look at some pictures.

SH:
Okay, yeah. I think we've come to the end of the story.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

AW:

No I don't think we have at all, I think there's a lot more to say, but I'll go ahead and stop the tape now anyway.

SH:

Okay.

AW:

Thank you.

End of interview



© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library