

**Oral History Interview of
Bob Livingston**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
June 30, 2010
Austin, Texas**

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

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

Transcript Overview:

Bob Livingston talks about his career as a musician

Length of Interview: 02:54:17

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Andy Wilkinson (AW):

All right, so let me say this is the thirtieth, right? Of June?

Bob Livingston (BL):

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah. thirtieth of June, Andy Wilkinson.

BL:

Two thousand and ten.

AW:

Two thousand and ten, at the home of Mister Bob Livingston in Austin. So you were talking about a great Bobby Layne story that's not true but it's still great.

BL:

Well it you know—

AW:

Sort of true?

BL:

Well what I do in my show—cause one of the things that is true is that Johnny Cash's song, actually it's June Carter, "Ring of Fire," I did that show when I did all these foreign tours, the only country that's ever asked me for my lyrics was Vietnam.

AW:

Lyrics so they could approve them?

BL:

Approve them or disprove them. And you know it was this thing that you've got to send these things to them, so I picked, I think it was fifty songs, and it was like wow. I said, "If I'm going to be held to—" they said, You can't do anything other than what you send us. That's what the official thing was. So I sent them and some bureaucrat over there got a hold of it who had to write a one sentence or two sentences about each song. And first of all, they didn't censor a line, a word, and as a matter of fact, whoever did it, had some of the most insightful, poetic, and beautiful interpretations of the song, like "Original Spirit," he thought, This is about the creativity of man and how we can all turn inward into our own creativity and send it out and be original. And it was like, is that what that song's about? That's amazing. It was like, Oh, wow.

And so, each song he went through, well when he got to “Ring of Fire,” which I had put on there he said, “This is a classic American country song about the burning effects of love.” [Laughter] And you know it’s just so perfect.

AW:

Have you got that list somewhere?

BL:

Yeah, I probably do.

AW:

Man, if you do, we need a copy of it, that’s too good.

BL:

I do have a copy.

AW:

Yeah, root around; I’d like to have a copy to put in the archive. But go on, “Burning Ring of Fire?”

BL:

“Burning Ring of Fire,” so, you know, I would do that song and in my show, I tell that story. And people always—you know, it’s just interesting because, first of all, we’re talking about Vietnam a communist government and sometimes I’ll preface it by saying, “So there’s this little communist pinko in a cell over in a little cubicle over in Hanoi.” And some of the old rednecks will go, “Yeah, right, ha ha ha ha,” you know but when I tell them they didn’t censor a word and they had all this insightful stuff it’s kind of this dichotomy sort of. So what I had been telling in my story was, besides that, I said, I’m from Lubbock and there was an old character there whose name was Bobby Layne, and some of you will remember him, he was an all American quarterback at U.T. and went to the Detroit Lions in the late fifties, right? It was the fifties, early sixties, something like that. He was the kind of guy that could drink a fifth of whiskey and throw six touchdown passes you know every Sunday, and some of the old timers would go, “Yeah that’s right.” And as a matter of fact I said, “He was a wild Texas ya-hoo and if you can find a Webster’s dictionary and look under wild Texas ya-hoo you’ll see his picture.” And so the truth of it was that he was friends with Roland Coke who was my girlfriends father, my girlfriend Penny Pearson, and it was her stepdad and so he would come over all the time and I remember just playing him some guitar and he would tip me a twenty dollar bill if I played—

AW:

Plus you went to high school with his son Robby, and played football.

BL:

Went to high school with his son Robby who, he was a year older than me, he was a quarterback and we incidentally—I just met James Street. I also want to tell this story about Darrell Royal don't let me forget, we had this whole thing about Darrell Royal. So, what my story is, to kind of get to the—to make it a little more immediate, which is a complete lie, but I don't tell the audience that, is that so Bobby knew everybody and when Johnny Cash came to town, of course he was able to get us tickets and he took all of us young boys to see Johnny Cash. And we went in and saw the show and it was fantastic and June Carter was there. And right in back of the stage was these double doors and right after the show, Bobby said, "Come on boys, let's go back stage," and that was like first time and everything for me and we walked back and when we walked in—and I tell the story where it has become real to me now.

AW:

[Laughs] Like all good stories.

BL:

Because when we walked in, and I can see it, he was standing there and he was talking to some pretty girl and all his band was there, but when we walked in he turned and looked straight at me. And he just walked straight at me, and I kept looking behind me and was like, What's going on. And he walked right up to me and he spoke to me, he told me to get out of the way, but it was a start. [Laughter] And people will kind of laugh and I'll just go into "Ring of Fire" and tell the Vietnam story as well but it's a great song and June Carter wrote it.

AW:

You know I don't guess I ever looked at the writing credits on that I just assumed it was Johnny.

BL:

No, if you've seen that movie *Walk the Line* and Reese Witherspoon and she's married to someone else and he's married—Joaquin Phoenix is married to someone else, and she's got her auto-harp. This is the way they depict it, she's got her auto-harp and she's sitting there and she's kind of wistfully staring out a window and she's going, "Love is a burning thing." But she wrote it and what a song! Just, what a song. So that's my sort of Johnny Cash thing, I actually saw Johnny a couple of times and once was at Emo's here in Austin at the punk club.

AW:

When he was doing the—

BL:

South by Southwest,

AW:

Oh, but was that after Rubin was producing—

BL

No, this was like, I believe, in the late eighties. It when all the punk stuff was really going on and all the kids—you know I had the greatest seat in the house. There was a column right in front of the stage and I just—it was packed and I just snuck in at that column and I was right there and watched him, and he was fabulous. And all the kids, the punks, the black lipstick and fingernails and goth looking people were there absolutely flipping out. And the same people went to see Don Walzer, and I asked a couple of girls once—a girl and a guy were there and I said, “What is it, why are you here?” I noticed you’re hearing and Don Walzer, this old country guy, and they went, “He’s real. He’s the real thing.” He said, “We go to tractor pulls, we go to big truck, we go see Johnny Cash and Don Walzer, forget Willie or Jerry Jeff, those guys aren’t real. This is the real thing.” Which I thought was cool.

AW:

Yeah. Especially since Don was a postman.

BL:

Exactly, but he’d always played Emo’s.

AW:

Yeah and there was never a purer voice on the planet you know?

BL:

Yeah, and at one time, if I of had my shit together, cause I walked up and I said, “God, Don I’d love to cut a—” he had not had a record at this time so I’d just love to cut a record and put a CD. He goes, “Well I’m open if you want to do something, you want to record, I’d love for you to put a CD out on me,” And you know, of course they’re all tied up in litigation now with Watermelon Records, I don’t know if you noticed any of that—

AW:

No, I didn’t.

BL:

Oh the family’s suing there’s this guy named Heinz Geisler, he was always a pretty good guy to me.

AW:

Oh I know Heinz, he’s a collector right?

BL:

No, that's Yurgen Cope.

AW:

Yurgen, that's who I was confusing him with.

BL:

Heinz owned Watermelon Records who had a bunch of people and they went bankrupt and he said he could never make any money and the family is suing him still, somehow or another saying they were never paid royalties and stuff.

AW:

I was afraid I'd kill Don Walzer.

BL:

Really?

AW:

Yeah, one year at Elko, they were looking for a suggestion for the Saturday night dance. They always have a dance, and somebody up there called me, and I said, "Man, you got to get Don Walzer." I think Buck was still alive, maybe not, but Buck and I played a show with Don—

BL:

The bass player?

AW:

No, Buck Ramsey.

BL:

Oh, Buck Ramsey.

AW:

And I played a show with Don at the Broken Spoke one time. It was an odd gig you know. Here's two cowboy folk singers doing their individual thing, and of course at the Broken Spoke people are convinced that you know if you play Ave Maria they'd be out two-stepping [Laughter] And so we're playing this—

BL:

[Sings] "Ave Maria," that's a good idea.

AW:

So we're up there playing and they're dancing to our stuff, and we're going whoa this is strange, because we just thought we were going to do a little concert opening set for Don. And so Don gets up and the regular thing happens. I got to know him through that but I said, "Man you got to get Don Walzer over here." So they did. Well Elko is like almost seven thousand feet in altitude, it's in January, and every time I saw Don he had no color in his face, he could barely move. [Laughter] And I thought, oh my God, my suggestion is going to be the end of Don—

BL:

Well did he do good though?

AW:

Did great. He could just barely get on stage, barely get to the microphone and as soon as it was time, [snaps] boy that voice hit and you know he was singing that clear, high stuff. He never missed a beat. It was terrific. He was a big hit. But you know, in between I thought, oh my goodness—

BL:

I almost killed—

AW:

I'm about to be responsible for killing Don.

BL:

Yeah, he probably hadn't been up there for years in that altitude.

Aw:

Yeah. And I didn't even think about it. Just wasn't thinking.

BL:

Yeah you don't—do you want something to drink, a water? I don't have much I might have a Diet Coke.

AW:

Yeah let me put this on pause.

[Pause in recording]

BL:

Crazier than he was.

AW:

Yeah, poor Robby.

BL:

James Street told me that what had happened was, he was in Vegas, and he had been on and off, in and out of rehab, and when he was in Vegas, and his wife was saying, "Don't do that. Don't go." And he goes, "It's okay, I'm just going to—" and he went to see some—you know he loved Elvis and they'd get backstage, you know, Elvis knew him. Street had a bunch of great stories. And so apparently Robby started betting, and he either lost or he won, but in any case, I think he had won a bunch of money and started drinking again, and somebody probably gave him some pills or something and he just you know, never woke up. And they called his wife and his wife flew out there and kind of secured everything. But he was—he just finally, his body gave out. Some people say he tried to kill himself—

AW:

He never struck me as that kind of guy.

BL:

No.

AW:

Well tell your Darrell Royal story.

BL:

Well, just recently a friend of mine whose name is Mike Looney, he was a fraternity brother of mine, who also tells the story, "Livingston was the first guy we ever met that just quit school after he got that lottery number. Well I remember when we were watching the TV and he said, 'If I get a good number, I'm ought to here.' And he left the next day, it was the damndest thing I ever saw, I'd never known anybody to leave school." And all these guys turned into, you know, really wealthy, businessmen, owns insurance companies, doctors and lawyers and stuff. And so when we have—every once in a while when I see them I'm the itinerant—

AW:

Heretic.

BL:

You know, musician. But so this guy, Looney, he's also an author and he's written some books and he's trying to do a movie on one of his books and he got this idea to do a documentary on the 1969 Texas-Arkansas national championship game. So he put in some money and he found another investor, and they went to Fayetteville, I guess, and they interviewed Frank Broyles, and

all the old timers that played in that game and then they came to Texas and interviewed James Street and Tom Campbell and all those people that were on the team, Ernie McCoy's brother, I can't remember, Mike McCoy maybe? And Darrell, and Darrell is a little, he's got a little Alzheimer's coming on you know? But he remembered me it seemed. Anyway, Mike said—cause I was telling him how much Darrell—what a big music fan Darrell was. And that hadn't been part of his documentary yet. The one thing that Looney said about him, he says, "You'll get up and walk in a room and it's just like, Well, why are we here? What's going on? Where's Edith?" That's his wife, and he just seems a little disoriented but if you're going to talk about that game or any of those years he can remember every detail of that game and of all kinds of stuff. And so I told him that he was just a big music nut and he's the one that, when Willie Nelson got in trouble with the IRS, Darrell Royal and a couple of guys bought all that stuff and gave it back to Willie. And so, and another thing about Darrell, I remember back in the day being at Segal Frye's house on 32nd Street and in the room, and it's all these folks just passing guitars around, maybe Jerry Jeff was there, maybe Murphey was there. I mean people were smoking pot in the back and Darrell Royal's sitting there with Ronnie Earl who ends up to be the—

AW:

D.A. [District Attorney].

BL:

D.A. And they were music nuts and it was like, "It's okay." And so I knew he loved music and I remember once going up and playing at Castle Creek and he walked up and here was Bill Bradley and James Street and all these football players that happened to be there too and he didn't want anything to do with them, he wanted to hang out with the musicians, Darrell. So here just about three weeks ago, Looney calls me and says, "We're finishing this thing up and why don't you come up and we'll sit around the table and play," so I did. And I had played him some of my songs, and then I said something about Willie Nelson and Darrell just lit up like a Christmas tree. And he goes, "Willie Hugh." And so I did "Crazy," for him and he started singing. And Looney, at the end of the little session, Looney said, "We really messed up by not having cameras in here." And so they figured out another way to do it, and so we had a show the other night at Barton Creek Country Club, and Bruce Robinson was on it and I was on it. And so I opened the show, and before that we went upstairs and had a little private concert and I just sat around and they filmed it all, and Darrell was just totally into it. And another thing that happened was, I was talking about computers and stuff and Darrell finally goes, "I've never been on a Website, don't know anything about it." I said, "You've never been on the computer?", "Never, never." I pull out my iPhone and I go, "Let's see here," and I open it up to Google and I go, "Coach Darrell Royal," and about five hundred—and I said, "This is what all these people are saying about you," and he's just going [makes a face]. And so the Wikipedia article was first, so I pressed the Wiki article and it comes up, and I start reading to him, "Darrell Royal was born

in—” and it was something like, cause he was talking to Bradley about Hugo, Texas, or Hollis, Texas up near Wellington.

AW:

Of our panhandle?

BL:

Yeah, it was in Hollis, it was twenty miles from Wellington. And a little town—and Bradley said, “When did you leave?” He goes, “When I was old enough.” [AW Laughs] That’s all he’d say about it. But he just looked at this listing and all his accomplishments and all this stuff about how his mother died when he was a year old and they kept it from him, how she really died, which was by cancer, and they told the little boy that she died in childbirth because they didn’t think he could handle the cancer thing, as I understand it.

AW:

Yeah, they’ll make him—now make him feel guilty for having been born.

BL:

Yeah, and he looked and said, “Is that about me? They have all that?” And he was just like blown away. Here’s Darrell Royal. And when I told Bruce Robinson that story, and Bruce has a road manager who’s from England, and he goes, [in accent] “It’s just a great testament to America, to not know anything about the Internet, have never done e-mail or been on a Website, and still have a football stadium named after you.” [Laughter] “It just goes to show you—”

AW:

What’s Looney’s first name?

BL:

Mike Looney. And he has all that footage.

AW:

At some point, could you put me in touch with him?

BL:

Sure.

AW:

I’d like to interview him about his time in Lubbock and Texas Tech.

BL:

Yeah.

AW:

That'd be interesting. The other—you know I know we've got a lot of different things to talk about, things that you've thought about, but could we start with you talking about your Africa trip? Because I heard you talk a little bit about it yesterday when you were recording the podcast over at Jeff Tavaréz's place, but it was a very interesting story, and I think it'd be nice if you could spend a little time just—because we spent the last couple of times we've been together you talked about your foreign service career. You know with the department—is it the Department of State?

BL:

Yes, U.S. State Department.

AW:

Yeah, but that was before you went over to Africa so, how'd that come about?

BL:

Well, how it came about was, the people that handle these type of programs, this is the cultural side of this U.S. State Department. They have the diplomatic side, they're liable to send a professor of geopolitics around to give workshops or talk or they also handle if the vice president or if a senator flies in to Lesotho. They handle all the arrangements, and they're called Public Affairs Officers. They also carry on hard diplomacy, but they love it when there's a cultural program that they can delve into. It's sort of really refreshing for them. And of all the—you know I've hardly ever met anyone with the State Department in these twenty-five countries I've been to that wasn't as sharp and spot on and, even with the right politics, as far as I can tell, because they're in there no matter who is in power, they're foreign service and they have a hard rut of hoes some time especially with Bush, with some of his policies. And they were usually, I never found any of them who were for it, but they had to do it, you know kind of in a side moment they go—I remember this one guy in Sri Lanka, who was telling me, "What do you think he's thinking?" And this is a State Department guy and I go, "Man, if you don't know we're in big trouble." [Laughter] So, Washington used to handle all this stuff in a centralized way and it was done under the auspices of the United States Information Agency, that was part of the State Department but it was sort of this other arm and they handled all the cultural stuff. And there was an entity called Arts America, that would handle, from the time you walked out the door to the taxi, everything was handled out of Washington and you got your itineraries from there and all that. Then with budgetary cuts and stuff, all that went away, and the USIA was incorporated within the State Department. There is no more USIA now, those people became—they were still Public Affairs Officers but now they were just U.S. State Department. So I started

working with these people at their posts, in other words, no more Washington. It was just, I would contact them, and for instance—this is how this came about. A woman I met in Lahore, Pakistan, her name was Donna Winton, and Donna was just a great person. So Tucker and I came through and we played Lahore in 1998. Well, every two years they play fruit basket turn over, and the same people that were there in Pakistan are different now, they've gone somewhere else, some other post. The don't ever let them stay—they can stay in the same region if they want. I'd met some that had always been either in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, just kind of in that same region. But Donna went to Bahrain, and out of the blue in 2000, so this was like, I guess, two years later, she said, "Hey, I'm in Bahrain now and it's the twenty-fifth anniversary of America's relationship with the king," or the sultan, something like that, "And would you consider coming over, you and Tucker?" And I go, "Well yeah I would consider but if I'm going to get that far, what do you think about just—I'd love to play all over the Middle East." And she said, "Let me see what I can do." So she kind of took it on to contact all the other posts and make an offer and so eight countries did: Oman, Syria, Kuwait, Yemen, Bahrain, Qatar, a couple others, Saudi Arabia was going to do it and then didn't. So we went over there and we did the tour, well that was amazing. In the Middle East, in Yemen. That was when I told—I don't know if I told this story but, "Not Fade Away" became sort of our theme song.

AW:

Yeah wasn't that when the girls in the—

BL:

In Yemen said, "Yes!"

AW:

And they had on the—

BL:

Hajib.

AW:

Hajib and all you could see were these eyes, and they were singing "Not Fade Away."

BL:

They were singing, "Not Fade Away." Yeah, and not only that but when I said, "This song is about how big and how wonderful and how beautiful this young girl was in Buddy Holly's English class," this young woman right in the front, she said, "Yes!" [Laughter] She was like, "That sounds good to me." So, we go into the Middle East and I lose track of Donna again. I had gone to Africa in 2005 into Angola. North Africa, we did Morocco, Tunisia, and then we had gone to Angola, which is the deepest part of Africa. Very weird vibe, very dark vibe. Militaristic,

it had been a—there had been a revolution going on for thirty years and the U.S. had backed the wrong guy. They had backed the rebel, Jonas Savimbi, and he was assassinated, revolution stopped the next day. They were sitting on top of something like the third largest proven oil reserves in the world. So real strategic. We went over there and played at the New U.S. Embassy and played for their Cardinal, and it was kind of interesting.

AW:

How did they people receive you in Angola?

BL:

Very good, very good. We did a show at a theater and we played with a young—it was one of the times I got in real big trouble with the State Department too, because we'd get to this place, they had lost our guitars, they had lost our bags. The woman that picks us up is this thirty-two year old, black, high powered, State Department, public affairs officer, she is the public, they call it the PAO. She's the PAO of the country. Unflappable competence in the face of—you know, we've lost our stuff, "Ok, let's go." She's back there telling the office we've lost the stuff that somebody needs to come out there and blah-blah-blah and we're going to need to check the bag tomorrow whenever it comes in and she's driving us in and she's weaving around in her SUV and there's military people and trucks full of soldiers and beggars and hawkers on the street and it's just this real dirty, just a wide-eyed and she's talking to a congressman in Lisbon who has missed his plane, "Look baby, that's not my problem. You're just going to have to buy your ticket we'll refund you when you get here." [Laughter] And she's you know. And so she takes us to the nicest hotel in town which looks like a Holiday Inn or something and says, "Okay there are armed bandits on the streets, don't leave your hotel, because they will rob you. What I have to say though is if you for some reason you do leave your hotel, make sure you have some money, because if they get you and you don't have any money, that's going to really piss them off." So that's our introduction. [AW Laughs] So when we get into the hotel, it's the most expensive place I've ever been in my life. A bottle of water is ten dollars, and we've been given per diem and stuff. Tucker meanwhile has got a girlfriend back in Austin and he's calling her, that comes later when he gets the six hundred dollar telephone bill and nearly has a nervous breakdown trying to get out of it and they wouldn't let him out of it. And so, we arrive there and we have the clothes on our backs. And we go in and we can't leave for three days, they can't find our bags. So I go down, they have a computer that is the slowest computer on the planet. It's dial up, there's a line to get there, it may take twenty minutes to formulate an e-mail because it would keep crashing and just you can type, but it takes five minutes for it to figure out, did he type 'the'? And then it'll come on. And so, I started posting on my website, things like, "The streets are full of hawkers and gawkers and prostitutes and I was in the restaurant and I swear a guy looks just like Idi Amin next to me and with his wife with jewels and she spits into her plate. I mean she was, it was just this strange, dark scene. Guys with sunglasses, meanwhile there would there'd be these soldiers of fortune, Portuguese guys going, "What are you talking about, it's a

great city, it's an international city, come on! We're going out tonight." And so I'm putting all that in my blog. And so we go and we meet this university troop of dancers and singers and we work out a show with them, and we do the show. And they put this giant "Bob and Tucker Livingston" up on the thing and we do some radio to advertise it and they have posters all over town and we have a pretty good crowd. And people come, there are local people but there's also from the diplomatic community that are invited and they come and they do a real nice job with bios and all that and so we worked on some songs and we've got video of all this. And we had a rehearsal and they wanted to do a song with us. SO I didn't know what—I don't know-- they they could not speak a word of English. So I said, "What about 'Blowing in the Wind,' by Bob Dylan? Do you know that?" And they go "Uh—" And I go, [Sings] "The answer my friend is blowing in the wind." And they just kind of looked and I said, "Well, look you just sing the chorus, 'the answer my friend is blowing in the wind,' you do that." [Imitates lyrics with accent] "The answer my fend eh blowin in a way," "The answer my friend is blowing in the wind." [Imitates lyrics with accent] "The answer my fend eh blowin in a way," and so they got that much. And we did the, [Imitates lyrics in accent] "Answer the blowin in a way," they had the most beautiful voices on the planet, like Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and they're dressed all in white with about thirty young people and so as the show goes by, there's different things going. There's incredible dancing, and traditional and modern and singing and everything, and then we play our show and we end it with "Blowing in the Wind" they come up and it's just the most beautiful thing in the world. They're doing it phonetically and then we do, "The Saints Go Marching In," cause they know that one and we walk off the stage into the crowd and everybody, "The Saints Go Marching In," so it was a big—and so that was a great experience but it was still just kind of strange. And then after we get home I get a call from this woman Kim, from the State Department who says, "We were making your final report to Paris, and imagine my complete dismay when I went on your website to see what you had written about us and what is there is nothing but your opinion of, you know, you're talking about prostitutes and Idi Amin's wife spitting in the plate and you don't say a word about the wonderful students and their dance?" And you know I thought it was a fair assessment, and I said, "You know, this was stream of consciousness, late at night, me just being me, I'm not even thinking about who I'm writing to. It was like I was writing to you, you know, a friend of mine. I wasn't thinking and I will amend it." And I did, I changed it, I put the children in it, the kids and the good things—

AW:

Did you leave Idi Amin's wife in there?

BL:

I might have. I might have left his wife in there because that's what it was. But I put it much more heavily on the cultural experience. Meanwhile, Tucker and I are going to Paris to talk to the head of African Regional Services for a bigger tour. Which, she's in Paris and they said, "We're going to fly you to Paris and then home." So we're sitting in the lobby and Tucker says

to me—we're fixing to have a big meeting with the State Department there in Angola. And Tucker says to me, "Dad, I'm not going to Paris," it's his girlfriend's birthday, "I'm going back to Austin." And I go, "What do you mean Tucker?" And this is typical Tucker. We could have a whole session on just Tucker but, "What do you mean? We're going to Paris, we're going to play—?", "I don't want to go. You wouldn't understand wanting to be with your loved one's birthday." That's how he puts it, "You obviously wouldn't understand anything like that." So he and I are getting more and more heated, I'm going back and here comes the State Department woman and she sits down and said, "Well whatever you want to say I can't talk you out of it." And instead of couching his words to, "There's something very important that has come up and I really need to go," he just goes, "It's my girlfriend's birthday, and I don't want to go to Paris." As he says to me, "Dad, I don't lie." And he doesn't. It doesn't make a difference if it's me or the government he's talking to. "It's my girlfriend's birthday and I want to be with her and I want to get out of here as fast as possible." And the woman's just like nonplussed, "But you're supposed to go to Paris.", "My dad can handle that, I don't need to be there." Then she finds out it would cost four thousand dollars to change the ticket, and he went, "Never mind." So, we go to Paris and we meet with African Regional Services and the woman says, "We'd love you to play, what we need is a proposal, you tell us everything you're going to do. We don't want to think about it. How much you would charge, what kind of workshops you would offer, everything you would do. Give us some video, and we'll put it on our intra-net thing and we'll share it." Well I go back and I'm jazzed about it and Tucker meanwhile is supposed to supply the video and I do the proposal but it slips away, the timeframe. That woman leaves. A couple of years pass, and out of the blue, I get a Facebook message from Donna Winton who is now the new head of African Regional Services. So it's Lahore, Bahrain, now she's back. Who says, "Hey, what's going on?" You know and we just take—it wasn't like you want to play? It was like we just start exchanging Facebook messages, we were friends. And I just say I'd love to do this—I had the proposal, it's pretty much ready, we've still got video, we'd still love to do it. So, she goes, "Send it along, we'll see what we can do." I sent everything to her and they had a few questions, and I tailored the proposal and made all these offers on what we would charge and what kind of meals we wanted, we were vegetarians, that kind of thing. And then they came back and said, "Okay, I think we've got some countries that have signed up." So I call Tucker who is living in India, and I say, "Tucker, we've got this program." [Phone rings] I have to—this is—

AW:

I need to change batteries anyway.

BL:

Hello?

[Pause in Recording]

BL:

Do you need to give a date or do you need to start it again or?

AW:

Oh this is the second part of June the thirtieth with Bob.

BL:

And so I call Tucker up about this African trip, and I offered it to him and he goes, "Dad I can't leave here, I'm in the middle of this serious music lessons with this teacher and my teacher wouldn't like it and I'm here and I just can't do it." And he said, "I haven't played guitar much anyway, I've just been totally delving into this." Which Tucker is in the middle of—he's playing a Vina, this ancient instrument, musical instrument, and so he turned it down. And he goes, "Get Bradley." And another thing that they said is, "You could bring a band with you this time. You don't have to come solo or just duo." So I could have brought even more folks, I think, but I chose a trio and me and Bradley, Copp and Richard Bowden. And so, we were gearing up for it, we had photographs made, real cool photos and bios and I had done a further proposal and really written and got on it, by that time Tucker had done a really cool video of "Not Fade Away" all over the world that I'd sent that to them and got some people excited. So, four countries from Africa came in, Rwanda, Lesotho, Namibia, and Zambia, no Namibia and Malawi. Rwanda, Lesotho, Malawi, and Namibia. Two or three others wanted to do it but they had already had programs that year and they didn't have the budget, everything is a budgetary constraint. So then, I got some gigs and I was going to go to Italy. I had some gigs in Italy and then go to Switzerland and play, and I had something in France. The things in Italy just didn't make sense, because it was just too far away from airports it was just kind of going to be really—it was going to be crazy. So we started the tour out, but the day before we left, Bradley Copp called, he had had a colonoscopy and he said, "Bob I've got bad news, I've got colon cancer. I cannot go on this trip." So he was out, we didn't have time—I asked him I said, "Do you want me to get another guitar player? I might be able to find someone who could do this." But the tickets had already been made, and everything had been done so they said, "No just come ahead the two of you." So Richard Bowden and I went and I got a couple of gigs, I think three gigs in Switzerland, and a gig in Paris, and the gig in Paris, all the State Department girls came out. Donna Winton and her assistant, about four or five of them and we played at this little place called Club 61 which was like a media hang out for foreign service or foreign correspondence and stuff, and that the foreign editor of La Monde Magazine maybe owns, his name is Remi. Another guy you probably need to talk to Andy, is Mort Rosenblum, he is a reporter, he used to be Head Bureau Chief of the Associated Press in Paris. He lives in Paris and in Arizona now. He was like one of the first reporters on the ground during the First Gulf War to get in. All these apocryphal moments in one's life, he had come to Texas and interviewed Jerry Jeff and done a book of essays, Jerry Jeff was one of the essays. This was probably back, it's got to be late eighties, very early nineties but late eighties. And when I went to France, I was going to play some gigs, Jerry

Jeff said, “Man you ought to look this guy, Mort Rosenblum up.” And I did, and he has a houseboat on the Seine, he lives on this thing, and I was there for the French bicentennial, and he invited me to this party, I came with another friend of mine and on the boat was Jane Pauley, and Gary Trudeau and all these people from the NBC who were covering it but they had a party and here’s Jane Pauley. And we all had a merry time and floated down the Seine to the Eiffel Tower and watched the fireworks and everything.

AW:
Cool.

BL:
It was very cool. So anyway, this guy ended up—I had played some gigs, he had got me some gigs in France before and he connected me with this man at Club 61, and that’s why we went there. We flew into France, we actually took the train from Berne to Paris, they put us up and paid us a little money, not a whole lot of money, but it was a gig you know we had a great time, had a good crowd and blew the roof off. And so the State Department knew they were in good hands, it was just like, “Holy shit,” you know.

AW:
This was at the beginning of the tour?

BL:
This was at the beginning of the tour. And then a lot of the women, they never handle that stuff.

AW:
They don’t get to hear you?

BL:
They don’t get to hear you unless you have a video or a CD. Donna Winton knew, but the other ones sort of didn’t and we were just pure Texas and they were charmed, and I wore my suit, my shark skin gold suit. And so we played and they enjoyed it, and then we went down there and met with the State Department people and the next morning they gave us our charge, you know, what we were going to do, and it was freezing cold in Europe so we had brought all this heavy—we left all of our coats there went out to the airport and we flew down to Rwanda. We arrived, they took us to the hotel, we crashed, we were up at six-thirty in the morning and we went to see the U.S. Ambassador of Rwanda. And this is a pivotal moment because I’ve done a lot of workshops—we’ve done guitar stuff, we’ve done songwriting workshops, as little as I could think of to do, but we were supposed to do all these workshops down there at these different countries. And the U.S. Ambassador is Stewart Symington Jr. his father was a senator, maybe of Indiana, I’m not sure. He was a Bush appointee, this guy, eight in the morning we come in we sit

at this—just like this, there's a couch, a coffee table, he gets up from his desk and he sits on the other side and he just looks at us and he says, "Boys, you are our ambassadors. Whatever you do, whatever you say, the way you act is being watched by all these people. We are in Rwanda, fifteen years ago there was a massacre, a genocide, nearly a million people were killed. This country is still in a state of mass post traumatic stress. They are stricken and you'll see it. But they're good people and they're turning this country around and we're trying to help them as much as we can. That being said, everywhere you go they're going to ask you for help and somehow you need to turn that round and say, 'What can you do for yourself?'" And that was really important, and so Richard and I, what we did at these workshops—we'd do these workshops, instead of going, "Okay here's how to write a song," we said, "We're from the live music capital of the world, Austin, Texas." And before I'd left also incidentally, Austin had made the Bob Livingston Trio Austin's International Music Ambassadors at this little ceremony, gave us some documents. I'd sent the documents out and all that, and they had given keys to the city, they'd given us some keys to the city to give to these mayors that we'd meet along the way, so State Departments so the mayor would be there at these shows we'd been doing. We'd give them a key and they do a proclamation and read the thing and you know it was a little ceremony. It was the first time we'd really have sort of some—the last time that I almost came close to having some diplomatic credentials was when Anne Richards said, "You need to be ambassadors from Texas and we're going to get you some badges and some stuff you can flash." And then she was out of office before I could really get her to do it, but she wanted to give us some badges—

AW:

[Laughs] "Stuff you could flash."

BL:

[Coughs] Yeah, so anyway, we would say, "We're from the live music capital of the world and your community can accentuate live music just like we do, that the whole tourism is based on live music in Austin. The city council's gotten involved and actually that is the motto," that's sort of the— "Austin Texas, The Live Music Capital of the World," it says that when you get to the airport, we were telling them all that. And their eyes were just getting big they just, you know like holy mackerel you're community supports you? Yes they do and we can help and we would meet with the mayor and tell him that too, give them the key to the city and you could do something with tourism and if you can accentuate your live music. And they would have questions like, "There's no place for us to play anyway, live music. There's some clubs but you know they're just hip hop.", "What about coffee shops?", "Well what do you mean coffee shops?" "Don't you have coffee shops?", "Well yeah, we have coffee shops.", "Well go in there and play in the coffee shops, don't you know the owner?", "Well yeah.", "Well ask them for a little—", "But how would we get paid?", "Put out your hat.", "Oh but then we're working for tips, it's kind of demeaning.", "What are you talking about, we all did that. I did that."

AW:

We still do it. [Laughs]

BL:

We still do it, that's what we do. Sometimes, if you can make a few bucks. And they said, "Well okay we'll try it." They may have one guitar among five or six, eight people, begging for strings you know. But what we did is we formed a music association on the spot, all these kids would share numbers and e-mail addresses and say we're going to do something and so it was a real positive way—our workshops kind of turned into like, what can you do for yourself? And giving them ideas and Richard would say how the community works and we said we embrace all forms of music, we are not elitists, you know. And I would say, and traditional music is really—I just want to put in a plug for your traditional music, and invariably, they would say something like, "Oh you know, that's old school. Traditional music is old school." And I'd say, "But it's beautiful, this is what we know," and they'd go, "Well here's a song," and they would sing this song, and they would all start singing it and the whole atmosphere would change and they were doing those beautiful harmonies of [hums a tribal sounding tune] you know those cool—And they'd get big smiles on their faces and everybody knew every word, and at the end of it we'd go, "That's incredible that's what we're talking about," and they'd just laugh and go, "Yeah, maybe we could put some of that into our music." So the State Department would work us—we'd get charged by the ambassador, we'd go immediately over to an elementary school and play a show. We'd go to a radio station and do a radio show, we'd go and do a television show, we'd go and we might have lunch at that point, we'd go and do another high school that afternoon, we'd go do another workshop in the afternoon. As the time goes by, we go to a meeting with the student association, they're working us, they have this schedule, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, with a driver and a State Department person, meanwhile they're just loving it because we're hard travelers, we know how to do it. And we talk and we sing and we're playing and we're energetic and they are loving it because a lot of times they'll get musicians that are just like, "What are we doing here? This is the end of the road." But I didn't think of it that way at all.

AW:

Sounds like fun.

BL:

It was so much fun. Work your ass off and then you'd do a show at that ambassador's residence or at the U.S. Embassy at night. And they invite the local media people, maybe the anchor woman or anchor guy, they invite parts of the diplomatic core, when were in I guess it was Lesotho, it was an incredible experience. Lesotho is a kingdom surrounded by South Africa. It retained its independence during the Bora War because they are such fierce fighters who fought in the mountains. It looked like New Mexico, you go and it's just the most beautiful place you've

ever seen. Adobe, funky architecture, and they have a king and the prime minister lives next door to the American ambassador. The prime minister, best buds with Nelson Mandela, taught at his school, an older fellow, who had a couple of assassination attempts on him. So he's invited to the diplomatic core that night, a bunch of people and local celebrities and local musicians and it's a party. And the Chinese Ambassador shows up who ends up saying, "You've got to come to China, they'd love you in Shanghai." And so the prime minister shows up and the ambassador is so excited he says, "I have invited him to twenty different functions, he lives next door, he has never darkened the door, but for some reason he's coming tonight." And it was like, what's this Texas music all about? Why are we doing it? You know and so they come and he says, "We're going to have a little talk." And so me, Richard, the prime minister and the U.S. ambassador sit in a little room about this size, smaller than this, and just talk about our life and what it's like, and living next door. And these two guys are meeting each other really for the first time and the ambassador says, "I just want to tell you, my daughter comes home from college every once in a while and we have parties for her and we invite some of the Peace Corps kids and they come in and we have this swimming pool and we're probably too loud and we probably kept you up too late." He goes, "Oh no, no problem I love children having a good time. I thought we were keeping you awake with our ostriches and llamas, and our weird birds." And so they were able to kind of communicate and go, hey maybe we should do this more often, so it was really cool seeing that happen—

AW:

Yeah, because of music.

BL:

Because of the music and a cultural thing. We go out and we do the show, and I do—I always start—if I only get to do one song or the show I do "Original Spirit," it immediately gets them, strangely enough. There's something, I think, about the beat as well, and I immediately noticed—the prime minister is sitting right in the front and I notice his foot tapping right off the bat and so when I see their feet tapping, I'm playing the harmonica, as soon as I see their feet tapping I know I got 'em, which is almost immediate. Then I do "Cowboys and Indians," and they're singing along, by the second song the whole place is singing. So it really works, those two songs, right off the bat, one and two. And I always before, in my tours, I had done like a history of American folk and country music, tell him "Sons of the Cowboys," tell them those stories. This time on this tour I did almost the same show I do now, I tell them who I am, I'm from Lubbock Texas, I got the good draft lottery number, because half of your audience, in the ambassador's case if you're doing the U.S. Embassy—

AW:

They're Americans, right?

BL:

There's a lot of Americans anyway, or diplomatic people or people that know, and they're not totally ignorant of the geography of these places and some of this stuff. And I tell them going out and meeting Michael Murphey, I tell them about picking up the hitch hiker and about him being from Austria and he's an auto-mechanic and he goes, "The only other Texan I know is from the—" and he turns out to be the governor of California you know that stupid cheap trick but they all laugh and so I was able to tell my story. because even the prime minister laughed his ass off when I said that because he knows who Schwarzenegger is you know. So it's like they're all having their knee pulled-or whatever it is but I was able to do my show and have some CDs and sell them too you know so it worked out really good.

AW:

Was there a lot of difference in the countries? It sounds like Lesotho and Rwanda were very different.

BL:

They were. Well Rwanda, I've got to say it's the cleanest country I've ever been in my life. You wouldn't think so.

AW:

Really? No.

BL:

There's no trash on the streets, they get out every morning and clean their own streets. There's a big volunteer thing up the prime minister's getting everybody involved, they've outlawed plastic bags

AW:

Wow.

BL:

Is that not big?

AW:

That is very big.

BL:

They do bottle, but they recycle. You drive down these roads, you go into a restroom on the side of the road that is the cleanest restrooms on the planet. You walk in, there's an attendant, and he doesn't expect a tip, and he's in there making sure that everything's cool. And their snacks are

like, I guess from South Africa, and they have these wild like curry Cheetos you know, really funky things. And of course anything you want. And we did a lot of traveling, a lot of driving and got a lot of pictures, and Rwanda's beautiful and we went up and played—so what they'll do is you'll fly into the capitol, you'll play a couple of gigs there, you'll go to a neighboring city and play a gig, then you'll go driving to another and play another gig. You might do another workshop during the day too, a couple of meetings with you know, and interviews and stuff. We did a lot of radio, a lot of television. I was telling you yesterday, you know when you walk into these radio stations and they're just sort of, okay they're rolling their eyes almost, here are these white Americans, white bread, what are they going to talk about, but we're on the show and it's like you got to say to yourself and so they were sort of getting interested. Whoa, so, you're from Texas huh? And I tell them a few stories. We do "Original Spirit" and they go, they're just up dancing, the disc jockeys. I remember this one woman, she was dancing wildly, while I'm playing the song on the radio, and she goes, "Ah it's beautiful, it's made my day! It's the spirit of life, it's coming and we're coming to your show. You've got to come see these guys, they're great!" And of course Richard Bowden's playing this fiddle, they've never heard anything like that, they've never heard anything like Richard Bowden playing a fiddle. They've seen guitars, they've probably heard—but the way Richard plays, and he's such a gnome and he blows the roof off. It was really great.

AW:

Well, are you building on this success or you got another African show that you're going to try to do?

BL:

Well when we got back, just recently I said, "We'd really love to come back," and she said, "We can't do it this Winter but we will consider doing it maybe in the—" because I guess what happened was, in their January time is their hot season, so they're thinking maybe more about maybe our Springtime, it would be a little cooler. It'd be their Fall, though it wasn't very hot. I come from Austin, Texas you know. They're like, "It's going to be hot down here," Are you kidding? This is not hot. Africa was completely different than anything. Namibia is bigger than Texas and Louisiana combined and it looks like West Texas and you drive for hours and then you see an ostrich or whatever run out of the—and hyenas and a lot of monkeys, baboons and stuff, just sort of on the road, but beautiful. We got to go to one game park, but the real good ones are so far away, it's an all day trip and we were just tired we had to pace ourselves you know.

AW:

Yeah, and when you're busy you don't have a lot of time anyway.

BL:

Yeah and we got to see so much anyway and just play a lot of music, we were playing all the time, or talking or meeting and Richard and I would come back about eleven, eleven-thirty and we'd be coming up that elevator and we'd look at each other and we'd just shake our heads and go—and Richard would say, “I can't believe what just happened.” It was like you'd try to process the day, you'd go in, because you're going to have to get up again at six-thirty, or seven in the morning. So we go in and we're crashing and waking up and going down there and get breakfast and Richard, he's just such a character. He goes and he has breakfast, and he's got his little bag and he goes back to the buffet and he's wrapping stuff up, cheese and bread and fruit and wrapping it up and sticking it in there and that would be his lunch.

AW:

Because that's what he does here in Austin. [Laughter]

BL:

That's what he does here in Austin. He had to kind of tow the line in some cases. This is sort of off the record but I'll just go ahead and tell it, you know Richard smokes pot and I don't smoke anymore but I sure did smoke a lot of it at one time. And I told him, I said, “Richard, I just got to tell you we're going to be working for the United States government, and they're looking at us and we cannot afford to have you—” I just imagined him sneaking off with some African musician and smoking some ganja or something and he goes, “Don't worry man, I play a lot of country clubs with Republicans and I know how to talk.” And also, he's pretty radical, he has some pretty radical political ideas and no government and tribal, and barter system, and you know play music and get food, that kind of thing. And so I just said, “You've got to be careful who you're talk—” He goes, “Well I talk to a lot of Republicans, I know how to talk to people, don't worry. If they ask my opinion though, I'm going to tell them.” And a few times he did, you know. But the amazing thing is, some of the people he was telling his opinions to, pretty radical opinions, were State department people who were saying, “Yeah, I don't blame you.” [Laughter]

AW:

Yeah well Richard, especially if they've heard him play anything, they hear his opinions. He's got a carte blanche because he's so, the spirit is so great—

BL:

The “Original Spirit.” [Laughs]

AW:

Yeah, the original spirit is there. Well can we take a minute for a break and then when we get back, I would like for you to talk about “Ruby,” cause I listened to you tell that story yesterday

on the podcast and that is a terrific story about process and in fact everything that went in to it. It'd be cool to—

BL:

Okay, my pleasure yeah. Good idea.

[Pause in recording]

AW:

So we're back, this is part three, same day, end of June.

BL:

I went to—in Mineral Well's used to be a big stop over back I guess in the thirties and forties, it was a mineral well, that's how they got their name—

AW:

Even before that.

BL:

Even before that?

AW:

Yeah in fact, people would come to Mineral Wells from Europe, from as far away as Europe to take the salts, it was a—

BL:

And they built big hotels, the Drake or—

AW:

The Baker.

BL:

The Baker Hotel.

AW:

And then the Crazy Water Hotel. Those were the two big ones. It was also kind of a wide open town for lots of other things.

BL:

Really? Like what do you mean?

AW:

Like whatever else you wanted besides the waters you could get there during those years.

BL:

I guess that because what happened they had a continental attitude about it and people would hang out there, it was up there in Texas, hotter than hell. It's not too far from Fort Worth.

AW:

Yeah. In those days it would have been long, today you know they're, oh its forty miles I guess, you know it's kind of off the interstate. That's the place that hired me to write this drama, outdoor drama, which I've written to raise money for their theater, so I get up there a fair amount, it's an interesting place.

BL:

So have you gone to the gardens and stuff, they've got all kinds of stuff going on.

AW:

Yeah.

BL:

Well, have you gone to the Double J Hacienda?

AW:

No, but I've done some stuff on the Brazos and some places nearby there, which it's gorgeous there on the Brazos, along that stretch, big—looking out over the cliffs and stuff along at different spots.

BL:

So are you writing a play about it?

AW:

I've written it.

BL:

About Mineral Wells?

AW:

Well it's called the Drovers: How Cattle Made Texas, about the beginnings of the cattle drive period, right after the Civil War, but all that started right there.

BL:

Well you need to meet these people that have this—

AW:

Yeah, I'd like to. One of the problems they've got in Mineral Wells is they don't have a lot of community spirit. And one reason is that there, for the last fifty years, there have been a few families that have kind of controlled things and you know other towns like that around, the little tiny elite group controls things and so no one else can kind of break into it. So they have this small elite and this really large poor population. At one time, like ten years ago when I first started working on the play, over 60 percent of the kids in their public schools were on the free lunch program it was really sad. And middle class people like your friends that you were talking about, they sort of feel separate from that community because you know there's never really been a place for them so, if people like that were to get involved, you'd have a big deal. Their theater and then their guest ranch would land off its business because that's where people would want to stay.

BL:

You want some tea?

AW:

No I'm fine, I've got some water, thank you.

BL:

Well you know that's exactly what I noticed. The people are very just—I don't know how to describe it but it's just like where did these people come from? They're like really fat, bad nutrition, seem to be very poor, all this stuff is going on but anyway up in just right outside of town, I think Indian School Road you go to

AW:

West of town?

BL:

Yeah, West of town there's this street called Seybold, and there was a ranch called the Seybold Ranch. Well about a couple years ago, the advertising creative director for the Richard's group in Dallas, his name is Jimmy Baldwin, and he was out doing a video shoot, he's also a singer, and he writes some clever songs. His big hit right now, fixing to come out is, "Peace, Love, and Chicken Fried Steak, it makes the world go round." [Laughter] And so, but he's a real smart guy, dyed blonde hair all real spikey and everything and these old kind of retro glasses and funky character, and he was out there on a video shoot and he thought this was a cool place, it was called the Seybold Guest Ranch and it was right there on a bluff overlooking the Brazos. And it

turned out it was being foreclosed upon and he made him an offer and it was really, you can't believe the offer and he got it, fifteen acres and this place, and then he put some money to it and he fixed it up and if you look at a picture frame and the outside of the frame, and on the inside is the courtyard, and all around the sort of perimeter are rooms, and then on one side is a big two story side that they've made their gallery slash yoga studio, and on the other side is where the family had lived and had had parties, and I mean John Wayne, and all these people would come out there and hang out. You know it was just outside of town a lot of them stayed there. And so that's what they called the great room. When they bought it, it came with all the original furniture, it had this great wooden funky ranch—

AW:

Wow. Like Mission Oak looking stuff?

BL:

Yeah, but the real thing. And so it's right now it's just full of art and modern art, incredible stuff, sculpture, Western stuff, hats, everything. And they've got a kitchen, a big communal kitchen. So people stay there, but they can come and use the kitchen, and it's just an excellent facility especially for music and so those people bought it and they built a house. So it's this family and it's Jimmy and Jane, and Jane is a yoga instructor and artist and she's an interesting character herself. Jim and Jane Baldwin, so I got a gig out there. Let me make some tea real quick.

AW:

Sure.

BL:

I don't know if you're thinking pick me up, it'll probably pick me up. But I got a gig, can't remember how I first went up there, but maybe my agent—you know I troll through things and I see where people are playing sometimes and I'll forward it to my agent and she contacts them and I think she did. So I went out there and I played a show and there was this grand piano in the great room and so I would sit there, I guess when I came out what had happened was, I might have played a gig once and then the next time I came back it was right at a time where I did the show and there was not another soul there and everybody left and I was alone.

AW:

They weren't staying there. They just came in for the show.

BL:

They came in for the show. And everybody left, it might have been Mother's Day, I can't remember exactly the story, but at some point and they have a daughter named Ruby, she was like five maybe six. Just this cosmic creature, really cute and totally creative and always—and

just imp, in the middle of everything and always ready to do something and loves to paint herself up and dress up and wear costumes and her mother, of course, they're two creative people there and her mother give her the ahead with being able to do that. And so it sort of all kind of runs in together but they had this grand piano and I would sit there and I was all by myself and I just was playing this piano and I started coming up with—well I'll go to the piano here, and I came up with a progression. [Plays song on piano] So I was sitting there and I was playing that and I thought, well it kind of sounds like something I don't know what, and I don't know but—and I was in a place where I just need to do something I need to do something with myself so it started out with [plays piano and sings] "I got to come up with something new, to turn it all around." And so I was saying how can I turn my life around and so I was playing it, and along about that time I think I took the family, I took Ruby and her mother out to a Mexican restaurant, and we came back and the sun was going down and as we drove in one of the first things we did was we looked over and the drive—you drive down a dirt road and you turn into the gate and there's the hacienda in front of you and the changed it to the Double J Hacienda and Guest Ranch, and you kind of curve around to the left and go back where they have some parking and there's some funky houses and some little outbuildings and things and it was this little bitty building and I said, "What's that?" And her mother said, "Oh that's the well," and Ruby went, "A well? A wishing well?" And her mother said, "Well it's a well Ruby." So when we got out of the car she immediately ran over to it, it was like the first time she had ever sort of recognized—seen it. And we went over and opened the door and there was just a pipe coming out of the ground and going back into the ground, with a valve on it. "It's a wishing well!" And, "Do you have any money?", "Yeah," so I gave her some money, and she would make wishes, one after another and go get change from everybody she could find and keep making wishes and then gather all the change and make more wishes. So it was getting kind of late and I said, "Ruby, look I really want to watch the sun set on the Brazos it's going to be beautiful," and she said, "Take my hand, I'll show you a shortcut to the sun." Which was just so beautiful, I just thought wow, what a line. And so I had been working on that song.

AW:

"Needing something to turn."

BL:

"Needing something to turn me around," so maybe that was it, I got to come up with something new to turn it all around, blah-blah-blah. I still didn't know exactly what it is and then I said, "I got to come up with something new, a shortcut to the sun," and then I thought well—and then the next thing, it rhymed with, "If I was standing in Ruby's shoes I could be anyone." So I remember saying this to someone, and they said, "Why would you want to stand in anyone else's shoes, you could be anyone anyway." And I thought—

AW:

I hope that wasn't said by another songwriter. [Laughs]

BL:

Frankly, I can't remember who it was but I just thought yeah but, this is a song and I really feel that way I'm not thinking that—I just thought that maybe if I was in her shoes I'd see the world in a different spot. And once I had decided that it's really Ruby that said that, when I said, Ruby's come up with something new, a shortcut to the sun, if I was standing in Ruby's shoes, I could be anyone. And so I had that much and I had the stuff, [sings] "I could be anyone, I could be a rodeo dancer," I didn't know if I liked that and, "I could be a soul romancer, I could be anyone." and I had about that much of the song, and then of a few other songs. I had a song that goes [strums guitar and sings] "I'd like to get just a few things right this time around, so many ways to build it up so it won't fall down, change is good, it makes you last, and all my mistakes are in the past it's true baby, da-da-da," anyway I had a couple of songs like that just verse, chorus sort of, pretty much some melody fleshed out—

AW:

Is that one finished?

BL:

No—well sort of.

AW:

That's a nice song, great start.

BL:

I thought so too and that's the one that Lloyd Maines, M-a-i-n-e-s said, "Ah that's just kind of an old hat," let me go get some of these lyrics. [leaves room and returns] During the course of the time I'll try out two or three more songs.

AW:

Hey, I think that's a great little song. I'm going to have to have a talk with Lloyd Maines here, we've got to get him squared away.

BL:

I know, he intimidated me. I was in sort of an intimidating spot. [Papers shuffling] This is "Oklahoma Girl," here's the "Cowgirl Lullaby," here's a lot of my old you know—

AW:

I want to see that.

BL:

"I got to come up with something soon to turn it all around, back to the earth to the twisted turn, I'll find some solid ground, I got to change it now," just different ideas that I was trying to write at that time. [papers shuffling] Here's a song that Lloyd and I were working on called "Indian Summer," and here's another one that we were working on, here's that one, I'll sing you these. But finishing with Ruby, so I sat down and I met this guy through Susan Herndon was telling me about John Hadley, and I had met somebody in Oklahoma and I was thinking that that's who it was and it was some old cedar chopper with a beard who just seemed you know, not a kind of guy that I wanted to hang around. And I thought that that was this Hadley, and she kept talking about John Hadley and she has actually written a song with him and he's really encouraged her and so, she said, "You ought to meet him sometime," and I said, "God, but that guy he seemed—" And she said, "He's not that guy! He lives in Norman." And so he and I talked and he said, "Man just come up here any time." So I drove on up to Norman, I spent three days with him and we wrote five songs, and Ruby was one of them, and it turns out his granddaughter's name was Ruby, his grandmother's name was Ruby. So I mean he had a—

AW:

Ruby connection.

BL:

There was Ruby's everywhere we were going and so he was able to sort of—he came up with the line of—so I had [sings and plays guitar] "I got come up with something new, a shortcut to the—" I'm sorry. [Sings] Ruby's come up with something new, a shortcut to the sun. If I was standing in Ruby's shoes, I could be anyone. I could be anyone. I could be a rodeo dancer. I could be anyone, if you're the question I could be the answer," which I just love that. Then [sings and plays] "First time I saw her she was standing there on the Brazos River banks," and this is all Hadley, he's putting the story that I told him

AW:

Yeah, putting the story in there.

BL:

He's putting it in there. [Sings and plays] "She had a rainbow in her hair, I didn't know who to thank. Is that a wishing well, and does it really make wishes come true? I got a secret to tell, Ruby is a wishing well too," and she was. And another thing about her that really blew my mind is that she had had something wrong with the corner of one of her eyes, I think it was her left eye and her mother had put this little colored Band-Aid on it and so she'd take it, these Band-Aids and cut them into like lightning bolts and put them on her—

AW:

Ruby had?

BL:

Ruby had, and her mother had painted her eyelids kind of red, it was this—she was striking. So the bridge came along and I told him—then he sang, [sings and plays] “She had sunshine, she had lightning, painted like an Indian around her bright eyes.” I said that, he didn’t know—said, “I don’t know about painted like an Indian,” but I thought, No maybe painted by an Indian, or painted like an Indian. And then he wrote [sings and plays] “Her shadow’s jumping from cloud to cloud, spinning in a circle beneath the blue skies,” [continues singing] And I was going to have a modulation here. Then we sing the next verse again, the first verse again, and it’s a little simple song it was a little dewy, but I remember sitting down there with Lloyd, and this was all part of the narrative, I guess, too because when I had these five songs I was pretty excited about them, and they came piles, getting ready to make a record. What I was trying to do was have these songs that I’ve had that I had about six real songs that were in my set, that I knew I was going to cut, and about twenty more that were odds and ends. So I sat down with Lloyd and I played him like twenty-five to thirty songs and there were things that he liked and things that he didn’t, and “Oklahoma Girl,” which is another song I originally started writing with Susan Herndon a little bit. But I’d mainly written it but when I played it for Hadley and he’s just so amazing to be able to—we sat there and traded lines and he ripped that song out when Susan came, he really liked Susan, he was trying to help her. But [papers shuffling] okay here’s that one. I had a bunch of songs, here’s that “Take a Chance on Me”, “The Darkness at the Edge of Town,” and so I had this song—do we have time to go over that?

AW:

Yeah, you bet.

BL:

And so this is how we kind of came out—

AW:

Which one is this?

BL:

This is “I’m Going to Get a Few Things Right This Time Around.” [starts playing guitar] Let’s see, it goes—and we changed it, my idea was, “I’m going to get a few things right this time around. There’s so many ways to build things up so they won’t fall down. Change is good it makes you last, and all my mistakes are in the past, it’s true baby, but unless I make that change I’m going to spend the rest of my life without you.” That’s kind of where I was coming from. And Hadley, changed it, and Hadley kind of played around with it, he didn’t know about the

change part, and so suddenly we got on a different kind of tact and this is kind of how it came out,

[sings and plays] "I'm going to get a few things right this time around. I know what went wrong last time and how it all went down. All my mistakes are in the past and now I know how to make a good thing last, it's true baby. Nothing can go wrong, darling just as long as I'm with you. Everything is different than it used to be, because of you. I always used to say I didn't like to dance but now I do. You got me acting like a man insane, standing on the head in the monsoon rain, it's true baby. Knocking on your door, I'm not lonesome anymore when I'm with you. Looking back on what a fool I used to be, I must have been out of my mind. And I'm not really sure what you think of me," [spoken] it's too high. "Just give me one more chance, one more time."

Anyway so that's kind of the way it kind of got off from where I originally had it to more of a straight kind of country kind of thing but I don't know which is better, which idea.

AW:

Well it sure sounds more like Hadley.

BL:

Yeah.

AW:

You know some of those lines are kind of Hadley lines. Now let me ask you when you're working with John, John is you know, before I spent a day with John, I thought of him as driven a lot more by lyric. But you know the more I sat around with him, the more I realized that he had a very interesting take especially on chord progressions how to structure those, and when I listen to you, I think of how strong you are melodically and like we were talking last night at the hotel about voice leading, you do a really good job with that, with the chord progressions that you pick, move that melody along in an almost fashion where it can't go anywhere else, which is really kind of cool. When you were working with John, was there as much give and take on the chord structure in the melody as there was in the lyric and the idea?

BL:

I pretty much had all the melody.

AW:

So it wasn't a matter of do we change it, it doesn't need to be changed we've already got it set.

BL:

Yeah.

AW:

Got it.

BL:

Yeah he was okay with all that because like I said I came in with a verse and chorus and the stuff and the only thing—this was a strange bridge that I was working on and I wanted us to do something completely different. So it's like a [strums and sings] "I'm not knocking on your door, I'm not lonesome anymore, when I'm with you." [Changes key] "When I'm with you, looking back on what a fool, fool I used to be, I must have been out of my mind. And I'm not really sure what you think of me, baby don't you give me one more chance, one more time," you know kind of a strange—but suddenly you're in five your back to the thing.

AW:

Yeah, yeah, that's cool.

BL:

But I think that there still needs to be a lot of work on that song because I kind of got off—my idea was you know, "I'd like to get a few things right this time around, there's so many ways to build it up so it won't fall down. Change is good, it makes you last, all my mistakes are in the past, it's true baby." And that's what really I felt. So I'm going to keep working, and then this is another song [strums guitar] that yet again I saw this as a song about a girl that was kind of afraid and wouldn't come out of her room and it was, [strums guitar and sings] "Don't be sad—don't be sad don't be afraid, it's okay to come out of your room. Forever lonesome waiting to be saved, he's coming for you this afternoon. And I know it don't come easy when you're not with him, but you know you said what you said and now you can't go back you can't take it back, you can't go back again." And this is what it turned into,

[sings]"Good advice what a waste of time, we only hear what we want to hear, you tried to tell me what was on your mind, I felt you coming through loud and clear. I know It hasn't been easy, can't get it out of my head. But you know you said what you said and now you can't go back you can't take it back you can't go back again. Don't be sad, don't be afraid, it's all right I'm here with you. I wouldn't have it any other way, after all that we've been through. You know it hasn't been easy, you can't get it out of your head. And I know I said what I said and now I can't go back, I can't take it back, I can't go back again. No we can't go back, as much as we'd like to, do it all over again. Nobody said we'd don't have a right to, but why fight a fight that we can't win. So here we are staring at the crossroads, it stopped raining and the air is clear. I don't know which way I'm

going to go, but I don't want to leave you standing here. I know it hasn't been easy and it's never going to be. And I love you and you love me and now we can't go back, we can't take it back, we can't go back again."

Which is more, to me, schmaltzy. I wanted it about—I liked sort of my original thing [strums and plays] "Don't be sad, don't be afraid, it's okay to come out of your room. Forever lonesome waiting to be saved he's coming for you this afternoon," I thought it would be more like a, almost like a—you know Ron Sexsmith? Great songwriter.

AW:

No, I don't.

BL:

Check some of his stuff out—

AW:

Rod?

BL:

Ron Sexsmith.

AW:

How do you spell that?

BL:

S-e-x-s-m-i-t-h. He has this great song—anyway, he's on a bus and he's thinking about this girl, this redheaded girl that was in his class and it's just this beautiful—he's talking about her, it's sort of first time for everything, and when he sits on the bus she comes in. She's grown up and she has a little girl and so it's like this full circle kind of thing. It's just this—he leaves a lot of stuff out, you know it's like not the whole—it's that resist the urge to tell the story kind of thing. He's a really good songwriter, check him out sometime. And an interesting voice.

AW:

Yeah, I will.

BL:

He's one of Tucker's favorites. And I just—I wanted to kind of make it a Ron Sexsmith song, you know she's, "It's okay don't be afraid, you can come out of your room. He's coming for you, everything's going to be okay," but I didn't really know what it was about, and when Hadley got it—

AW:

Well Hadley comes from a different place, he's thinking somebody needs to cut this song, you know, I mean that's—all the cool funky stuff he does, he still thinks this song is going to be cut by somebody.

BL:

Right and then he makes it where, "I know it hadn't been easy and it's never going to be, but I love you and you love me, and now we can't go back, and somehow no matter how weird it's been we're going to still hang in there together." And I didn't really want it about that and so that's one of the songs that—

AW:

So in working collaboratively, how do you resolve those things when you want it to go a certain way and in the collaboration it starts to go another way? Is there a point at which you just say, "Nah?"

BL:

Yeah. And he would say the same thing you know. He didn't like the line in Ruby that, "Painted like an Indian around her bright—" and it was like, nah, I don't know but I cut it that way anyway [laughter] it's too late. But I've written before there's a—

AW:

I guess the first person to record has the say so, don't they?

BL:

There you go. [Phone rings]

[Pause in recording]

AW:

Okay we are back again. Now, so we were talking before the phone rang, about sometimes do you ever just say, "Nah, I want to keep it like I was thinking about it?"

BL:

Yeah, in this case, I'm easily intimidated I think. And when it happens I tend to just back off and say, "Fuck it."

AW:

Really? See I think of all the experience you've had, working with all the people you've worked with and all the—you know you and Gary P. writing stuff together, you've worked with Jerry

Jeff and Murphey, and those are all—could be intimidating people just out of their own force of personality and their abilities, and yet you fly through that. So, I think it's interesting that you say that you're intimidated because—

BL:

Well that may be a self-deprecating remark for sure. I know that just recently in this recording process, what happened was, I cut the basics at Cedar Creek, went in to do some fixes at Chris's, Chris Gage, and when I'm making a record it's kind of like a painting sometimes, you're just throwing stuff out there to see what sticks. And I'm asking, "What do you think about that" a lot. That's just sort of me, I go, "What do you think about if I did it this way? Or how bout this way? Or this way? Or what if we tried this?" I have a bunch of ideas, I don't go into a project with it all mapped out—

AW:

A blueprint.

BL:

At least this one I did not.

AW:

Well you know if you go into a project with it mapped out, what's the point of doing it? It's got to grow some.

BL:

You've got to grow some and hear what other people say and the way people play it and I give people a lot of rein on their interpretation, but there's certain things that I hear as much as anything, if not necessarily licks but feels and textures. Lloyd is a great person for taking direction even though he's who he is, I can say, "Lloyd, I have this idea for this lead, and it goes [sings] da-da-da-do-da-da-da—whatever," and he goes, "You mean this? da-da-da-da-da," "Yeah, yeah", "Yeah that's cool okay." He takes direction he's going to do it.

AW:

Yeah, because Lloyd Maines never forgets it's your record.

BL:

And that's exactly what we came—see this was a big thing that just happened. So we get another guitar player that I've worked with a lot in the studio, his attitude was, "Bob, I'm the lead player and you're the lead singer, I don't tell you how to play—I don't tell you how to sing, you don't tell me how to play." To me that's very—that's a stone wall, a brick wall of my free flow.

AW:

Yeah it's like my way or the highway kind of.

BL:

Yeah, so that intimidates me. Well so I get into the studio in this situation with Chris. Chris, the greatest player on the planet. As a matter of fact he touts his studio, as "Tweak your record here," you sit down and listen to something and you go, "I think, guitar would be cool there," so he plays this great guitar part, and then, "How about some accordion there?" La-da-da.

Mandolin, B-3, Wurlitzer—

AW:

And he does it all, right?

BL:

Piano. He does it all and he can play it and he's got all the best instruments and he's got a great pro tools rig. Well, that really works. So we were doing that to this—we were fixing some stuff and it got to this song, "Dance Like it's a Holiday," and I heard eighth notes in the chorus, [sings and claps tune] "Let's go dance like it's a holiday." To me that's what I had written it, I wanted to hear it and I suggest he did that and when he did a pass through on the piano he didn't play it that way, I said, hey man, give me some eighth notes on that bridge, "I don't think that works," and I said, "What do you mean it doesn't work." He goes, "The chords aren't conducive to that kind of pattern," and I said, "Yeah but you know I really want that, I think it sounds great when you do that, please do that." So he does it, and then a day later we were putting something on and it was a mandolin part and I was saying, "Man I think you need to—" And he goes, "You know, Bob, I'm the kind of guy that I do best if I'm completely left alone and play it like I want to play it. Then I'm free to play it." And I said, "Well that's okay but I just hear this thing, it's my song and I hear a part and I get this feel if you could stay a little lower on the mandolin, and he goes, "Okay, I'll do it but you know you're giving me so much direction." I went, "What do you mean?" And he goes, "Like that piano you had me play that part and I didn't want to play it. And I went, "But it sounds great," and he goes, "That's what you think." [AW Laughs] He says, "Well that's what you think." And so to me, in my mind I'm going, "Ooh," and I'm stepping back. Well it's going to be an issue now. So what I did was—I was intimidated, I was intimidated for me being able to be free in saying, "What about this, what about that?" And so I wrote Lloyd. This is sort of all inside info but I wrote Lloyd and I said, "Lloyd, this happened with Chris and I don't know if I want to mix at his place after all." And I kind of told him, and Lloyd like breaks my confidence and writes Chris and tells him pretty much everything I said. And Chris writes back and Lloyd breaks his confidence and copies me on Chris's response, which is basically, "Well when you left, Bob just can't seem to make up his mind and he's almost asking me to be a co-producer in this, he's asking me what I think and I didn't really have an opinion." And what I would do is I would sing it like this and I'd go, "What do you think

about that?" I just kind of you know I'm free, I'm just saying, "What do you think about this? Or I can sing it like this," and I remember him telling me, "I don't really care Bob, you can sing it anyway you want." So all of a sudden Lloyd was sort of on Chris's side, and he was saying, "I still think we ought to do it here, he's got the ears, he's got the blah-blah," and so I kind of go—I start going back and forth. Should we finish the project and mix it at Cedar Creek or should we mix it at Chris's? And then I heard a couple of his mixes and sounded a little folky to me and the other thing that Chris said, which to me was the crowning blow—he said, "I like to mix and put your vocal up front and mix the band all around it." And I just said, "I want it to sound like a rock and roll record, I want it to sound in your face sort of," and a lot of the roughs he gave me were a little low you know and he said, "Well that's just roughs." But when I told Lloyd he went, "Oh that's completely diametrically opposed to the way I want to do it," he goes, "You listen to your first record and it was—even if it was folky and whatever it needs to be upfront and the band has to be present and you've got to hear all those instruments and it's got to be part of the deal." And it really does. And Chris is a great guy, but I just said, "I got to mix somewhere else." Well so that was an intimidation that I could not really get around, so the only thing I can think of to do is bolt.

AW:

Well but that—to me, that is not intimidation that's, you say, "Oh I'm in the wrong place." You know it's just like, one of the things I love about being like with Richard Bowden who is, as we know, just a brilliant player but when you're working with him in the studio, he'll say, "What do you think about this?", "Ah no, I'm looking a little more this way," He'll say, "Okay, I can do it this way," and he'll do six different things and lays them out. In fact, most of the time if you say, "Richard, which one do you like best?" He won't even tell you. because he doesn't want to do that, he wants it to be—and so that's—I think going to somebody else is smart on your part not a matter of, "Oh I got intimidated," I think you're short-selling yourself.

BL:

Well in this case, in this case for sure, and when we were talking about in the songwriting aspect, when I've co-written before, like I co-wrote with Gary it just seemed seamless. We were just trading lines back and forth and you know if there was a line that I didn't agree with and he was real strong about it, I'm cool. And the same way with him. When we wrote "Public Domain," I had that idea and I pretty much wrote the whole first part of it and he started throwing in lines about DeMolay and all that, which I couldn't relate to at all, and I never sing it that way. I say, "I'm going to go see what's shaking over in Bombay." I didn't say the DeMolay line. But other people said, "Ah that's a great line, I really relate to that," but I was never in DeMolay and I could not relate. But anyway, songs like that come with Reid Wood in India that I wrote "Middle Ages Rockabilly," and a bunch of songs, "Friends" and stuff that was on the Gonzo record. I would have a verse and a chorus and I'd come to him and I'd give it to him and he'd go home and come back with ten verses. And I could say, "Okay I like this line, and this one, this one

here,” And I’d just sort of edit it and he was cool with it, he was fine, he had no problem, he was just wide open. With Hadley, it was, he was pretty cool with it. I gave him his head on some things and like this one that I just read, it took a different turn, so my heart wasn’t in it anymore, but you know, he was really into it. And when I came home and I played, that’s one of the ones Lloyd went [grumbles] and it didn’t really speak to him. But “Ruby,” and “Ruby” didn’t really—Lloyd didn’t really you know, over the time I think it’s become, I’ll play you the cut—

AW:

I’d love to hear the cut.

BL:

It’s a rough cut but—

AW:

That’s all right.

BL:

And Betty Sue’s singing on it and this song “Gypsy Alibi,” I’d like you to hear.

AW:

Well is that one that you co-wrote with Hadley?

BL:

No, this is a song that I had on the piano when I first got a piano years ago, it goes, it was like [plays song on piano] so I had this kind of Gershwin-esque kind of deal and it was going to be about Jerry Jeff. [plays piano and sings] “Gypsy alibi, drives me crazy. You ain’t no gypsy, you’re just lazy. [AW laughs in background] You’ve been so hard to handle,” and then I didn’t really know where to go with it, and the Gonzo Band kind of played it around. And then I was in India this last time when I wrote, “I can’t sleep tonight” and a few other things there, and Tucker who was there, said, “Dad it’s just a shame we’ve never written a song, maybe we should finish that song ‘Gypsy Alibi.’” And I said, “Okay.” So I was playing it on the guitar, I can’t really play all that stuff on the guitar. So I started playing it and he came up with, I had [sings and plays piano] “Gypsy alibi, drives me crazy. You ain’t no gypsy you’re just lazy. Fortuneteller, Madame Woo, you can hear her laughing in the backroom. All those nights on the caravan, queen of hearts, Jack of diamond,”

AW:

This turns into Leon Russell. [Laughs]

BL:

Turns into Leon Russell, but it's like he came up with "Fortuneteller, Madame Woo," which was, my wife Iris used to be, for the kids on Halloween, she would put this mask on and she was Madame Woo. So suddenly this song takes these images of circus and "Fortuneteller Madame Woo, you can hear her laughing in the back room," and I had, "All those nights on the caravan," and he came up with, "Queen of hearts, Jack of diamond," rhymes caravan with Jack of diamond, which is so cool. And then he started writing—then he comes up with, "Pirate Roberts and the fat man, paper tiger she just dancing." And then I said, "Major domo in the spotlight, and the clowns come out at midnight." And then I wrote this which is a weird line, "Looping loose in the motel room, all you ever had was the light of the moon." We're still kind of thinking about Jerry Jeff you know. So it's Gonzo and Jerry Jeff, and then the last verse I didn't have it, I didn't have it, and I recorded a version of it and it said, "Gypsy alibi, Indian giver," [sings] "Gypsy alibi, Indian giver, lost musicians in the hall of mirrors." And first of all, so I kind of did that, I thought, "Indian givers," I don't really like it but—and so Tucker from India, I sent him the words and I sent him the rough cut and he goes, "I think you should really change that last." And so he came up with, "Gypsy alibi, thin as silver," which is really cool. And then I said, "Lost musicians, hall of mirrors," not in the hall of mirrors, just lost musicians, hall of mirrors. And then I said, "Phantom shadow in your eyes is my reflection in disguise." So I'm kind of looking at it like that. "All those nights on the caravan," I had, "Who would ever understand," and he goes, "No it's got to be stronger than that." So we both came up with, "Hour glass dreams running out of sand." So that's how the song goes.

AW:

Yeah, so is that on the new record?

BL:

That's going to be the title track, yeah. It's called "Gypsy Alibi."

AW:

Are you going to tell Jerry Jeff about it?

BL:

Yeah. [Laughter] Maybe, if anybody ever reads this, they'll know. But you know Jerry Jeff, I don't know, I was just mad at him one day and "Gypsy alibi drives me crazy, you ain't no gypsy you just lazy." But he wasn't—Jerry Jeff, there's a lot to be said for his persistent striving and doing the way that he wanted to get it done. And he'll talk guitars with you all day, and he's thinking about it, whether he's able to write another "Bojangles" ever again.

AW:

Well, I mean, how many "Bojangles" do you need to write? [Laughs]

BL:

That's right. He mainly wants to write a song about his love for Susan, who he says admittedly, "A song like that will get you out of a lot of trouble boys." [Laughter]

AW:

So instead he writes, or sings, "I got lucky last night," which got him into more trouble, I'm sure.

BL:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I played a really good cut with Richard Bowden on the fiddle on that Gypsy Alibi—

AW:

Yeah, we'll go listen to those here in just a second. What are some other things you wanted to talk about today?

BL:

Well, you know as I've been driving down the road, and the thing is I tried to remember and there was a couple of really key things that I wanted to say about influences and stuff, but I can't remember for the life of me what it was. I thought I might include a little more about my family, Iris, you know who—and I don't know if I remember saying this but, I was playing a show at the Armadillo—did I tell this story?

AW:

Yeah, about how you met Iris? Yeah.

BL:

Yeah about how I met Iris. Okay so that was in there, there's been so much going down. But she's been a—she was a big supporter for a long time of music and stuff and kind of got worn out going to gigs and stuff—

AW:

As wives do.

BL:

As rock and roll wives do you know, and looking back there was a lot of lonely times for her.

AW:

Yeah, and you had talked also earlier interview about her going to India and how that got you to India—

BL:
It did.

AW:
And that was interesting

BL:
And Trevor, I told that story about us communicating with cassette players?

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
And all that. And a lot of those that still have all those stories back and forth and everything.

AW:
Those need to be preserved too.

BL:
I know it.

AW:
We could digitize those. The cassettes, if they're voice, we can digitize them in like ten times speed so they're really fast to get that done.

BL:
That would be great.

AW:
So when you think about that, when you're ready to do it we'll do it.

BL:
Yeah, I would love to do that. I just can't remember there was something I went, "Man I need to tell Andy about that," there have been two or three things as I've been driving down the road talking about it. I don't know if I ever really went into detail on whether—remember there were those things we didn't know whether we wanted to have, which were the fights with Jerry Jeff and whether that would be interesting to know or—

AW:

Well you talked a little bit about it, I think it was on tape, especially I remember you talking about one where you were in the Northwest and—

BL:

We were in New York.

AW:

Oh I was thinking about one—did one happen up in Washington state or out in the Northwest part of the U.S.?

BL:

No. One happened here in Austin—I had two fights, one in Austin, one in New York and Gary Nunn beat him up in Phoenix and John beat him up in Chicago. [Laughter] Always because of you know—Jerry would just get pushy to a point where the only thing left to do was hit him. There was no other word that would work you know. The one in New York we were playing Carnegie Hall.

AW:

Wow.

BL:

And the night before, we were staying at the Plaza, he had a suite—

AW:

Uptown.

BL:

We were up in his suite and Susan, Gary Nunn, me and Jerry Jeff, drinking champagne, watching the Dallas Cowboys get soundly defeated by the New York Giants. Landry's coaching, this must be what '75, '76, something. Landry's coaching, Jerry Jeff is getting more pissed off as the game's going by, screaming at Landry, screaming at the television, drinking champagne. And we're all just, "Ha ha ha, Jerry's getting out there." And at one time, finally he picks up this brass lamp and hurls it at the television, and it bounces off—misses the TV, bounces off the back wall, comes back and hits him in the head that quick. "Bam, bam bam." And he just looks dazed and he puts his hand up to his forehead and looks down, and says, "I'm bleeding, I'm bleeding," and looks at me and says, "You're not so tough," and immediately starts to strangle me and chasing me around the room, and I'm going, "What's the matter with you?"

AW:

And this is on champagne. [Laughter]

BL:

Who knows what else he's been doing but I was having a great time up till this point. And it's like you know, champagne can do crazy things to you I think but he's chasing me and Susan's saying, "Calm down," we're all saying, "Calm down." Finally he's on top of me on his bed and he's over me and he's just kind of—and I threw him off and he came at me so I hit him. He came at me again, I hit him again. And he went down on all fours at my feet and he was still struggling to get back up and he says, [growling sounds, protesting] and I looked at Susan and Gary and they were just staring at me with horror. And I reared back and I hit him as hard as I could in the face, and he just went limp. And I'm just breathing heavy I've just hit a person. You know it's like, "Holy shit, what did I get into?" And finally he gets up and goes, "Oh all right, all right." He rubs his jaw and gets up, and there's this little Martin guitar that we carry on the planes, about that size you know triple-oh-eight something and he starts whirling it around over his head like a bullwhip and says, "All right, let's go party! Okay!" It was like this revitalizes him and I just said, "I'm not going anywhere with you," and Susan's going, "Yeah." Nobody would go with him. He says, "Fine!" So he goes to the door and he's just storming out with that little guitar and we're going, "Come on Jerry, come back in here, calm down.", "Ah fuck y'all!" And what he does is he goes and gets in a taxi and goes to The Bottom Line. Steve Goodman is playing at The Bottom Line and he bursts in the door, through the crowd, knocking tables and chairs out of the way, as Goodman is on stage, and walks on stage with him and stops the show, and Goodman just looks at him and goes, "Jerry Jeff wh—?" He didn't know what to say. Jerry goes, with this guitar, "Here! You take it! I'll break it!" And gives him that guitar who he had until he died you know. Who knows what happened to that guitar, and walked out of the pub and that was it. And then he had to get made up, he had a black eye, and he had to get made up. But it was always, whenever these things would happen he never really held it against you, it was just like, "Yeah I know it." I'd say, "I'm really sorry Jerry Jeff,", "Yeah, I know I'm sorry too, I don't know what happened."

AW:

Well there's the old blues song, "Champagne Don't Make Me Crazy," maybe it does. [Laughs]

BL:

I don't know, too much champagne will get you pretty drunk I think you know.

AW:

Bubbles, and the hangovers are terrible.

BL:

I know and I think he did have a hangover and he had to play, but when we played, the crowd went crazy, the manager of the Carnegie Hall kept having to walk out on stage, "This is highly inappropriate, sit down in your seats. This doesn't happen at Carnegie Hall!" And they'd rush the thing. He'd get them sitting down and they put a moratorium on any kind of acts like that. The guy was so pissed. People had beer—they were coming in with beer—

AW:

He was mad because it was successful.

BL:

He was mad because it was successful. Carnegie Hall, a Jerry Jeff crowd at Carnegie Hall and that was the last time we played there. We'd also played with Doug Sahm there before. That was our second.

AW:

Well what was the Doug Sahm crowd like at Carnegie Hall?

BL:

It was great. It was basically our crowd. Jerry Jeff had a giant following in New York City. Everywhere we went—I never played a gig with Jerry Jeff when they weren't hanging through the rafters. It was amazing. And you know a lot of people didn't think—a lot of his contemporaries—I remember Guy Clark would just, "Eh, the only thing he ever wrote was a song about a dead dog." You know in his worst moments, because he couldn't understand, here's Guy Clark who writes all this great stuff, and here's Jerry Jeff who's singing his songs and other stuff but writing, who is so unbelievably successful, packing them in.

AW:

And how do you—I mean you've had a chance, with your own performing and writing, with your work in bands, with other people, and you have these enigmatic things like with Jimmy Buffet or Jerry Jeff Walker that—what is the difference? What is the element that makes them shine against these really accomplished people like Guy Clark?

BL:

I always thought that Jerry Jeff was like the first punk rocker. You know he's singing a song, "Up Against the Wall Redneck Mother" he didn't write it but everybody thinks he did. It was raucous, we were as drunk as they were in some cases, you had to be kind of smashed to keep up with Jerry Jeff's rubber ways, he was just all over the place. He would say anything on stage, it was a good time, there's not a blue note in any of his music, it was all stories or happy times,

good times. Drink up while the drinking is free, everybody raising bottles of beer and it could be loud. Those days came back to haunt him when he tried to be calm and quiet and do a song like “Blue Mood,” or—

AW:

“Little Bird”

BL:

“Little Bird,” and people were yelling for “Redneck Mother” or “Pissing in the Wind” but look at the songs he wrote and picked, “Pissing in the Wind”, “Redneck Mother”, “Sangria Wine”, “Got to Sleep Late in the Morning.” And so what did he expect you know? But it was the good time, it appealed—another guy came up to me once, I guess he was a musician, played in a band, he goes—and I was playing with someone else, I think I was playing bass with Larry Joe Taylor that night, but this guy knew who I was and he sought me out. “That Jerry Jeff, he sucks, you know he don’t do anything that anybody else couldn’t do, what’s the deal? He sucks. I just love it.” [Laughter]

AW:

“He sucks, I just love it.” [Laughter] Maybe that’s the best explanation we’ve got.

BL:

You know he’s just fascinating, there’s a certain aspect of him that is fascinating and you know why did I stay with Murphey? Murphey was the most—Murphey was difficult to be on the road with and he’s so intense, you never knew what kind of mood he was going to be, in and Jerry Jeff not so much in the earlier years, but definitely later. And Jerry Jeff was not in a bad—he just started complaining a lot, he was getting a lot of ailments and so it was just pretty much he was pissed all the time because his body hurt I think. [coughs] But yeah, sort of a strange—you know New York—And I remember we played this place called Tramps, and it was a thrash rock club in New York, held about fifteen hundred people.

AW:

Whoa, that’s a lot of thrashing. [Laughs]

BL:

And when we would play there it was their best nights. They loved it. And so the place is packed to the rafters. They’ve got this giant P.A., and the P.A. guy comes up to me at the end of the night and he says something like, “I have to turn the fucking P.A. up ten times louder than any other fucking band because the people are so fucking loud and singing so fucking loud I can’t even hear you! I have to turn it up louder and louder they’re singing louder, it’s crazy!”

AW:

And that's the guy that's used to thrashing?

BL:

They're used to head-banging music and he says, I have to turn the P.A. up ten times louder than these people because the people are just, "Sangria Wine! And Redneck!" You know it's just—all the displaced lawyers and displaced Texans and people come out of those concrete canyons and flood those places you know. Can't get in—couldn't get in. Beacon Theater, sold out, all those places.

AW:

Did Jerry Jeff ever talk about that? About the attendance, the popularity? Was that a thing that entered into his consciousness or what?

BL:

I think that with Jerry Jeff, he was New York right? He was from New York, he lived only out of New York, he lived in the Village, he had had some kind of folk creds. He wrote "Mr. Bojangles," he had that Circus Maximus group, and he put out that record with "Mr. Bojangles" on it and that gave him a certain amount of credibility right there. That was real. It was a big hit. And he goes to Austin and links up with us and puts out that first record, which is as rag tag as you want with asides and talking and screwed up—and clams galore on the record half the time, but it was real. People—it really struck—

AW:

Well and that recording—the way that you talked about how it was recorded—

BL:

Pretty much live.

AW:

Yeah. Which was a thing not being done at the time.

BL:

Not being done. Everything was worked on being pristine and like Crosby, Stills & Nash, they put records out with fifteen minutes on the side. This record had thirty minutes of music on a side, so the tracks weren't as thick and it didn't have that jump—but it did, Stereo Review gave it a great review because it was a piece of a live—we haven't heard anything like this before, you know. "L.A. Freeway," that, of course, is on there and but when we came to New York to play, we played at Kenny's Castaways, it was up on 84th street, I think, in Uptown, we played for five days, and it was packed. And I remember one funny thing that happened is, about the second

day, New York Times came out and reviewed the show and it was like, “Jerry Jeff Walker comes to town with a group of Texas musicians.” It said, “Great show, backed up by a very adept five piece Texas band—or five piece cowboy band.” [Phone rings] The next night Jerry Jeff reads the review from the stage, another reviewer is in the audience and what he hears is and writes the next day, “Jerry Jeff Walker backed up by the five piece deaf cowboy band.” [Laughter] Let me just see who that was. So Jerry Jeff just thinks it’s so hilarious—

AW:

Deaf cowboys—

BL:

The deaf cowboy band and gets Michael Priest the Armadillo to do a drumhead with an old geezer cowboy opening one of those horns and it was Jerry Jeff Walker and the Deaf Cowboy Band, that was our first name. So you know we went out and it was just like we couldn’t believe it. Playing with Murphey, having pretty good crowds, a lot of notoriety and everything to Jerry Jeff who even eclipsed that, this was normal. It was like this must be a big deal. I mean we were still the same people but places were packed. Kristofferson and everybody was coming out just to see it and hanging out and going, yeah man this is good. Willie Nelson and Wayland and we’d play from coast to coast and everywhere we played—

AW:

Yeah, not just a regional thing at all?

BL:

Uh-unh not at all. Everywhere. Canada. We could have gone all over Europe it would have been even bigger. And Jerry Jeff would shoot himself in the foot at every stage because his attitude was, “I’m here to have fun and I’m not going to work and go to your in-store appearances.” These guys would have like five or six in-stores and two or three radio shows, and if he was not allowed to play music, if he just had to stand there like an idiot, he would back out, he wouldn’t do it. So he wanted to play—especially radio, if they wouldn’t let him do exactly like he wanted to do, he would be real surly, he didn’t like to answer questions and didn’t like to interview. Didn’t like to play that game. When he became his own record label and Susan was the one telling him to do it, he would do it. [AW Laughs] He saw the value in doing—in call-ins and meet-and-greets and all that stuff. But at the time, “Fuck that,” he was not interested. And he would shoot himself in the foot. It would have been even bigger, but then there was a certain charm in that too you know. Of him doing it his way. We made friends—The Gonzo Band made friends with the record people because we would be friendly to them so when our record came out we got a good shake with it because they remembered us at least we’ll do these things. And the story is that when we left, they had the Bandito Band, which was Freddy Kirsch, Ron Cobb, Tomas was in the band, Bobby Rambo on guitar, and Leo LeBlanc on steel. And Ron Cobb was

the bass player and he sort of resembled Jerry Jeff, had that nose. And when Jerry Jeff couldn't get up or wouldn't get up for a radio show, a few times he sent Ron Cobb and he'd put his hat on and he was Jerry Jeff, and just would go ahead and do it and they didn't know the difference.

AW:

[Laughter] Oh that's great.

BL:

Another funny story is when Leo LeBlanc—he was this kind of myopic, glasses like coke bottle tops, steel guitar player, they were arguing about something and Leo had kind of a speech impediment in a way and he goes, “You know Jerry, I am older than you.” And Jerry Jeff said, “Yeah but I've been awake longer.” [Laughter] Doesn't count. Another famous line of his is, “I've been beat up by bikers worse than you.”

AW:

Yeah, I remember that.

BL:

He was hard—but nothing seedy, it's weird, it was not like darkness really. There were drugs involved sometimes but it never seemed, even—

AW:

He wasn't Sid Vicious.

BL:

He wasn't Sid Vicious. And it wasn't even Willie world you know it was more of—because I wasn't attracted to that darkness myself and when I saw it I was sort of repelled from it, so I never hung out that much, I never stayed up all night. If I did stay up all night, I'd feel so bad that you know I'm definitely not going to do it the next night. Jerry Jeff is the next night, and the next night, and the next night. How he did it nobody knows. And playing long, long sets. Sometimes to the point of we're the last people standing. Just playing and people are leaving, and people are leaving you know he's played for three hours and he's going to keep on playing.

AW:

What an experience.

BL:

Yeah. It was a good run though. I wish I would have done some things differently. Oh, I'll tell you. One of the things I wanted to say: Gary Nunn was my roommate, Garry Nunn was—did we talk about this yesterday some?

AW:

Not on tape though.

BL:

There was some competition involved. Gary was in the band, The Fabulous Sparkles.

AW:

We used to all go listen to them.

BL:

We used to all go listen to them.

AW:

And we were in awe.

BL:

And we were in awe. And he was a great musician and suddenly here I was, I had played with Murphey right after we cut—I know I've told some of this but I want to delve into Gary here for a second. Because right after we had cut *Geronimo's Cadillac*, what happened is, we went and just Murphey and I cut [phone rings] all the—I'm sorry hold on just a second.

AW:

That's all right.

[Pause in recording]

BL:

And we had cut twenty-five songs in a couple of days just him and me. And we come back and that was going to be the record, they were going to pick from that. And Murphey was just driving me crazy. Murphey was just really—you know once Murphey on stage, he'd have all these songs—maybe I'm not sure if it was me getting nervous but on "Calico Silver," [sings and strums guitar] "No rain and the weather got warm," no it's—yeah C right? So rather than having the bass in the C root [plays note] the bass is in the third [plays note] "No rain and the weather got warm," right? So it's like [sings and strums] "No rain and the weather got warm, broke down and," instead of it being in a D, it would probably be in a [strums notes on guitar] maybe an F bass, so it was weird. It was [sings and strums in different key] "No rain and the weather got warm, broke down and sold my farm," which is—there's a first time for everything for me. I was a rude guy up to that point, I hadn't played bass very much and suddenly that's weird. Well I'm getting confused sometimes, maybe, I'm not sure what had happened to participate this one thing

but I was either out of tune or playing the wrong note and Murphey said, "Can't you get that bass in tune?" And grabbed a string to jerk on it and ripped the bass string off the bass on stage.

AW:
Whoa.

BL:
Very strange feeling. It's like, "Oh shit, how embarrassing." So that was the kind of atmosphere you know and it was just kind of getting a little weird. Well, and there were no tuners, we had no tuners, so you're having to be as close as you can get.

AW:
And in a loud environment it's not as easy to tune like that as—

BL:
Tune on the fly—

AW:
As sitting in the studio.

BL:
That's right. And we had no tuners. There was no little tuners like they had, you know maybe blow a harmonica or something get that note but. So there was a lot of, not tension, but yeah, tension and stress involved in this gig. Well, Hubbard called me out of the blue, "What are you doing?", "Well I'm just playing with Michael and blah-blah-blah." And he goes, "Listen, Wayne Kidd—we've got this band called Texas Fever and Wayne Kidd is leaving and we were just wondering if you wanted to play bass with us?" I don't think he even knew we had made this record in Nashville.

AW:
Oh this was—you had just made the record? *Geronimo's Cadillac* got it.

BL:
We had made the record, come back and we had a gig at the Saxon Pub in Austin and he says, "Man we've got all these gigs and we split it four ways, and we'll be making—" And you know Murphey's like, let's say I'm being paid anywhere from seventy-five to a hundred dollars a night maybe, maybe not even that. And Murphey was just paying me as a musician. And here was a way to really make some money and be with some guys that were my old friends, and so I told Murphey, "I'm quitting." And this is after we'd made this record. Now, Gary claims he was

going back to Texas Tech, he was sick of being in Austin. He was playing in a band, Genesee, and he's packed up ready to go and somebody tells him there's this guy Michael Murphey you need to see. And my idea was that Gary was called to audition for my spot or take me because he knew I was going, but Gary claims he never knew. So we played the gig that night and Gary's sitting there on the front row, practically. And I'm totally intimidated you know. And I'm like, "God he's there, he's getting my gig, he's the guy. I have all this respect for him barely know him, except him being up here and me being down here and everything. And Gary, this was his look [makes face] who's looking at Murphey and thinking, "This is freaking great, the guy is doing his own songs and everybody's listening to him. I want to do that!" A lot of those rock and rollers, that's what was going through their heads, when they were hearing Murphey play. Well the end of the night—that might have even been when he jerked the string, you know, high tension. I was just, couldn't wait to get out of there. I was just like as fast as I could get out the door, I was out. Murphey came to Gary, said, "I hear you're a bass player, would you like to play bass? My bass player's leaving." Gary went, "Sure." Him, Leonard Arnold, and I can't remember who played drums went back to Nashville, I think it was Kenny Buttrey maybe. I know him and Leonard Arnold, Gary and Leonard went and Leonard put guitar on some of the stuff that had already been cut, and that was when Murphey had written *Geronimo's Cadillac* with Charles John Quarto and they went to Nashville and they cut *Geronimo's Cadillac* and fixed up the rest of the songs and overdubbed drums and everything else, and that was the album *Geronimo's Cadillac* [phone rings] you know. Meanwhile, I'm off with Texas Fever, we're playing we're having a great time. I get a call from—

AW:

Who all is in it at this point? You—

BL:

Me, Rick Fowler, Michael McGeary and Hubbard. I was blown away. I was in a state of insanity because of this Murphey experience, really. I had long hair, and a long beard and I was also intimidated by Three Faces West were my heroes, on top of it, funny, everybody having lines and stuff, and I told them right up front I said, "Listen, I'll come and play with you but I'm all music. Don't be expecting me to be the funny guy that Wayne is. I am not going to have anything to do with it." I sat down, I played bass. I sat down and Rick and Wayne were there and they would make fun of me, that became the shtick, they'd go, "And then we've got Bob," and I would go barefoot. There's a picture—I really want the picture somewhere. So I'm barefoot and I'm sitting down playing bass, but we did all those songs, and I got to sing songs and it was really fun and finally I got kind of used to it and I started standing up and wearing boots and that is about the time that Hubbard writes "Redneck Mother." And so Hubbard writes the song "Redneck Mother" and I can't get him to sing it.

AW:

Because he's afraid to sing it?

BL:

Because he's afraid to sing it. But I learn it. So I learn "Redneck Mother." Meanwhile, I get a call from Murphey, "Bob what are you doing?", "What do you mean? I'm playing with this group Texas Fever." And he goes, "Bob Johnston just called me and said, I've got to get you back in the band. He wants you back. Not that I want you back, he says you got to come back and I believe you do, you've just got to come back with us." So I quit Hubbard, we were really rolling and I quit and I go back with Murphey to go out and support this *Geronimo's Cadillac*, they had already cut *Geronimo's Cadillac* and fixed up the record, the record's coming out and Johnston thinks I need to be there. He had some personality conflict with Gary or something maybe.

AW:

Johnston did?

BL:

Yeah maybe. Because Johnston was always real super friendly to me and being my friend. And so I remember the first rehearsal and it's like Gary Nunn, who's going to play bass on what, but we worked it out. Because I say, "Gary you know this is a perfect piano song." He's a much better piano player than me. But on "High Hill Country Rain,"—so we're there and Jerry Jeff does, I call him up and I said, "Jerry Jeff, I'm playing with these guys and we're in Austin." He was in Austin, and I somehow knew his number, he had given me his number.

AW:

And how did you know him?

BL:

I met Jerry Jeff in Los Angeles, Michael Murphey took me to the Troubadour to see this guy Jerry Jeff Walker open for Linda Ronstadt. I knew he had this song "Bojangles," I didn't know much about him. He did a solo, he was wearing Charlie Dunn boots, sitting down on stage with his pants—

AW:

Shotgun

BL:

--And I saw this J.J.W. and I thought those are cool boots and he's cool looking you know and he's sort of authentic and he's got that cowboy hat and so after the show we were talking to him

and he was just real friendly and kind of crazy and drinking whiskey. And J.D. Souther is there and all these Linda Ronstadt people, and it was a cool thing. And we say, "Hey man let's go back to my place," and I was staying with my manager Randy Fred who lived in Beverly Glen—

AW:

Who got you the record deal—

BL:

Who got me the record deal. And said, "Come on up to—we'll have a party," and Jerry Jeff says, "Okay, I'll come and I'll try to bring Linda and these people." And we go and buy a couple cases of beer and chips and Cokes and party things and everything and go back and set the whole thing up and Jerry Jeff never shows up. And we're just sitting there looking at each other. Murphey writes, [sings and strums guitar] "We're just empty handed compadres, thought we'd be bringing back something good for the shack, looks like we're out of whack again." We're empty handed compadres, he writes this song just on the spot that's how he does it. And I'm just going wow, okay, whatever. So meanwhile, I go back to Red River, Jerry Jeff has come to Red River, who has gotten a record deal in New York, to do a new record on MCA, they're going to take a chance, he hadn't put a record out in five years. He writes "High Hill Country Rain," "Charlie Dunn," walks into the bar and sees this Roy Smeck Stage Deluxe leaning against the bar, who I had had, that Hubbard had traded me for a D18 and I had it for a while, traded him back, and it happened to be sitting in the bar, and when Jerry Jeff walked in it was that guitar, that angel that he had owned.

AW:

It really was that guitar?

BL:

It was that guitar.

AW:

How amazing. I just assumed he invented the story.

BL:

No, it had this angel painted here, and it belonged to Babe Stovall, and Jerry got rid of it, traded—Jerry Jeff had a—somehow, it ended up with Hubbard, Jerry Jeff traded him a brand new, Jerry Jeff model guild that they had just come out with and gave it to Hubbard brand new, two thousand dollar guitar or something. So he gave that back and somehow or another it came back to him and I traded, and so I had the angel for a while and when Jerry Jeff walks in and sees the guitar and was writing the song already, and wrote the last verse.

AW:

That's too much.

BL:

Is that too much.

AW:

Already writing a song.

BL:

He was already writing a song—

AW:

Comes back and sees the guitar.

BL:

And is able to finish it.

AW:

Wow.

BL:

So that happened in Red River. We became friends, he was kind of crazy but he liked me for some reason. And even then, some woman would come in and go, "Jerry Jeff, do something!" And he'd pick up a glass of flowers and pour it on his head. "Is that okay?" You know he was like—someone was always wanting him to—you know—because he had "Mr. Bojangles," and people knew that song already. So he wrote all those songs. He moves to Austin, and I had his number and I called him and I said, "We're having a rehearsal, come down and check this out, I think you'd enjoy it. And he knew Murphey of course. And he comes over on 6214 North Lamar where we had that "Public Domain," sticks his head into a band rehearsal and it's instant band. And he said, "Look I've got these songs, will you play on my record too?" And that's when we go and we cut "Hill Country Rain." Well I played piano on "Hill Country Rain" and on that record is—I started with [strums guitar and sings] "I got a feeling something that I can't explain," I do the opening on the record and always did it live like that. [Sings] "It's like dancing naked in the high hill country—da-da-dum-dum." It's a real complicated song, written in C tuning, a lot of changes a lot of different parts, really great, I thought. So he had written that, and so Gary and I we were switching around a little bit with Murphey but when we did the record I played bass on some, I played piano on some, we cut the record, started in Austin, we went up to play with Murphey at the Bitter End in New York City. Jerry Jeff is up there cutting with Patterson Barrett and Stew Shoman, this group that he had met in upstate New York, and found

out we were there and says, “You got to come and play on this,” it was “L.A. Freeway”, “Old Beat-up Guitar”, “David and Me”, whatever songs we finished. And Murphey—meanwhile, we’re at the roof at the Holiday Inn, and Murphey is playing his guitar, and I just said something about cosmic cowboy and he looks at the sky and he writes “Cosmic Cowboy” right then. But anyway, we were playing back and forth between these two guys and Gary and I would always trade off on these—and by that time we’re friends, and there’s a lot less tension, we’re roommates and I didn’t pay enough attention to Gary Nunn.

AW:

Why do you say that?

BL:

Well because as the time goes by—I meet Mark Andes the other day. You know who he is? Bass player for Heart, Canned Heat, Fire Fall, who is Eliza Gilkyson’s boyfriend. In New Mexico and moves to Austin. I say, “How come you moved to Austin?”, “Oh Gary Nunn, he told us to move to Austin.” I talked to Melissa Javers, something about Gary Nunn’s the reason I moved to—he produced my first record. Didn’t know this. As an adult, I don’t know if I’ve grown up yet, but I’ve started thinking and I realized—Gary Nunn taught you in that first thing—

AW:

That first song, Melissa and I were in that songwriting class and there’s Gary Nunn, and like we were talking yesterday, of all those great instructors, Bob Gibson, Peter Yarrow, B.W. Stevenson, David Amram, the one I got the most out of was Gary P. you know?

BL:

And see that knowledge was there that I didn’t take full advantage of. I was his roommate, we were friends, we saw each other all the time, but Gary had other things to do and whether it’s jealousy, I’m trying to think of why didn’t I do this? Why didn’t I go, really? Because we wrote songs together, we wrote “Public Doman,” we wrote, “Roll on Down the Road,” maybe one more. Gary called me when—Gary’s phone rang one day, “Hey is Rick Beresford there?”, “Rick Beresford? No he doesn’t live here. Who is this?”, “This is Eddie Wilson.” He says, “This is Gary P.”, “Oh, Gary, I was trying to get Rick you know, I’m working on a song—we’re working on an advertising campaign for Lone Star Beer and we wanted someone to write this commercial, I need a commercial, I need a song.” And he goes, “Well he doesn’t live here.” And he hung up and he goes, “God, I should have done something about that, how do I get in touch with Eddie Wilson, and he calls him and he goes, “Hey, don’t ask Rick Beresford, get the Gonzo Band to do this. We’ll come up with a song.” And he calls me, and he goes, “We need a song about Lone Star Beer, and so I write [strums guitar and sings] “Dancing in the moonlight under Lone Star skies in a Lone Star state with a Lone Star high, and the nights, they never get lonely,”

just lonely, lone, lone, lone, all the way. “We watch the showers of April grow the flowers in May, we laid our cards on the table, sing our songs all day, and the nights, they never get lonely.” So we had it as a song and at the end Gary put on, “Bean taco and harina tortilla all night long.” and that’s all he really wrote on that song but we became co-writers. And so that’s I guess the third song we wrote, so there could have been a lot more of that if—I guess what I’m really trying to say is, I wish I would have paid more attention to Gary because he was a great resource and a great songwriter, wrote “London Homesick Blues.” Wrote some of the best songs, “The Well of the Blues”

AW:

Plus he’s a good song picker.

BL:

He’s a good song picker. And that was one of the things he’d do too, he’d hear a song like “Jaded Lover” by Chuck Pyle and learn it. And then play it in front of Jerry Jeff or around campfires you know. Every song writer that came into town he’d get them over to his house and make a demo reel of it, thinking that I’m going to get my Nunn Publishing Company going.

Awe, shit, he’s got a lot. Probably—what’s that guy that did “Louisiana Saturday Night?”

AW:

Yeah—

BL:

You know who I’m talking about?

AW:

Yeah.

BL:

I think he had his first demo—his first reel, Cal Catching. A lot of people, and I didn’t pay attention as much, he was too close to me. I didn’t realize the teaching aspect, the valuable resource to pick his brain a little more, I think I would have been a much better songwriter. That’s just what I think.

AW:

You’re not done writing songs though, Bob. [Laughs]

BL:

No I’m not, I’m not. I’m just learning, like that lesson that we had with you.

AW:

Well we're all learning, I mean, I think that's the best thing about songwriting is that with your instrument and a clean sheet of paper, you're starting over, you're having to learn again. To me, that's the refreshing thing you know. Wouldn't it be awful if we discovered a formula that worked every time?

BL:

Yeah. It would. And sometimes use it, and some people use it that formula,

AW:

Well I guess when it came time to get the rent paid, you might say, well I think I'll use that formula. [Laughs]

BL:

Which is right now you know. I need that formula, somebody needs to cut this song. Yeah you know, I don't know, I've just always—Gary was a big influence on me and he was one of my main influences.

AW:

We spent that nice afternoon, you and Murphey and I, and the two of you talking. We need to do the same thing with Gary P.

BL:

That's right.

AW:

That'd be really good.

BL:

Absolutely.

AW:

In fact, I wish we had recorded that afternoon we went over to his place and we were going through those photographs, just listening to the two of you talk about those photographs was terrific.

BL:

Well you know Gary Nunn is going to do a thing with University of Texas Press, a photography book.

AW:

Damn it, I suggested he do one with me over at Texas Tech Press.

BL:

I think somebody set him up, I'm not sure who it is but I heard him talk about it the other day.

AW:

Well it needs to be done, no matter who does it.

BL:

He's got great—

AW:

I know it, I know it. They're great photographs.

BL:

Unbelievable. That's the other thing, he—I don't know if he was thinking ahead, but he was organized. In a very organized fashion, he had the contact sheets, the black and white, that camera—

AW:

Organized sequentially.

BL:

Sequentially.

AW:

There not in a big box of stuff. [Laughs]

BL:

Like mine.

AW:

Or like mine. I know I've got them somewhere but it's pretty impressive. Well I'm glad to hear he's doing a book. That needs to be done.

BL:

I think so, but I don't know so much about it but you know he's—and Gary, when the band split up, I pretty much the breakup of the group because I said, "I'm starving, I've got a family, I can't make it, I'm quitting. I don't know what I'm going to do." But what I did do, out of the blue,

Hubbard called me again, "I've got gigs, could you make these two gigs this weekend?", "Yeah." And when I played those gigs and made real money for the first time in years I thought and he said, "Can you play with me?" I just thought, I didn't hesitate a bit. "Yes, I'll do it." And I got John and Paul in on it too, we went with Hubbard and Gary really got hurt and really pissed, "I would never play bass, I'm never going to be a back up guy again as long as I live and you shouldn't either." First he wanted me to, he and I to be like a duo sort of thing. And I just said, "But Gary," because he was out playing these honky tonks and sleeping on the bandstand. [Phone rings] What time is it?

AW:
I don't know.

BL:
For some reason it's not working.

AW:
Yeah that's hard living. It's four-thirty.

BL:
It was hard living and he did it and you know I had heard him say that to people—and you know you hear these things and you never understand. But I can look, I can be objective enough to know, whatever reason we follow our paths—

AW:
As Roeke said, "In any case, life is right."

BL:
In any case life is right. That's right.

AW:
Let's take a break on that.

BL:
Okay.

[Pause in recording]

AW:
We're back it's still June the thirtieth.

BL:

Well I know there will be—something will come to my head when I'm out of earshot.

AW:

Well that's all right. In that new unlined book you're going to get for your songwriting just jot down some of these things and we'll re-do them.

BL:

I will and I'm making a new record, it's going to be called *Gypsy Alibi*.

AW:

That's the first time I've heard what the title's going to be. That's cool.

BL:

I have a chance if I could really get moving on it, because I want to have it out by the first week of September I don't know if it's possible because here we are in July.

AW:

You've got a month just to get CDs pressed.

BL:

I thought they do it in a couple of weeks.

AW:

Depends. I mean they say they'll do it in a couple of weeks but my experience has been you better count on a month.

BL:

Yeah. Well—

AW:

Printing takes more time than the CDs.

BL:

Yeah and I'm going to do a digipack like you did.

AW:

Those are nice aren't they? They ship well, they handle well, they don't get beat up, you know carrying around in the back of your car like jewel cases do. I like them a lot.

BL:

They cost a little more.

AW:

Not much more, though.

BL:

Where do you get it done?

AW:

Well I've been doing mine at Crystal Clear because I've been doing with them for a long time and I compared prices with like Disc Makers and a couple of others.

BL:

And Oasis?

AW:

I didn't compare with Oasis. The problem with any of these people is that there's never an apples to apples. Everybody prices their things a little differently so you need to, when you make a comparison, get it down to the last nickel and get them to add—because some of them charge you for one thing and don't for another and vice versa. And it's really hard like you'll see on the web, "A thousand records for fifteen hundred dollars," well then you start adding in the things you got to do and then it's a thousand records for two thousand dollars you know and the next person it's a thousand records for eighteen hundred dollars and you think well they're not as good but as it turns out they're two hundred dollars cheaper because they've added in already the things that the first one didn't. So I went back and forth with it and we stuck with Crystal Clear because we had been using them, we had a rep we could call and shepherd us through the process so—

BL:

They're in Dallas?

AW:

Yeah. They used to have an outfit in Austin, here, but they closed it and they're all in Dallas.

BL:

I remember they had one.

AW:

Yeah, Lloyd turned me on to them years ago. Some of the guys up there in Lubbock are doing a lot with Disc Makers but—and they're good, I think they're quality control is good and all, but they were going to be a little bit more expensive so we went ahead and went with Crystal Clear.

BL:

Well you know, everything has changed so much that the CD sales aren't—Jerry Jeff's new record is only digital.

AW:

Well we thought really seriously about doing that with ours but our crowd—there's enough of that that we sell CDs.

BL:

Yeah that's what I'm hoping for too. You got to have them.

AW:

Now here's one thing, depending on your crowd, CD Baby, I think will sell you a point of sale download card. Because one of the drawbacks for guys like you and I is we go to a gig and people want to buy that night and if you don't have something, by the time they get home and get on the web, their buying fever may have been gone. They're selling a card where you can sell it to them at a gig just like a CD, and they've already paid for it then they download their digital. That's a cool thing and you can even have it printed up, make it look like a CD and it has a code number on it and they use that to get their downloads.

BL:

So theoretically you could have that before the record is even out.

AW:

Yeah except some of the things you're going to do for the record you're going to do for that like get a cover, if you had that sort of stuff and you have your electronic files you're okay.

BL:

See with this cover. There's two things that's going on. I've done some research and I've talked to Terri Hendricks.

AW:

Boy Terri knows this stuff backwards and forwards.

BL:

She said, "I do it different than everyone else, I don't worry about distribution I'm just completely dependent on my email list." And Betty Sue said, "I've paid like four thousand dollars to a radio promoter, I could not track one sale from it." She said, "Who cares if I'm being played in Monroe, Louisiana at two in the morning? It's not even worth me sending a CD to." So, there's some stations you want to get on, for me I need to let everybody know I've got something new and let them hear it and then it's continuing my process.

AW:

You got a built in—you've got a market. People know who you are, they know who you are from you, they know who you are from Murph, Jerry Jeff—

BL:

I'm one degree of separation from millions of people knowing who I am but it doesn't do—I've found that who cares, they want to hear—that's why this record's going to be a little more country I think, it's turned out that way. I'm hoping because most of those people that listen to Murphey and Jerry Jeff and remember us, it was sort of a country thing. And Cosmic Bob only goes so far, they think I'm some sort of—you know like some of the songs I had, it's like when people get the record they really like it, it's getting them to get that freaking record.

AW:

Oh yeah. No, I know. But still, you do have things that you can build on and they're more important than the radio station in Monroe, Louisiana playing it at two in the morning.

BL:

Right, but so that's what I'm dealing with now is trying to figure out how to put all that together and CD Baby and everything—

AW:

Yeah when we get done here I'll give you my pal Andy Hedges phone number and email because he's—you know he's young and he spends a lot of time looking into all these different things, so he'd be a good one for you to correspond with.

BL:

Oh yeah definitely. You got his email address?

AW:

Yeah.

BL:

I would love to and the other thing is the cover. Dick Reeves who did Lost Gonzo Band Rendezvous cover and he's done a lot of covers here in Austin. He sort of said, I just want to—he's funny he's kind of got a stutter, "Bob I-I-I-I'm going to do it for free." [Laughter] Which, hey great, now that's one thing. The next guy is Willie Matthews, and Willie Matthews said, "Send me everything. I'm not just going to—" he said, "I will paint you—I'll do your painting." But then it turns out he won't just do a painting he wants to do the whole thing and he would do it pretty cheap, five hundred bucks to do the cover just to pay a graphic person to put all the pieces into it. But he says he wants supervision of every single phase of it. And unfortunately, he wanted me to do a picture of me in a cowboy hat in an Indian loincloth. [AW Laughs] And I just said, "I don't want to do that." And he goes, "No that's perfect, it's the perfect picture, it's perfect, it's what I want to do with you." But that was the last record, this record's not going to be like that.

AW:

It's certainly an album cover people are going to remember. [Laughter]

BL:

Yeah, me in a cowboy hat and a loincloth. He says, "One of those Indian diapers."

AW:

[Laughs] One of those Indian diapers.

BL:

I don't know, I'm trying to be a little more—but *Gypsy Alibi*—there are good images on that too, and that's the kind of way I want to kind of go with maybe some juju and I may or may not wear a hat. Someone else told me don't wear a hat whatever you do it will pigeon hole you. So I don't know.

AW:

You were just talking about Jerry Jeff who always wore a hat and not being pigeon holed.

BL:

Jerry Jeff's got to wear his hat even me, I just said, "If you don't wear your hat, you're not Jerry Jeff."

AW:

You know, Jack Elliot wore a hat and he's been wearing a hat since 1952 or whatever. So I think if it's something you wear all the time, wear it. If it's not something you wear all the time, don't wear it.

BL:

For the most part I don't. See I mean look at me I'm in shorts and a shirt. There's some people that won't go out of the house and not be in costume.

AW:

I know it but we know about all that—people don't expect that of you. The public doesn't—they expect you to be a certain way on stage and they want to rely on that.

BL:

And I never hardly ever wear a cowboy hat on stage.

AW:

Then don't wear one.

BL:

Yeah I mean it's just not me. If I have it, I have my stampede string and I'll throw it back. I might wear it on something. With Jerry Jeff I used to wear it and for "London Homesick Blues" I'd put it on. "I decided that, I get my cowboy hat," he would be singing, I'd go over and I'd pick up my hat and put it on and the crowd would go, "Ye-hoo" you know. So it can be used as a prop. But I don't know, I'd rather not be associated with a cowboy hat somehow.

AW:

Yeah, don't do it.

BL:

It's like a cover with—whatever happens it's got to be. I play—you want to hear a couple of these?

AW:

Yeah, let's put an end to this tape for today, and we're going to go listen to music. Sorry you're not with us.

End of recording