

**Oral History Interview of
Bob Livingston**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
October 8, 2008
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 discusses his early musical influences, his experience running The Attic, and his musical career after the disbandment of The Gonzos. He delves into his international tours in India and concludes with stories from his tour around the United States in the mid-nineties.

Length of Interview: 02:02:23

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Andy Wilkinson (AW):

This is Andy Wilkinson, it's October the eighth with Bob Livingston, again, it's in the afternoon, around four 'o clock, his house in the north side of the University in Austin. We had a great talk yesterday by the way, I thought it was really good stuff about the Gonzo Band.

Bob Livingston (BL):

Yeah. I'm sure there's stuff I was leaving out. I didn't get enough time for you to ask if there were questions you know.

AW:

I'd have interrupted if I'd of had something at the moment, but what I would like to do today is get—start before that, you know you don't just meet the people in Red River and get record deals out of the shoot you got to come from somewhere.

BL:

You got to come from somewhere, yeah.

AW:

So start with how you got interested in music, and what you were doing. I assume being those years in Lubbock, and you were growing up.

BL:

Actually, when I, when I, I lived in San Antonio until I was about nine. And my brother was a musician, my mother, my first musical influence really goes back, and I was thinking about this the other day cause when I played, I played for my mother's memorial service, she passed away, and so I played for it, and you know I told people I said, "I remember—" Cause you know church for me my, both my parents worked the church. You know First Methodist Church in Lubbock, and the one in San Antonio. My father's activities director, my mother was the general secretary and editor of the news.

AW:

Yeah.

BL:

And they had started out in San Antonio, but they went up to Lubbock, and then they ended up going back to San Antonio. Big churches, you know, my dad coached all the teams. We won the, you know, city league. We beat First Baptist every year, and all the other churches, you know, and those church leagues were big time, I mean well back then.

AW:

I was a First Methodist member when we first moved to Lubbock when I was a little kid.

BL:

How old were you?

AW:

I was five it was 1953 when we moved, then by the time I was old enough to have known you, we had our family had already helped start another church, Oakwood Methodist, in Lubbock.

BL:

Okay.

AW:

And that's where I really went most of my time, but we all knew first church so—

BL:

Yeah first church and they had the great organ and a kind of thing that I'll go ahead and tell because it's already been out on virtual Lubbock to my extreme chagrin that I actually use names, but there was an organist at the First Methodist Church in Lubbock. I don't know if I should tell this. Because I'm getting ahead. San Antonio, I'm getting—

AW:

That's all right.

BL:

San Antonio is my first—my brother—you know how much is that dog in the window. I started singing I love that song, and I could sing and I could carry a tune, and I was a little kid. My brother played guitar. I would take a wooden spoon and turn it around, or he had also, at some point, had a small kind of guitar a ukulele or something. I couldn't play it, but I would turn it and play the back of it and act like I was playing.

AW:

Um-hm, how much older is your brother?

BL:

[Coughs] He's seven years older. My brother was a, musician and he was good. He was a good player, and he was a big influence. because I remember he did shows. He actually, you know, I got some great pictures when he was a kid and he'd play in like a cowboy suit and he'd get up there and play the guitar and sing, you know, school or whatever. And then when we moved to

Lubbock, he got in bands. Right off, pretty much right off the get-go; he went to Tech, and started playing in bands. One of the band he played in was called The Raiders and it was Gary Blakely, Charlie Hatchett, and his brother Earl Hatchett also at two different times played the lead guitar, but Charlie Hatchet was the first guitar player, and my brother on base, and it was a trio, and they could play at one of the big gigs at that time was—

AW:

Didn't Charlie Hatchet later play with Dow Patterson?

BL:

I'm not sure, but Charlie Hatchet one of the biggest booking agents in this town.

AW:

Oh, yeah. I think, I think Charlie played with Dow Patterson.

BL:

In what band? He was on Regional Sparkle I think, too. I mean, I mean with the Sparkle reunion he was definitely there.

AW:

I think, yeah. I remember Dal talking about him and—well anyway that's a sideline, but yeah so I know who you're talking about that's cool, The Raiders.

BL:

The Raiders, and they played—they were a trio and they could make 150 dollars back then, it was like they each made fifty dollars, and they would play, you know, two or three times a week and they would play Reese Air force Base Officers Club was a big gig and a lot of the frats. And they could make two or three hundred dollars a night.

AW:

That was a lot of money.

BL:

But they were each making a hundred, let's say if they made a three hundred dollar deal.

AW:

Yeah.

BL:

So that's a hundred bucks two or three times, fifty dollars here, and he's teaching guitar here at Music Company. And I was saying yesterday how he had talked to Jesse Taylor, and so I was really drawn to music and I'd listen to it and I'd loved the Everly Brothers and I loved the Hank Williams and stuff like that. And, of course, when at some point, I need to learn how to play, and I had had access to a ukulele, and so I knew I could try to play that.

AW:

Yeah, and this is, you were how old about this time?

BL:

I'm probably—because it was in Lubbock, so I've got to be ten or, I got to be eleven or twelve.

AW:

Yeah.

BL:

And I got with green stamps, nine books of green stamps, I got a ukulele, and the first song I played was [singing] "Nothing could be finer than to be in Carolina in the morning' No one could be sweeter than my sweetie when you meet her." And I learned Carolina in my Mind or whatever that is, and [singing] "If I had Aladdin's lamp for only a day." You know that whole song, it was kind of cool. I had some cool chords, and so I played that, and I learned a few songs and pretty soon I realized I could sing along with anything I intuitively played by ear.

AW:

Um-hm.

BL:

And I could play practically any song, you know, I knew that, you know, it's just the one the relative minor and the four and five, you know, on most songs and somehow I could I started picking them up. Well I wanted to play the guitar of course, so I think I got a guitar, a Stella or something. I think it as a Stella, the first guitar at Sears and my brother may have loaned me the money to buy that guitar. I'm not sure, I probably never paid him back, and this is really embarrassing to remember that. And I took the top, the bottom four strings, I mean the bottom two strings off, and you could chord it the same way you would do a uku., and it's not tuned the same, and I never could figure out how I did, it worked, but you could do it. It was like a tenor guitar. It was four strings, and so I started playing that then eventually I guess I put those bottom, the A and the E back on there and I learned how to play the full chords, and I got a gig, the first gig I played was at a Jewish church's—a party that a friend of mine who was Jewish in school said, "Man you ought to play for this little party," or something and I got paid five dollars, and

that was big. And somehow I went wow five dollars I didn't have to—cause the jobs I was doing as a kid: one of them was chomping cotton, right next door was cotton fields as far as you could see.

AW:

Where, what was next door?

BL:

It was on fifty-two, thirty-ninth street or something like that. I'm just coming up with a—I'm trying to remember. I lived on 9th Street just right down a, you know, a block and a half from Mackenzie Junior High School, and then they built that there, but at the time it was all cotton fields when we moved in 1959. We came in June of '59 right after Buddy Holly died in what February of '59?

AW:

Um-hm

BL:

And so Buddy was already dead by the time I got to town, but I loved his music. You know, I loved that I could hear that, I couldn't play it, but I listened to radio all the time. I remember one of my jobs was pulling weeds in people's yards, there was so many weeds out there and it seemed like when these houses were built rather than get sod like they do today you'd have to pull every freaking weed and then they would sow the seeds, so I'm out there pulling weeds. I got this little transistor tape record—or transistor radio, little bitty one, orange one, and I was listening to Neil Sedaka, and they would play Neil Sedaka like every other hour or something like that. Whatever all those songs that were big back then. And I listened to that stuff and I really loved it, and country music was not really—I mean I loved the old—I loved some of that stuff but I didn't listen to the country, I listened to KOMA out of Oklahoma City, and it had a lot more R&B stuff, and my brother was really into Wilson Pickett, Bo Diddley. He could play all the Bo Diddley licks. Had all the records, and so he was always playing 'em, I mean Otis Redding. Otis Redding came to Lubbock, we went to see it, he took me to see him, you know, and he loved all that stuff, and could play the harmonica pretty decent, too you know, the Blue's Harp. So I learned, I picked up a harmonica and I learned it, but I didn't learn Blue's Harp as much as Straight Harp, and it's different than most people play. Most people play Cross Harp, and I play it a lot of times straight, and come up with—it's more mellow, melodic and I do a lot of padding. I'm just sit, doing chords, you know a lot of when I do my show now. I still play the harmonica, but I learned how to play it and I learned like a [sings tune] "banjo on my knee." That was like a—so I learned and I learned the melody, so I somehow could hear it. I don't know how, but I could play melody, the melody. I never became a lead player, though. I never was—all I wanted to do was play chords and sing, and if somebody else could play, and at the time—

so I was playing this guitar and my first band was with a guy named Robbie Gamble, papa jelly belly [?] [00:11:25], but Robbie Gamble were fast friends, we went to school, I mean we went to church together and his parents and my parents were friends, Arthur Gamble was a big oil guy you know and Robbie was—he played, he loved music, and there was a guy named Johnny Tull, and Johnny Tull was just, turned out to be a lawyer, but—

AW:

I remembered Johnny Tall though.

BL:

We've got a great picture, and Johnny Tull was playing a thing that I invented. It was a bamboo pole with some coffee can lids on it. It was a percussion instrument, you'd hit it like this and we had coffee cans, that's a [inaudible] [00:11:55], hit it like this banging', it was kind of jug-bandy.

AW:

Now was this when you were in high school or in junior high?

BL:

No this was like, got to be, you know, when I'm like thirteen, or twelve thirteen.

AW:

So where were you going to junior high school? Mackenzie?

BL:

At first I went to Slaton, and then I went—when McKenzie was born I went to the ninth grade at McKenzie. Now, Coronado was not there at that time, and so I went to Lubbock High School, and [coughs] when—but what was I thinking, what was I saying there?

AW:

About Johnny Tull and—

BL:

And Johnny Tull, and the name of the band was the New Grutchley Go-Fastees [AW laughs] and we played the First Methodist Church, and that was like our second—I remember getting some money for that. Maybe twelve dollars or something we could split, but we played in some of those church things, all kind of stuff especially Methodist, they were always having MYF [**Methodist Youth Fellowship**] and parties and my dad was the activities director. The place was packed. Everybody loved my parents and loved my father to the point where he would have to kick the people out of his office on Sunday so they'd go to the service because all the guys and the basketball team and a lot of the—these players were great, and they played for Tech, and

they had a semi-pro league in the summer, and First Methodist Church was in it and the beat The Lubbock Hovers. And they were at First Methodist Church and my father at fifty-five was the manager and catcher of the team, and he would, you know, he caught and he told all these kids what to do and everything. They loved it. They loved it, and so I just remember going to, always being there, always being at church listening' to that music, and that's how we get to the First Methodist Church and the pipe organ, so I would ahead and listen to this woman play in the afternoons, Bach, her name was Dorothy O'Barret. She was playing all this stuff. And I would always kind of notice every once in a while there would be some other people back in the back that I didn't know. I didn't recognize at all, I didn't know who they were, they didn't look like they went to school, they looked kind of disheveled. I was a kid I was playing football, I was in Mackenzie Junior High School, you know, put on the football team go to Lubbock, trying to play football somewhere around in there, so it's got to be '65, '64, '65. The other big thing that happens is in the First Methodist Church one night is, The Beatles going to be on, and I was there, and I skipped church and go down in the bottom, they had a really nice TV, and I watched The Beatles at church and when I saw 'em, because to me they were like, [clears thought], They had long hair so it was like Davey Crockett. I always dug Fess Parker and thought he was cool because his hair was long. I always wanted to have long hair and my mother never let me have it, flat top! You know, you got to have it, and I hated it, and I was redheaded, freckle faced—

AW:

A push-up bur.

BL:

Yeah, push-up bur.

AW:

Yeah, push-up bur that's what my mom liked cause it took longer to grow out than a flat top, [laughter] so it saved money on haircuts.

BL:

Oh, yeah. Haircuts weren't so bad, I mean the guy—I always kind of go sleep in the chair. I remember he'd shave your neck with the razor, and all that. But I saw The Beatles, of course, it seems to me that's later after the New Grutchley Go-Fastees, but once I saw that, psh, that was it, for me. And so I liked all that music and I learned it, I learned songs, I learned, I just kept learning songs, and I could always entertain a crowd or a campfire, and go to church camp, and I remember taking my guitar to church camp, and learning all those—

AW:

Ceta Canyon?

BL:

We went to a place called—what did you call it?

AW:

Ceta Canyon, up by Palo Duro.

BL:

It seems to me that actually I didn't go to church camp in Lubbock. I went to church camp when I was in San Antonio. No, I went to church camp in Lubbock! And I can't remember the name of it.

AW:

Yeah, just curious, that was the one we always went to first Methodist church, so did you have a band after the Go-Fastees?

BL:

No, I was always playing by myself, and so I, at some point when I was a football player and I played in assemblies, stuff like that, but I played football, and we beat Monterey for the Silver Spurs, 1966 right?

AW:

'Sixty five, is what I remember because I graduated in sixty-six so I wouldn't remember the fall of sixty-six, but I do remember Robbie Lane at Jones Stadium fall of sixty-five.

BL:

Is that '65? Because I graduated '67, and my junior year is when it happened, is when we beat Monterey.

AW:

Yeah, that would've been, that would've been Fall '65.

BL:

Wouldn't that be '66?

AW:

No, because if you graduated '67 the fall '66 would've been your senior year.

BL:

Oh, ok.

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
You got me straight now. Yeah all right, fall '65—

AW:
I was there, because we had had a really great season except for that. You know, because we had beat Odessa Permian.

BL:
Right, you still won District.

AW:
Yeah, and Bi-District. Yeah, we wound up in the quarter finals losing to Odessa that we'd beat the first game that— [car engine revs]

BL:
We also beat Odessa.

AW:
Yeah, and that was the only two games they'd lost that year.

BL:
I know.

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
And we had an eight and two record, we got beat by two other people, but I remember when Freddie Acres, comes Friday, you know how the guy goes on the—our principle was absolutely gung ho—I can't remember his name. And Freddie Acres, when he came to Lubbock High, he took—I was supposed to go to Coronado, and I was like a second string tackle on the varsity, junior varsity, so I'm going to be a junior and I say Coronado is going well. Well, I'm going to go to Coronado, it's just right down the road. I wasn't even thinking about Lubbock High and Freddie Acres called me up, and he said, "Hey, I'm just want you to know that we want you to stay at Lubbock High." And I said, "Look, I'm just going to go to Coronado, my girlfriend's going there, everything." He goes, "Look, you're now my starting tackle," and I go, "What do you mean? Ted Radliff is in front of me." And he goes, "Nah, man. That guy, that fat guy is

going to Coronado. Good riddance!” He said, “You are the guy.” So when I go meet him he’s this young guy, he was twenty-six. Freddie Acres, the first thing he does he buys everybody gold blazers and cowboy hats, and he starts talking, said, “We’re a bunch of Beau Brummels,” and he’s always power positive thinking, power positive thinking, but at the same time he will do whatever it takes to make you excel. And in my case it was to see his face in the opposing player’s head helmet, and I wanted to kill the guy, [laughter] because he was alternately stroking me, and putting me down to the point where I hated him.

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
But, we won games, [laughter] I knew always a trick play and stuff, and so I played, but I always was playing, you know wanting to play music, too, and Busty Underwood and I, we went down, in ’65 I guess, and we bought Gibson J-45s, they got a red sunburst. I had a real guitar at this point, and I also bought a Fender twelve string acoustic guitar that worked great because I heard the guy at Harod music company play Norwegian Wood, [singing tune]. It sounded so cool I bought one on the spot. [Laughs]

AW:
And he was playing it on twelve?

BL:
He had played it on that Fender twelve that was on the rack, and I just said, “You got to—” and you know they gave me a good deal. So I had a Fender XII and a Gibson J-45, and I started playing gigs, and the first real thing that happened was, is Ron’s Ice Cream, right? Which was on University Avenue it was called Ron’s Ice Cream, remember?

AW:
Um-hm, yeah, near Broadway.

BL:
It had a basement, it had a basement—yeah, and it was right across the street from Texas Tech. And so this guy had a basement, and he, somehow I talked him into having music there, and let me play there. This is when I’m in college, so I—let me get back to my first high school gig, I get out of—I still haven’t played, really done professionally, and I go to Texas Tech, and I’m taking Art, and I’m just hating being in school really, but I’m trying to figure out what to do with my life—and so when does this happen? So that’s what it’s got to be eighty—it’s got to be sixty-eight right? Because if I graduated ’67.

AW:

Yeah, so either fall of '67 or—

BL:

So is that how it works? The fall of '67 I'm in school?

AW:

Yeah, you're in Texas Tech.

BL:

Because I went right in, so I go to fall '67 in Texas Tech, at some point, I play a few gigs here and there, but, I'm trying to think when this happened. It's got to be this, I get this little club. I don't really happen to anything. I get in a fraternity because what happens is, in Lubbock it was dry, there was no fun, my girlfriend joined a sorority the freshmen year, and all—she's right in, she's a Pi Phi, Penny Pearson, right, remember Penny?

AW:

Oh, Penny!

BL:

Penny Pearson was my girlfriend.

AW:

I just, a couple weeks ago, did an oral history interview with her dad.

BL:

Tony?

AW:

No, with her dad!

BL:

Who?

AW:

Houston Pearson.

BL:

You know, I never met her dad.

AW:
Really?

BL:
This, she was, her dad was Roland Coke and Mary Coke was her mother, and they lived, but they were already divorced.

AW:
Oh, ok, but Houston is Tony's dad.

BL:
Yeah, and her dad.

AW:
Yeah, and my wife and Penny were friends. My wife went to Coronado, though.

BL:
Yeah, what's your wife's name?

AW:
Mary Anne, but it was Alley, she was J.T. Alley.

BL:
She was the prom queen—

AW:
No, I don't, I don't think so—

BL:
Penny Pearson was the prom queen.

AW:
Oh Penny was, yeah.

BL:
And I was her date, I was, we were going to get married or something.

AW:
Yeah, yeah, no well, Mary Anne, my wife and Penny were pals at Coronado.

BL:

I'll be, tell your wife, ask her if she knows me.

AW:

Yeah, oh yeah, no she remembered you from, but she said—

[Pause in recording]

BL:

Trying to remember when I really actually—

AW:

Excuse me, this part two of October the eighth with Bob Livingston. Go ahead.

BL:

Okay, so we were talking about, so my girlfriend, she got in this sorority. It really tore me up and it—and she—and what she said about her brother—

AW:

Tony?

BL:

Who, God rest his soul, Mike Pearson—

AW:

Oh Mike, yeah, bless his heart.

BL:

Who recently passed away, told her Bob doesn't have college polish, [AW laughs] or he needs to get some college polish. That was the word, I just remember it like it was yesterday, and so she said, "You need to get some college polish." So she goes off and gets in a sorority—

AW:

The least polished guy I ever met was Mike. [Laughs]

BL:

Yeah, well that's what's so funny. I mean, she claimed that that's what he said, but I have a feeling that—because when you get in a sorority it's like, they want you to date the juniors and seniors, and all that stuff. and everybody wants to date you, all those little freshmen girls. So they are taken care of and I'm alone in the world when I get to Texas Tech. So what happened

was: the fraternity thing came up, and they didn't care about me. I wasn't a great football star. I wasn't playing football. I wasn't an academic guy. I wasn't the good looking, business major, kind of cool guy that had his plan. I was this total odd ball out, but a friend of mine named Andy Curr, who had been the president in Lubbock High School, and all westerner boy, the whole thing, and everybody wanted him. Every fraternity and he decided to stay at Tech, and so everybody wanted him, and the SAE's [**Sigma Alpha Epsilon**] wanted him in the worst way, and so he just told them, "I'm not going to pledge if you don't get Bob." [laughter] And so they went, "Okay, we'll get Bob." And you know he says, you know they figured they were going to run me off.

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
And the thing about that fraternity was they were some pretty good guys, and you meet these guys in your pledge class and you go through this thing, and it's kind of like the Marine Corps. There's no real hazing and the SAE's never made you do push-ups, they made you—they would work on your psychology. They'd freak you out saying, "Get out of here and do push-ups!" And you go, "An SAE doesn't do push-ups, sir!", "Yes you do, I had to do push-ups when I was a pledge, and you're going to fucking have to do 'em!" And it was just back and forth, back and forth, and finally you get down, "Okay, I'll do 'em," and you do 'em and they go, "Don't you know that an SAE is never supposed to do push-ups!"

AW:
Yeah, yeah.

BL:
You know, really crazy stuff, so I was playing for them though, and they liked it, and so when I got in the fraternity I went to this guy, Ron, who had the Ron's Ice Cream Shop, and I said, "Man, what about having a little club down here, in the bottom here," and I'll play and I know I get these frat guys to come in. All that's going on, but I'll tell you what really did it for me. I go—what is that, what was that place. I go see Joe Ely, and he's playing on Avenue Q somewhere in apartment thing in the bottom, it's Avery Towers with a something—

AW:
Altura Towers.

BL:
Altura Towers, and there was a club, and so I'd heard about Ely, but you know he's a couple years older than me, so I never knew he went to Monterey I never knew anything about him. I

just knew that he hung out with Lance Copeland, who would beat the shit out of you, you know, at any provocation.

AW:

Yeah, I was grateful that at Monterey, Lance Copeland was my pal.

BL:

Yeah, and he's probably a pretty good guy, but if anybody—

AW:

No, he a good guy if he was your pal, he wasn't a good guy if he was— [laughs]

BL:

If you threatened him, I suppose, or made any kind of macho, I just remember him, terrible stories, and so there was, but I knew Ely and I go see him in Altura Towers and he's got an amplifier and a high hat, an electric—and he's got that guitar that he found on the beach in Venice with the sea shells glued on and all that stuff, the? Gibson, and it's plugged in. It's got a barges barrier [?] [00:27:19] or something, and he's sitting on an amplifier playing it, and I just thought it was the coolest thing in the world. And I go down to the pawn shop the next day and I bought a high hat, and I said I'm going to be like Joe Ely, and he did "Candyman." I learned that. I started going to see him, and I started talking to him, and I tried to get. How do you do that? He actually showed me some stuff. I was on the definite periphery, and I'm going to grow? this parallel with Ely right now to a thing that happened when I'm sitting there listening to the pipe organ in church, and the woman was playing. Her name was Dorothy O'Barret. Suddenly one day she wasn't there anymore, and I asked my mother what happened to her. "Well she, she left. She had to leave." Really, so they got some other guy that wasn't near as cool. Come to find out she hung out with Ely and all these people, and those guys were going into the church and dropping acid in the afternoon [laughter] and come and listen to her play on that stuff, and so—

AW:

Didn't she have a house over by Roscoe Wilson Elementary School?

BL:

Maybe, see I didn't know her I mean she—my parents—

AW:

I think we used to go over there and hang out at her house.

BL:

Yeah.

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
She's the woman. She was a great musician.

AW:
Yeah, yeah.

BL:
And so I guess she lost her job in one, for one reason or another.

AW:
Yeah, cause she was way too hip. That's why.

BL:
She's way too hip.

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
And so I go see Ely and I learn a little more and I decide at this point—and I played for my frontier, fraternity brothers and different people my new set up with the high hat, and you know I'd learned Proud Mary and all that stuff, so I convince this guy Ron to let me open up this little club, and I called it The Attic, and we had this frozen pizza that you had these pizza ovens he got. The things that you get these frozen pizza things, and we'd sell pizza.

AW:
Yeah, had you been to The Cellar at that point in Fort Worth?

BL:
Yeah, yeah I had.

AW:
You know, which was upstairs, and you had The Attic which was downstairs, pretty cool.

BL:
Yeah, yeah, and I had been to The Cellar, and I had gone there in my fraternity in capacity, so like for a football game or something you know? Whether you're a—I just remember going, kind

of going through the college thing, but really not. You know I—my eyes were open big time when I got to college. I'd never had a drink, you know, up to that point. I never touched—I didn't even know what pot was. When they talked about reefer I thought it was a cigarette. I'd never seen it until I was at least a year and a half into college. Never saw it, so I had the little club, The Attic, and I would play, I think, every Friday and Saturday night. I know every Saturday night, and we charged fifty cents to get in. The place was packed. All my fraternity brothers and other fraternity guys started coming down, and I would be doing, you know, Proud Mary and they'd bring beer in, and eating pizza, and you know sweaty crazy. Right down that alley was another folk club, and I can't remember the name of it, but it was on the opposite side.

AW:

Was it The Purple Onion?

BL:

Doesn't sound right, but Ely played there.

AW:

Yeah, and there was A Tower of Pizza, but that was over on Main Street.

BL:

This was down the alley and across the alley.

AW:

Yeah, yeah, oh where later it was a place called Mesquites, and the club actually was a little, right upstairs.

BL:

Yeah

AW:

Yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

BL:

It was across the alley and it had a little thing, it was just this little—

AW:

Yeah, yeah, and it later became Mesquites Steak Place, but I can't remember the name of it when it was—and the club was tiny.

BL:

Tiny club, and Joe was play—Joey.

AW:

Yeah, Joey.

BL:

Was playing there, and so I had this little Attic going, so we had a little happening in the corner, and I asked Joey to play for me on Sunday nights. He said okay. So he came down and did one Sunday, and then the next Sunday he came back, and you know my frat guys, or my frat guy and girl clientele were in there, and I had to become violent with some of them to shut up. I said, “This is not like you! This is art!” and you know they didn’t understand the concept at all.

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

BL:

[Sneezes] But I was blown away with Ely I thought he was great, and he did that, all that stuff, and I don’t think he was writing too many songs.

AW:

Right.

BL:

But he did Dylan, so anyway I hired Ely, and he started bringing, like he would bring a crowd of people, and he would say, “This is my lighting director. These are my PA people. These are my moral support. This is my background singers.” He’d get ‘em all in, and that was fine with me until he kind of stacked the deck, [AW laughs] and he would play, and so I was really—that was a big influence on me. Joe Ely was a big influence on me, and through other kind of music, through his distilled or whatever version, blues, and folk, and everything—

AW:

Were Jimmy and Butch hanging out with him yet?

BL:

May have been, but I didn’t know ‘em at all.

AW:

And they weren’t playing with him?

BL:

And they weren't playing with him.

AW:

Yeah, got it.

BL:

And I did see the Flatlanders play, so I guess they were, maybe. When did the Flatlanders start playing?

AW:

Oh, kind of around, let's see, I think they didn't really play as the Flatlanders until about seventy-two, or three.

BL:

Okay, because that's when I came back and, I was already long gone.

AW:

Yeah, I think they were all living together over on Fourteenth Street, but I think they didn't be the Flat, because some of them went out to California, with Jesse, and then they came back, and I think that's, if I remember the chronology right, so it was a little later than that.

BL:

You know, I'll tell you—I've told this story in the Lubbock lights thing, so I'll just go ahead and touch on it briefly, and Joe just laughs and Sharon goes, "When did that happen?" But I remember going to see, to meet Ely, and I went to some house, and there were a lot of people in it, and he answered the door, and he was naked, and they were painted with dayglow paint and they were doing some kind of arty thing. If that was before I saw him play or during or it was a bad acid trip, you know, I remember this happening, and I say it, and Ely just laughs and goes, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, it happened, you know, I was naked." And then Sharon goes, "I don't remember anything or how that could've possibly happened." But so I had the club. Ely comes and plays and then it doesn't, nothing much happens. I close it down. It's too much trouble, because Ron wanted to do something else. Maybe he sold, I'm not sure, and I got a job and the Brookshire Inn.

AW:

Yeah, Brookshire on Nineteenth Street.

BL:

Upstairs, I remember playing for Johnny Carson when he came in, you know, and I played and met all these people, really interesting people that were waitresses and stuff, and one of 'em—one woman's name was Fran Smith and she was a artist and she went to Tech. I just thought she was the coolest thing on the face of the Earth. So I got involved with her, and when the Brookshire Inn—played there at the Brookshire Inn then draft lottery happens, 1969, and we're all home. Watching all the three networks and watch the big cylinder come out and the guy pulls out the numbers, and mine was 309. What does this mean? So I go to the draft board. They said we'll figure we were going to take thirty numbers a month. At that rate if you want to leave school you can get back in next semester, and so I thought what do I have to lose? And I talked to my English professor at Texas Tech, Dr. Brewer, she was a woman, and she said—I asked her what I think I should do. "Well you know what you want to do. You're not getting anything done at this school. [laughter] You know, follow your heart, follow your dream." Because I had written a lot of stories for her and stuff and she, she kind of like thought that they were kind of had a weird bent, you know, when you write a creative writing class and stuff. But I never—I was always a good bullshitter on tests I could do the essay questions, but I couldn't answer it in line, so I was like a C student, and made my grades to get into the frat, but barely you know, and kept it up for a little bit because there was a hammer on you. You had to make your grades, so that was a good kind of thing. But when I got the draft number I finished the semester, and I took off for Aspen, Colorado, and these people, that had worked in the Brookshire Inn, some of them came up there with us, and so they got jobs and stuff, and it happened pretty quick. Did I already tell you this story?

AW:

Unh-uh.

BL:

Okay, so I was in Aspen, and my brother was playing in Aspen, Colorado at this club, and I can't remember the name of it, but it was right there at the edge of a ski lift.

AW:

Um-hm

BL:

Restaurant, club, music, he played at night. He got me a gig playing what they call Après Ski from like four to six.

AW:

Like the happy hour, kind of.

BL:

Yeah, the happy hour. Place is packed. So I had to entertain 'em.

AW:

This is where you met the guy that says, "I can get you a record deal"?

BL:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah, cool.

BL:

Yeah, this is, this is the place, and my brother had been friend with John Deutschendorf from Tech.

AW:

Right.

BL:

And so he came up there once, and so he came to see us, and we hung out, got to hang out with him for a little while.

AW:

Was he John Denver by then?

BL:

Oh yeah, yeah he was John Denver. He had written "Leaving on a Jet Plane," I probably did it. I did, my big song, one of my big songs was "Early Morning Rain." It's significant for another, you know, as we get into this, but "Early Morning Rain"

AW:

You're talking about the—

BL:

I love Gordon Lightfoot.

AW:

Gordon Lightfoot song.

BL:

--I loved it. I learned two or three Gordon Lightfoot songs, and so I was doing those kind of things, and I was doing Dylan. I was really into Dylan, and I was playing, and, of course, I had written my own songs in high school. I started writing my own songs. One of my songs was called Small Change Only. It was about Penny.

AW:

Yeah.

BL:

Small Change Only, and so—

AW:

So back up to high school just for a minute, did you know a guy named Terry Milburn? He would've been a year ahead of you, my grade, I palled around with him. He was a, he sang in the choir. A little short guy looks like Peter Laurie.

BL:

Doesn't, doesn't ring a bell.

AW:

But he—you know he'd put on his turtle neck and he'd play and sing Dylan songs. I think, I thought maybe you'd run on to him, but he looked just like Peter Laurie, including he was getting kind of bald.

BL:

And he went to Lubbock High?

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

BL:

I don't remember—

AW:

He's a real distinctive looking kid.

BL:

What's his name?

AW:

Terry Milburn, but we called him Bo, T-Bo.

BL:

Now that sounds sort of familiar.

AW:

And he drove a '60, Chevrolet, two door, hard top Coupe, a white one with one of those big gear shift levers.

BL:

Yeah, the guys that I knew were the, connect with the football like Bo Boren, Tonky Murphy, what names, eh? Busty Underwood.

AW:

And Robbie Lane, he was a ball player. Who else?

BL:

Robbie Lane, oh there was a lot of 'em. Ronnie Young and on the team that beat the—that won the Silver Spurs. Oh! I was going to tell ya. So the Friday before that game—this just on the side, but the Friday before that game, the Silver Spurs—and this was '66 you say?

AW:

Yeah, no Fall '65.

BL:

Or '65? Fall of '65, we're going to play Monterey, and all that week Acres acted like, he was just saying that there's no way we're going to lose. There's no way we're going to lose, and in the morning, that Friday morning, when it came on the TV, came on the thing, the principal introduced Freddie Acres, and Freddie Acres was on the public address system in Lubbock High. We're all sitting there listening to him, and he goes, "This is the best tradition of high school football in the state if you look blah-blah-blah," and he gave this thing, and he's talking to the whole student body. And he's saying, "I promise you, I swear that on Monday morning I will come on this PA, and I will say Lubbock High School the home of the Silver Spurs. I swear it to you." You know, and we were going holy Mackerel, you know?

AW:

The weights on us. [Laughs]

BL:

What kind, what kind of weight is on us, but he never let it enter your mind, and we won the game. You know, 14-13, the thing at the last—Kenny Gaines hit the guy trying to write the headline from the front page of the paper.

AW:

Yeah, and you know, non-Texas football fans don't understand, I mean we were playing that night at college stadium.

BL:

Jones Stadium.

AW:

Because they had to have, yeah they had to have enough room for all the fans.

BL:

There were twenty six thousand people.

AW:

Yeah, yeah, that's amazing you know for a high school—

BL:

I've got the front page fairly handy. I'll show you. [Laughter] I do, this guy, Busty sent it to me, but I played for my high school reunion just recently. Fortieth high school reunion—or—yeah fortieth. And we had it in San Antonio because nobody—

AW:

Really?

BL:

Nobody lived there anymore, nobody wanted to help do it, and so they all came to San Antonio.

AW:

Cool.

BL:

You know we didn't have a lot, but I don't know it was over a hundred people.

AW:

Well anyway that's another thing. So we talked yesterday, I think, in really good detail from Aspen on through the Gonzo years, but after the Gonzo years you did a whole lot of different things, I mean you were doing a lot of music with Bobby Bridger right?

BL:

Well during the Gonzo thing that's one of the things we did, we hooked up with Bobby Bridger, and Bobby became a friend, I can't even remember where I first met him.

AW:

Kerrville or—

BL:

It might've been Kerrville, you know we played Kerrville back in the day.

AW:

As the Gonzos?

BL:

As the Gonzos and as Jerry Jeff, and with Murphey, I was on the first Kerrville Folk Festival with Michael Murphy, and—

AW:

In the auditorium?

BL:

In that auditorium. And I think that—so Bobby kind of came upon—and what happened was is he had written—he had this beautiful piece, “The Secrets of the Fleece,” and he wanted to record it. So Gonzo band, somewhere along the trail, we wind up in Colorado, and Bobby had rented a studio, he had an investor or something, he had the studio, he had all his cards in a row, and he had Slim Pickens.

AW:

Had Slim Pickens?

BL:

And Slim Pickens was a big fan, so Slim Pickens shows up, and he does the narration. “The year is 1832 and the white man came from Fort St. Lou to pick up the do-di-do.” And it goes into song by song, so we cut all the music and then Slim does all the narration, and we recorded this opus, and also there are Mike Williams, I think was there, and I believe Charles Don Quarto was

there at some point. And who was really there was this guy named Timber Jack Joe, and Bobby had met this man, and he was—he called himself Timber Jack Joe the last of the mountain men, and it was not only that on the back of his rig, which was this giant horse trailer, he has a Winnebago. He had been some sort of surveyor or geologist or something, but always an enthusiast of the West, and when he retired he became a mountain man, and he would shoot his elk, and tan the hide, and, once a year, have this beautiful, white, gorgeous, totally fringed—everything he had on. I'll show you some pictures. Everything he had on. He had mojo, and bear claws, and all this funky stuff, and red long underwear under this whole thing. He never took it off. He carried a forty-five. He wore a skunk skin hat, long beard, walking the Night Hawk, here in Austin, Texas. "Woohoo, turn me loose. I'll never be the same." [AW laughs] And he'd see the waitress, say, "Honey, I'll give you six beaver pelts to come up to the mountains with me." And so, he would charm these girls and they would go out and see his rig, and he had this giant—had this Winnebago, and he'd pull a horse trailer that had the most beautiful Appaloosa horse you've ever seen, a fox that would curl up with him, and a couple of dogs. It was like Timber Jack Joe, the last of the mountain men. Timber Jack and Tuffy, the last of the mountain men. That was one of his dogs. And he would go to all the—he was in *Jeremiah Johnson*, in that movie—and he provided a lot of the—and that's how Timber Jack—that's how Slim Pickens knew him because Slim Pickens was one of the largest holders in western costumes for all these movies. He had Hudson Bay Cloth, and all this stuff. I don't know if you know the story of Slim Pickens. He was a rodeo thing, and then he became a rodeo clown. He wanted to get in the movies. He moves to New York. He gets a gig at Carnegie Hall, operating the elevator backstage. And so, Leonard Bernstein, they say, "Don't—anyone—the only person who can use this elevator tonight is Leonard Bernstein. Don't let anyone else on it. Mr. Bernstein." He goes, "You got it." Jascha Heifetz was on the show. He comes up and he's trying to get on the elevator. He goes, "You can't get on." And he goes, "What do mean I can't get on?", "Only Mr. Bernstein is allowed on this elevator tonight." And he said, "Don't you know who I am? I'm Jascha Heifetz." He said, "I don't care if you're Bob Wills himself. You ain't getting on the elevator." [Laughter]

AW:

That's a great story.

BL:

And so, there was Slim. So after we finished recording this piece, we go up in the mountains and we have a rendezvous. Bobby had written us a beautiful song. [Sings] "At the rendezvous." So, there were several tepees. We had painted a tepee for Timber Jack. Timber Jack had a tepee. All these other mountain men come out, and they have these tepees, and there's all these hunters, and they're all dressed in the mountain man stuff, and they've got flintlocks. They've got the whole thing. They're shooting them off. We set up this giant bonfire and we get this in this big—and Jim Inmon. Remember when I talked Jim Inmon? And so, John's there. Jim comes up, and

he was the engineer on the session, and he takes this mobile unit and puts four quadraphonic microphones on the perimeters of the circle. And all these guys—so we do all this stuff all day long and at some point, you know, Timber Jack is going to pay us for our participation in the recording. He gives us beaver pelts. [AW laughs] And so, we get beaver pelts, you know?

AW:

Yeah.

BL:

So we got these beaver pelts and—

AW:

I'm wondering where you can cash those in. [Laughs]

BL:

Well, when I cash mine in—so, I traded mine to a guy. I said, "Look." I gave it to a guy and traded him something, and he made a beautiful beaver hat for me. I mean, with a bill, like the old mountain men used to wear, with a pearl. I don't have it anymore. I don't know what happened to it. With a pearl. I think it got eaten by the—whatever. And this beautiful pearl abalone button. It was just gorgeous, but so that night, they formed a circle and someone brought out this moonshine. I mean, big time, clear light, moonshine whiskey. And they would pass this jug, and so you hear this in recording, as it gets passed around and everybody told a story. And many of them were hunting stories. These unbelievable tales of killing grizzlies, you know. And one guy, you know, is there, who's shot it with a gun, a handgun, because that's the only thing he had. Another guy, this guy, Michael Burton, is there. Michael Burton had written "Night Rider's Lament." So Burton was there. He had been—his uncle—he was an orphan, raised by Eskimos, right, Native Americans. And he knew—he had gone on these incredible—his uncle was a major hunting guide. The guy would tell stories of like, "The grizzly was in a hundred and fifty yards of my uncle and he's already smelled us by this time, so he's bearing down on us. And my uncle says, 'Okay, Mike. Here's this double-gauge, twelve-gauge shotgun. If he gets through me, put it in his mask and let both barrels go. That's the only thing you can pray for.'" All the time he's telling him this, the grizzly is screaming and running at him. He goes, "I'll get him." And he gets down, and at this point—bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam. And he just kind of runs over them into the forest another thirty or forty feet and collapsed dead. These unbelievable stories. And then, at that point, Slim Pickens says, "You know, I own a little piece of property right near where you were talking and you know, the Indians had," and he would tell the story of whatever it was. Well then, it would go around the circle again and the guy would tell something about Taos, and Slim would go, "You know, I own a little piece of property over there and there's a buffalo jump on it." He would tell this. He owned land everywhere. Apparently, Slim had these—and Timber Jack, too—all these house trailers stacked to the ceiling with blankets. And

if—and these girls, he would—that old Timber Jack would sort of—he wasn't really trying to seduce them because they were really young, but he would put on the most beautiful elk dresses on them and dress them like an Indian maiden. They would come to pose for pictures and he would be up there and he was on his Appaloosa horse. So he had the Appaloosa and we have great tapes of that Appaloosa and Timber Jack riding in his quadraphonic around the circle, screaming, yelling all his mountain man stuff. So that's really—

AW:

And Bobby still has that recording, right?

BL:

Yeah. That's part of his—you know, if you get that—I got a copy of it.

AW:

Yeah, I've got that. I was thinking that was—

BL:

Years later, we went back and recorded the other two plays, but the original version is there, you know, with old Slim. And so, Bobby was a big influence there, too, and but, we'd been playing with Jerry Jeff by that time pretty intensely.

AW:

So when does the Gonzo band, sort of, peter out and you begin to do these other things?

BL:

Well, when the Gonzo band petered out is when we broke up in that cold winter up in where we were in the Midwest, or something, and we—our last show—

AW:

Took separate planes back?

BL:

Took separate planes back and we got back, but we had a debt.

AW:

So what year would this have been?

BL:

I have the poster. I think it was 1979. I mean, I've got—

AW:

Yeah. I was going to say '79, or '80, from what you said yesterday.

BL:

Have you seen the poster? It's unbelievable.

AW:

No.

BL:

Danny—this is what happens. We go back. We had played with Jerry Jeff. We weren't playing with him. We were starting to play with Hubbard. By this time, remember when I told the story of how Ray had called me up and we'd gone. So me, John, and Paul were playing with Ray, but we had this Gonzo debt. Gary went off and just said, "I can't believe you're going to playing with a bass again, backing somebody up." [Phone rings] This is my son. Can we just take a little break?

AW:

Sure. Yeah, I'll just put it on pause.

BL:

Hello?

[Pause in recording]

BL:

French girl.

AW:

Oh, this was Tucker?

BL:

This was Trevor.

AW:

Oh, Trevor.

BL:

He married this girl and—are we recording?

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
Maybe, we should probably not have this on.

AW:
Okay.

[Pause in recording]

BL:
And—so where were we?

AW:
Separate planes back, '79, or whatever.

BL:
Separate planes back. '79.

AW:
So now, you're playing bass with Ray?

BL:
I'm playing bass with Ray, but we had a gonzo debt. And so, we wanted to retire the debt. We owed, maybe, about five thousand dollars for a car—for a vehicle that we had, credit cards, all that kind of thing. So I started thinking, let's have a benefit. We'll call it, "The Benefit of the Doubt." [AW laughs] It's doubtful who it benefits, but we're the beneficiaries of the doubt. So I went to Danny Garrett, one of the Armadillo artists. Him, and Michael Priest, and Jim Franklin, all had an incredible spot where they did all their art, their poster art. He did this incredible poster for us. "The Benefit of the Doubt." It was at the Armadillo. Jerry Jeff said he'd play for it. Ray Wally—Hey Iris. Have you met Andy?

Iris Livingston (IL):
No, I don't think so.

BL:
This is Iris, my wife. This is Andy Wilkinson.

IL:

Hi, nice to meet you.

AW:

My pleasure.

IL:

Don't mean to interrupt.

AW:

No, no. You can come in join. We're just talking. Actually, he's talking and I'm listening.

BL:

And so, it was—whatever the date it was, and we had this big show at the Armadillo, called, “The Benefit of the Doubt.” And had this great poster. The place was packed. We also had the Nuclear Energy Dragon there. It was because we were in the South Texas Nuclear Project, Austin was, and we were trying to get out of it. So we were—no nucs is good nucs. We had this big dragon come out and we stuffed money into it and he shat an A-bomb. [Laughs] A three-person dragon. These kind of activists from somewhere or another had this dragon. They went, Well we'll bring it. So we had theater, we had everything, and we made just enough money to pay everything off, and we were absolved and the Gonzo band, it wasn't a Beatlesque nightmare. Ours were very small. And so, that was it. And we'd lost—you know, we had lost our record deal. The sad thing, you know, one of the things that happened was that Michael Borofsky took all those tapes, when we recorded those fifty songs. Bulk erased them and used them for other projects. I ended up with head-on, two-track, stereo-master board mixes, which we've since digitized and we have it, all that, we have nineteen of them. There may be a lot of seven and a half reels that may not be as great quality, but a lot of that stuff is there. It was really, sort of, some of it was experimental and pretty bad. I mean, we did sing—there was hardly any keeper vocals. We were just doing it kind of live. There as a lot of just rhythm track stuff and a lot of mish mash, you know, but it's all there somewhere, so. I mean, I've got it. We'd have to bake those tapes, which we did. We baked the two-track masters and digitized them. Just recently, Vicky Carp, this woman that was an old Gonzo fan from way back, she called me and said, “Whatever happened to those tapes?” I just said, “Well, you know, I've got them.” She said, “What does it take to do it?” I go, “We'd have to bake them. We'd have to digitize them.” She goes, “I want to.” So she, at her expense, paid for it. And so, she was kind of a Gonzo girl scout. And so that's there. Well, but—so where were we? I was in—we did the show. We absolved ourselves of the Gonzo band, and we started playing full-time—I started playing full-time with Ray Wylie. Jerry Jeff goes out. Our paths, every once and while, cross. But for the next couple of years, I play with Ray. We made a record called, “Something about the Night.” Bruce Springsteen had heard it and he was into it. We thought we were going to, you know, hang out

with Springsteen and we were going to open a show for him, and that didn't happen, but we thought we were. I think Hubbard was probably too much like Springsteen, or—because he really did. He would—where it's kind of—you know, that blue jean jacket kind of thing. He worked on his look and he would work on his disheveled hair. You know, he really worked on that.

AW:

Yeah. I remember the first time I saw him, I thought he had the most artfully disheveled hair I'd ever seen. [Laughs]

BL:

Exactly, yeah. And he was very well aware of it. His wife was Diane Hubbard, who was sort of—she was a glamorous Dallasite. She was probably making him very well aware. It seemed like—he's always been—he was always into his image. He always looked like he was on stage. I mean, you know, he felt that something should set you apart.

AW:

Yeah, he was never off duty.

BL:

He was never off duty. I mean, you know, I have seen—I've—even Murphy said once to me, he goes—after he'd gone totally cowboy, he says—

AW:

Yeah, because he's never off.

BL:

He says, "People ask me—people tell me that they love my costume and I tell them, 'What costume? I dress like this all the time [laughs].'" And you know, he gets up. I just imagine him going down to 7-11 and putting his, you know.

AW:

Oh yeah. I've talked to some of his former band members who said it was such a drag at three in the morning on the interstate to stop at the Love's and here, Murph gets off the bus, you know, in his fringe, and with his slicker on. They're all trying to slink around because those truck drivers are, you know?

BL:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah. I remember that about Ray, but I was never around him enough to know that that was a full-time.

BL:

Oh, Ray. And Ray was still funny during those years. He was hilarious. Some of those songs, like, "Texas is a State of Mind," if you've heard it.

AW:

Oh yeah.

BL:

And that was one of his songs. And "Something about the Night," and "Rockabilly Rock." You know, really good stuff. We played the fire out of it. Played a lot of places. And so, I was—music was good. Those were good times, as far as getting paid, and as, like, really kind of earning a living, much better living, than with Jerry Jeff or Murphy, strangely enough, but not on a national scale. It was more of a regional scale. We did some—we did go to the east coast and stuff, but mainly, regionally.

AW:

Yeah. So then, you'd leave him and go back with J.J., right?

BL:

I leave and go back to J.J. I guess it was '81, or something like that. That's when he came roaring up my dirt road. I get back with him, but everything had changed. The Gonzo band used to open up. We were all—and when we played—we were all on the frontline, sort of. When I got back in the band, I remember one of the first things that happened is when we—there were a few gigs here and there, but we got—one of the things I remember is it was a tour and the guitar player was from Florida. His name was Gary. Bobby Rambo was also there, guitar player. Freddie Kirch was on drums and I believe this is when this happened. All I remember is when I got back in the band, it was Jerry Jeff Walker with his microphone and his monitors way up here and us, way back there. He goes, "That's the way it is now." He just came right out and said it. Over the time, I would inch my monitor and microphone up. It all became a thing on stage. We'd get to the sound check—even to the last gig I played with him, practically. It didn't make any difference where the guitar player was. Mitch, who was our last player, you know, in the Gonzo Compadres. He was our last—that's a thing we could actually talk about, the Gonzo Compadres, which was the Jerry Jeff thing.

AW:

Yeah, yeah. Incarnation, yeah.

BL:

But Mitch could be in front of him, but I had to be back there a little bit. And so, he and I—I'd just mess with him. I'd move it up a little bit and he'd come and move it back a little bit. [Laughs] But so then, so we were back, but John got back in the band. John went off with Delbert McClinton, and after the Ray Wylie Hubbard thing. I know he went off with Omar and the Howlers at some point, and then, he went off with Delbert and played. But at some point, and I could tell you when it happened, I was—I'm just really bad about the chronology. All I know is just we played so much, and played so much, and played so much through those years. And then, one winter, right before Christmas, Jerry Jeff told us—by this time, I think John had left the tour. It was just me, Freddie, and Jerry Jeff. John—something happened—John snapped because he wasn't there when this happened. We were in Kansas City and Jerry Jeff just said, "I'm going off and doing a solo tour with John Prine. I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't need a band for an indefinite period." He didn't know what to say. So—

AW:

And this would've been about what year?

BL:

I'm thinking about '86, or '87, '88. Something like that, you know? Because I had played on and off with Jerry Jeff, but—and I had gone to India in 1981.

AW:

Okay, yeah.

BL:

I go to India in 1981, but I don't really get this Indian musical thing going until I go back in '85. And should I tell that story, or do you want me to keep on—

AW:

Let's do the '81.

BL:

Do the Gonzo?

AW:

Yeah. Why were you there in '81?

BL:

I just—because Iris and the boys were there. They had gone to India.

AW:
Why?

BL:
They were interested in the culture and the philosophy. They wanted to see it and they went. And so, I was playing with Jerry Jeff and I think that somewhere, in some capacity, and I'm trying to figure it out now, how I did this, but I ended up—I can tell you right now how I ended up there. Do you want to talk about it?

AW:
Sure.

BL:
They were in India, and these were the days where there was no internet, of course. The phones didn't even work. You couldn't hear anything. It was so antiquated. The British left the English language. They left India with the civil service, the English language, the railroad system, and everything else was kind of chaotic, especially their phone system and stuff. To get a phone call—later on, when I went there, to get a phone call, you'd have to go get on a train and ride three hours to a hotel, book a hotel, a room in this one hotel, book a call, and wait about three hours and then it would come through. I remember, when I was there once, calling Freddie Kirch. I had to do that and I took Tucker. Tucker was about ten or eleven at the time, or something. I can't remember how old he was. We went and booked a call. Freddie answers. I hear this [makes sound]. I go, "Freddie." And he goes, "What?" I go, "Freddie, this is Bob. Can you hear me? I'm in India.", "What?" You know, and I had to get out whether there was any gigs or not, you know? And so, the telegrams worked. So, you know, '81, I go there and I go back, and so I'm not sure, but I was playing with Jerry Jeff during this time, '82, '83, and I might've made another trip every once and a while to go to India. And then, in '85, I was there and I met this American named Frank Block. He was a Vanderbilt University law professor and his specialty was legal aid. He was there. He was a Fulbright. He had gotten a Fulbright to go over there. I was talking to him and he says, "Yeah, you know, state department has this. If you can convince them you're an expert in anything from hydroponics to legal aid to country music, you can get a gig." I said, "You're kidding." He goes, "No." He says, "Let me give you this," and he gave me the telegram address of the U.S. Embassy in Delhi. He had been working with the state department too because what happens is they get these Fulbrighters over there and then they tell him, "Look, you know, since you're here would you like to do a lecture? I can get you six lectures. We'll pay you a couple hundred bucks. All expenses paid. We're going to take you to the most beautiful country you've ever seen in your life and we'll—and would you do it?" And he goes, "Yeah." So he goes out, so he had done this. And he tells me of a man named Billy Stevens, who was a blues harmonica player and he has a show that had gone through India about the history of the blues. He had—he played a keyboard kind of thing, too, and had a harmonica.

He played all this great stuff. I think he had some recorded music. I'm not sure what his show was about, but he told me about that and I—so that started germinating an idea. I didn't have—I didn't know what was going to happen with Jerry Jeff at this point. He's on and off and I'm—I'm kind of [coughs] coming back and forth and playing a few gigs here and there, but nothing really—everything is unstable. So I figure, if I could get this show—it'd be unbelievable if I could make money in India. So I telegram the state department and I said, "I'm a musician from Austin, Texas. I played with Jerry Jeff, Michael Murphey. I'm here in India, I love this country, and I could do a show for you and I'd like to—what would I do? How do I get known?" And they write back and they say, "Get to the nearest consulate and set up an audition," and they gave me the fax numbers—or the telegram—telex numbers for all the different consulates. The one nearest to us was Madras. So John Inmon was also there in India, with me. He'd come over. And so, I tell John, "John, what do you think? Are you willing to go to Madras?" He goes, "Count me in." We do this all night train to Madras and we show up at the embassy at nine in the morning and—I mean, we did sixteen hours on the train.

AW:

Oh, wow.

BL:

And all the way across the country. This wild trip. Not prepared. Freezing. We were in second class AC. We were—you know, we didn't think to book us a—we didn't—years later, we found out how to do it, but it was just like, we got on and I remember us all being on the top birth right next to a vent that was blowing out the most frigid air. I had no blanket, no pillow. It was a miserable kind of experience, but they had some of the best food I've ever had on this train, you know? And so, and the train would pull in and it was just—we were seeing India, you know? It was just really incredible. So we were all the way across India. I mean, flocks of albino peacocks looking out your—you know, stuff like that. Camels. We were getting close to—that's one other—and so, as I'm going, as I'm riding on the train, I am coming up with an idea of what we're going to tell the state department. I had done some research. I had found a book, strangely enough, somehow or another. I knew it anyway—it's the history that we all knew anyway. So I kind of write it down and as the sun—and I started saying it, as the sun was peeking up over that landscape, you swear you're in the middle of west Texas, except then, this herd of albino peacocks are going—you know you go, Whoa [laughs]. But it looked like Texas, so we go in there, nine in the morning. We come up and we meet this guy. His name was Timothy Moore. He was a—like a vice council of the state department in Madras. Real dry. Little round glasses. We doing okay?

AW:

Yeah.

BL:

And so he says, "Okay. What are you here for?" And we said, "Well, we're auditioning. We're musicians." And he's just kind of looking at us. So we go in this little room in the American center. The American center had an incredible stage, like an auditorium. Has a great library. That's one of the things they do. In all of the consulates, the state departments going, but the—at that time, the division was called, The United States Information Service, USIS. They were the ones that were responsible for disseminating information about America and America's interest abroad and whether it took that professor of hydroponics, or a guy from international harvester to try to sell them, or a McDonald's, or whatever, or country music, or artists, or dancers. They had this whole cultural program. The Russians and the Americans had been duking out since the fifties in India for the cultural hearts and minds. The Russians would send the Bolshoi Ballet. The Americans would send the L.A. Philharmonic. And so, and all the state department, all the foreign services had these. It could've been the French, the English, they all did it. So John and I go, and we're in Madras. I tell them that I want to do a history of American folk and country music. I'll do them old cowboy songs and I'll do prisoner songs and I'll do work songs and I'll do some gospel and I'll kind of bring it on up, but it'll be an entertaining history and I'll tell them the stories. And we do a couple of songs, and then, halfway through the third song—and this guy's just kind of staring at us—halfway through the third song, he says, "Do you mind?" And he reaches down and pulls out a banjo. He said, "I've been waiting for you guys to walk through this door for a long time." He says, "I'm here—" He says, "I'm a bluegrass guy and I'm interested." And so, we played "Fox on the Run," and a couple of things. He goes, "You guys have got the gig if I can sit in every once and a while when you come back." So we said, "Okay." So the next year—we had a year—we couldn't really get programmed. They call it programs. They would program you into these cities. We came back in 1986, and I had bought a little fender switcher amp that I still have for John. We said, "At least you'll have electric guitar." He'll play electric guitar and I'm going to take my bass and my guitar and we'll be prepared for anything and what we'll do is—in that first tour, we told the state department, "See if you can get us a drummer and we'll do a Gonzo band thing." So I have all of this—I have a couple of really cool articles, "Lost Gonzo Band in India," and pictures, and me and John. We'd have a different drummer in every city, practically. The way they do it is—India, they do it—it was never—

AW:

Now, these were drummers that knew this music? Or they were—

BL:

These were drummers that knew deep purple and rock, you know, hard rock. Anything that filtered through to India. They'd never heard of country music. So we'd have these weird rehearsals with these guys. The guys—some of them, could barely speak English. They're playing on a worn out set of drums that looked like it was left over from the Raj, held together with wire. But occasionally, in the bigger cities, Bombay, particularly, and in Goa. All the really

good western musicians in India had come from Goa. It was a Portuguese colony. Even after a partition in 1948, when India got its independence and Pakistan, Portugal still ruled—maintained Goa. It was on the west coast and all of the names of these people are like Fernandez and Hernandez, had these Portuguese sort of names, spelled a little differently and it has a real South American vibe, almost, to me. And until 1961, they were surrounded and they said, “Get out.” And so they had to—they kicked the Portuguese out. But it took them that long, from ’48 to ’61, where they got the Portuguese out. And so, in Bombay, we played with a drummer, whose name was, I think, Rocky Hernandez, and he was in a band called Rock Machine, who were kickass rock and roll in India, in Bombay. I remember playing—each post would—like, you would go to Bombay, and you would end up going to the region, up to into Rajasthan, and to different places. They would program you out of Bombay, and the embassy was there, and you’d always do a show at the American center. You’d always—and you’d go to schools and different kind of ways we would do it. But I remember playing the American center on that tour, and in Bombay, with this great drummer, Rocky Hernandez. Me and John. I played bass. We were just kind of trio Gonzo band in India. And so, and I—but I would tell the stories. John and I would come at it first and we would do a duo and I’d play acoustic guitar and he played guitar. I would do these old cowboy songs. So we’d build it up, build it up, and then we’d finish off the night with, you know, whatever. And so, at the end of this one show, this American couple came up and said, “My name is Ed Malsick. I’m from Austin, and you guys are great. I was the first entertainment photographer on the *American Statesman*. I remember when, blah, blah.” And he’d claimed he had some—you know, back in the days of—what was the big? I can’t believe I can’t remember his name, but he was an entertainment writer on the *Statesman*. An older man. He was old when I met him. Townsend Miller.

AW:

Oh yeah. Yeah. I remember that name. Yeah.

BL:

And remember, Townsend would basically just say, “I went to the show. It was nice and the bartenders were great. There was people there that had a great time.” I mean, that was his review, you know? He never really got too specific, but so this guy—

AW:

He was no Dave Hickey.

BL:

No. And this guy, Ed Malsick was there, and he said, “We’d like to invite you to our house.” And somehow, we had to tell him everything. They knew that John and I were there. They knew that we were vegetarians. They knew everything about us somehow. And so they said, “We hear you’re vegetarians. Come to our house. We’ll have some veggie chili. That’s our favorite thing

to do.” You know, India is vegetarian heaven. If you’re going to be a vegetarian, there’s no better place to do it. So we went over there and he was telling us all these stories about how he’d taken pictures of us at the—and had pictures in his files under Willie Nelson’s 1972, first picnic. All this stuff. He was a big fan. He was just so glad to have us. We were having a great time. We pulled out our guitars and so we’re playing, listening to all this great Austin music that he has. All of a sudden, the phone rings and he picks it up and he was on call. Each, you know, like one member over the weekend, when the embassy is closed, you may draw the duty, and anything can happen. What had happened is an American had had a heart attack and he had to set it up and medevac him out of the country and he had to oversee the whole thing. And it kind of—you know, you saw how our—and this guy changed into absolute state department. He went and put on his suit. He left and we didn’t see him again. He was out all night making sure that this thing happened. I mean, if you’re an American in India or anywhere and you can’t get back home, they’ll get you home. They may take your passport and do a lien on whatever they can do to get that money back. But they’ll—you know, they’ll get you home. So [honk]—so, there we were and we were doing these tours, John and I. We did a cycle. We played a lot of cities. We played in Vijayawada, on the east coast. They couldn’t speak practically a word of English. When we finished our show, we had the funkiest drummer of all time. This guy, he was the deep purple man, you know? He was playing and he would look at his friends and—you know—and he was just like, looking at his friends. He couldn’t believe he was playing with us, but he would look at his friends to be, you know, look at me, and do these wild, terrible fills, you know? So it was bad. It was really bad.

AW:

So what you discovered was drummers are drummers everywhere you go. [Laughter]

BL:

Drummers, exactly. [Laughter] Exactly. And so, [coughs] we did a press conference [coughs]. The state department would put—I mean, it was put full tilt. Major press conferences with every news.

[Pause in recording]

AW:

Okay. We’re back, continuing with Bob Livingston.

BL:

All right. So I think we were in Bombay, and we played those shows. And so, John and I did this tour in ’86, and John went back home to America, but I stayed. I stayed on there for a while. And because suddenly, I’d been paid, which in India, you know, you could live like a king on what

they paid. They'd try to pay you in rubies a lot of times because the American government owned billions of rubies and, you know, from whatever. And like, movie companies—

AW:

So they're trying to get rid of them?

BL:

Trying to get—they're trying to pay you off on them instead of giving you hundred dollar bills, you know? But I kept saying, "No, no. I want U.S. currency." But sometimes, it was okay to be paid with rubies, a lot of times, because we were living in that country. Well, John goes back and I stayed and I wrote my context to the state department. I said, "Look. John has gone back, but I can do the same show and I'm going to be here." And so they said, "Okay." John wasn't going to be there. But I said, "Look. I'll do even a more cowboy thing and I'd like to play with local musicians. You know, indigenous instruments. And so, I did. I went off on a solo tour. I started doing the solo tours and through '87, and '88, '89, '90, and '91, I pretty much, at least every other year, but in one period of time, and I can't remember exact what year it was, but I was there almost one year solid in India.

AW:

And doing that work the whole time, right?

BL:

Yeah. [Coughs] What was really great about it is I would go off, maybe, for two weeks on a state department tour, up to Gujarat and Ahmedabad, where Mahatma Gandhi was from. You know, he was from Gujarat and he went to the—marched to Surat, the city, to make the salt. Remember all that? So we got to play all those cities. I'd go off and do that two weeks, come back. It was hard travelling because I had to drive—either drive or take a train. And a lot of times, I took a train. I had my cowboy hat and I had my guitar in a gig bag. It was a Martin. I'd bought this Martin, that same Martin that I'd bought out in California with my advance money, still had it. So I was playing that Martin and I had my boots and I had stuff. I couldn't do anything with my cowboy hat. I didn't have to wear my boots. They could be in my bag. But at railway stations, I'd be standing there and I mean, I'm red-headed, freckle-faced, and I would have a crowd of people—they just stare at you in India. They stare at you, top to—they don't—they're unabashed. They don't mean anything by it. They're just—[AW laughs]—you know? With their mouths hanging open. And so, I'd be at these railway stations and it's like I would—I'd get on this train. I remember, once, getting on this train and when I got to the railway station—most of the time—a lot of times, I had—state department was with me all the time, at first. They had to be there. But I became an old hand at it, and so they'd let me travel by myself. Okay. But sometimes, I remember, I'm standing there at this railway station, and it was at night, and there was hardly anybody there. This guy walks up to me, [Indian Accent] "Are you Robert

Livingston? Are you Mr. Robert?" I go, "Yes." He goes, "I have come with your dinner." He hands me this thing and he goes, "And here are your tickets for the—" He says this thing to me in the middle of the night, just kind of at this deserted station. He said, "I'm going to wait with you until the train comes. The train comes and he gets me on the train. And so, then you would go and you would get to a spot. The state department, vice council, the public affairs officer would hook up with you. You always had an Indian or Yemini or a whatever. In all these state department tours, there's always someone who works for the U.S. government, a national. And they always find somebody really sharp, really bright that knows the language, knows the lingo, knows how to make travel reservations. Nothing. They're unflappable. Really good people working for our government, you know? And beyond a—I can just say this because our administration, you know, I've gone through a lot of different administrations working for the state department. They were always top notch. Really—you know, pretty much liberal folks with really good educations that knew more about these countries than a lot of the people that living in them do when they arrive. They were responsible for conducting our foreign policy. They usually speak the language. They know it. They'll learn Arabic. They arrive and they've got perfect Arabic. They have whole systems on how they can do it. But in India, everything was English. They speak perfect English. We would always have an Indian liaison—what they call—liaison officer that knew the local language. But all of our audiences were usually middle class, upper middle class folks. Americans are coming and they're playing, you know—[Indian accent] "Mr. Bob's coming to play country music." You know? And he said—the guy in Surat, wrote, "Mr. Bob came here to play American country music and to learn the country music of India." And so, it's just like, what country? That's the question, you know? It's the music of the country. We had the same themes. When I saw—that's what I would say in these shows. Look, these—this is about a young cowboy. Imagine you're out on that train to Madras, and you look out your window, and the sun is poking up. You'd swear you were in the middle of west Texas, until that covey of albino peacocks goes by. Imagine you're a young cowboy and you're driving your camel herd to—you know—and some cobra jumps up from behind a bush, and bites you right between the eyes, and you fall down there in the mud, and the blood, and the beard of the desert, and your life is just oozing away. That's when a young feller gets philosophical. This one of the oldest, one of my favorite cowboy songs that I'm going to sing you about this young guy, who goes and dies out on the prairie. And I would, [Sings] "Don't bury me on the long prairie," and I would sing, start singing, and I'd get them to sing along. [Sings] "Don't bury me." They, [Indian accent] "Don't bury me, on the long prairie, [Indian accent] on the long prairie, where the coyotes [howls]," and they would start howling. [AW laughs] The whole audience. They were just absolutely innocent and they loved it. One of the first songs, one of the first times we—the first gig we played in India was in this seaport city, nearby where we lived. Iris and the boys were there. They all came in Kochi. It was in the auditorium. The Americans were there and—you know, it was like, Supreme Court. All these government people were there. The wife of one of the justices of the Supreme Court comes backstage and she says to me, [Indian Accent] "I really enjoyed your program. It's top notch, but that song you did about that poor young cowboy

and how you had to leave his body in the prairie is so sad and so touching.” She said, “Tell me one thing. Is there no way you could go back and get his body and take it back so he could be buried as he wished?” You know, they absolutely—she absolutely believed it. And people, when they would hear the show, they would cry during that song because it’s so real, because I put them in the scene, and that’s what they were just like—“Are you sure he’s dead? Can’t you help him? Can’t you just go back? How could you do that?” You know? And so, also, during, on this tour, when John had gone back, we were living in this little village. A little town, a city, nearby was Thiruvalla. Tucker was there, Trevor, and Iris. I got this gig playing at the Nehru Centenary celebration in Thiruvalla. It was a big fair, and stuff, and they had different music, and they were going to add—you know? And so, I thought it would really be neat to get—because Iris and I would sit around and sing in the room sometime, and she had a pretty voice, and we sang, “I bless the day I found you.” You know, we—that was our big hit. And so we decided to do a family portion of the show. Tucker could play guitar by then and Trevor was learning the mandolin. It’s in that article. You’ll see that picture. You’ve seen the picture. We all had costumes. We went and found some Khadi. What?

IL:

Had them made.

BL:

We had them made. We found some material at the Khadi shop. You know, the hand-loomed.

IL:

Plaids.

BL:

You know, it was really cool material and I had a shirt, Trevor, Tucker had a shirt. Iris made a whole dress out of it. So we were dressed in our theme, and we came, and we sang. I remember—I think we might’ve done “Country Roads.”

IL:

We did.

BL:

Because “Country Roads” was the most famous song in the world. Everybody knew this song. I quickly realized that the way—I’d be in a refugee camp in freaking Pakistan, and if I’d sing that song, they were singing. Years later, I told John Denver that and he goes, “Yeah. You wouldn’t believe the royalties I get from China.” But everybody knew the song, “Country Roads,” and so I started opening the show with it because I figured they’d say, “Here he is, Bob Livingston.” They—“What are you?” I’d say, “I’m going to take you walking down some country roads and

tell you stories about beautiful women and ugly men of the Wild West.” [Sings] “Almost heaven, West Virginia.” And they go, “Oh, so this is country music, okay. I know that. I’m not—” you know? So suddenly, they’re in the pocket. Pretty soon, on the first song, they’re singing. If I can get them to sing along, or yodel—I taught them how to yodel, all that kind of stuff. But we did the show at the Nehru celebration. We did, “Let it be Me”, “Country Roads,” something else, maybe four songs.

IL:

“This Land is Your Land.”

BL:

“This Land is Your Land.” We do, you know, great American—that’s what they wanted to hear and they love it. They know it. I would always substitute in “This Land is Your Land,” “From sunny Bombay to the plains of the Punjab,” with the last verse. We’d get every town.

AW:

Woody would’ve approved.

BL:

What? Woody would’ve approved. Woody would definitely approve. And so, it was really fun to do that. I remember that because Iris, not used to singing on stage, until she was holding her ear, trying to hold her tune. Unfortunately, we were sing on the same mic. I just remember, I’m going, “I bless the day I found,” and she’s going, “You’re singing too loud.” She’s trying to harmony and she’s going, “You’re singing—don’t sing so loud.”

IL:

Screaming in my ear. I was like—I couldn’t even hear what I was supposed to sing. He has a loud voice.

AW:

He does have a loud voice.

BL:

He does have a loud voice.

AW:

Having to move the recorder back and forth here.

BL:

But so, we did that. The other famous song was “I Just Called to Say I Love You.” Everybody knew it.

AW:

Really?

BL:

I’d play these—I’d go and play these girl schools, Catholic girl schools in Delhi. “No New Years’ Day,” and they’re just glowing. They start, “I just called to say I love you.” And so, what I started learning was the local custom was Diwali, that was the New Years’ Day. So I’d sing the song like it, but then I would start singing, “no Diwali, no Saraswati Puja day.” You know? And sing these Indian things and they would really love it, that you would kind of give them a—when we got to Pakistan, I did this song and I went around some people, and I said, “Well, what kind of celebrations do you have here?”, “Celebrations?” It’s Muslim. “Celebrations? [In accent] Well, we have Mujra day.” “What’s that?” “That’s when you crawl down the middle of the street on your hands and knees and beat yourself for your sins.” [Laughs] And it was kind of things like that, you know? So they had to go to some pains to come up with a joy to celebrate, but they had them. And so, I was just kind of going back and forth and I spent that whole year there. Well, in 1991, it dried up. Reagan was in, right? Who’d come in in ’92? Clinton? I can’t remember. Reagan was in.

AW:

Yeah, ’92.

BL:

Clinton came in ’92. Reagan had really dried up the reserves of the public funding for programs like mine. I wasn’t funded. The thing is they loved about me, I would show up. I had a reason to go, which is go—I wanted to be with my family in India. I’d go there and they didn’t have to pay my airfare over. I made enough money that I could pay for the air ticket, and then some, and then I was there. So I fronted my own ticket. It wasn’t until later that I—so they were drying up with money, ’91, or ’90—’91, I believe, was one of the last tours I did in India. I did India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. In ’91, there was a revolution in Bangladesh. I had gone there to play these shows. We’d played in Dhaka, at this academy, music academy. That’s when the greatest tabla player I’d ever heard, he was a Bangladeshi. He plays a tabla on this Buddy Holly. We recorded it that night, of “Not Fade Away.” I mean, the guy is absolutely burning. So we played that that night. We’d heard there was going to be a strike the next day because they’re striking against the government. Might be hard to get around. So they said, “We’re going to come pick you up in our van.” So they picked me up in the embassy van, take me to the American center. The American center is not the embassy, but in downtown Dhaka, on the fourth floor of this

office building. So we go in there and I say—they say, “You want to take your guitar? Just leave it in the car, sir. You know, you can leave it in the car.” I go, “I’m going to take it up. Who knows? I might play a song up there.” I take it with me. We’re on the fourth floor and we’re in this press conference. They have ten guys there, asking questions. I had a lot of Indian press. It’s hilarious. And so, a lot of press in general. I mean, every language you can think of and there we are, you know? And so, one of them is really funny and I’ll show it to you. It’s in Urdu. When they get to—it’s totally Urdu and it gets to Lost Gonzo Band. It’s in English. They couldn’t figure out how to translate it.

AW:

Yeah, they looked up Gonzo.

BL:

[Laughs] But so we were in the press conference and all of a sudden, somebody goes over to the window, and he goes, “Oh my god.” I say, “What happened?” We go over, and we’re looking out, and this smoke is rising above the buildings. There was probably five hundred people on top of this building and they’re all looking down, standing on the top of this big, giant building, and smoke is coming up, and they go, “I’m afraid it’s starting.” And about that time, this mob comes around the building. The streets were empty. Now, they’re full of people. They are attacking everything they see, and smashing windows of every car they see, and hauling them out in the middle of the square, and burning them. I’m looking at this out the window and they attack the American—got in the American compound, got all their vehicles, and hauled them out, and burned them. Including everybody, most of the vehicles were motorcycles that belonged to Bangladeshi people that were working there. They were just going, “Oh my god. Oh my god.” So, it’s like, we have to get out of here. They called the embassy and the embassy made arrangements for an ambulance to come in. They said, “Livingston is having heart palpitations and need to be removed, so we’re bringing an ambulance.” They didn’t know what was going to happen. So I just remember going downstairs and going out into this crowd and they were still there.

AW:

But you didn’t really have heart palpitations?

BL:

No, no. Not at all.

AW:

This is just the story, though?

BL:

Yeah. I just remember them saying that. It was just like, "Send an armored car. What's the deal?" And so, they pull in, though, with an ambulance and we had to walk through this crowd. I remember walking through the crowd and not once did I feel that they had anything but the most sheepishness over these cars burning and everything. He was like, "What are you going to do now?" You know? They were just looking at me. They didn't have anything against me or any of these other Americans. It was against their government, and what had happened is there was a revolution and the country fell. There was a general Zia in Pakistan, and there was a general Zia in Bangladesh. You know, Bangladesh used to be Pakistan, East Pakistan. Remember all that?

AW:

Um-hm.

BL:

[Coughs] So the guy died and somehow or another, it was under suspicious circumstances, just like the general Zia in Pakistan, and his widow took over, and the widow was leading the revolution, and the government fell the next day. They had to evacuate me out of—and this is—the Gulf War was going on, too, so it has to be '92. The Gulf War was also going on. And all the time, this tour that I was going on, this last tour, we were in—we had attacked Iraq, and I was saying stuff like, "You know, I'm going to teach you to be the first kid on your block to be a yodeling fool just like me. You know, there's yodelers all over the world. You know, what I've found is that it's impossible to invade a country and yodel at the same time. And just if old—if George Bush would just learn how to yodel and he'd call up Saddam, and say, "Saddam [yodels] yodel-lay-hi, yodel-lay-hi, yodel-lay-hi." And Saddam would probably go, "[yodels] oh-do-lo, oh-do-lo, eh-da-lo." I would say that and people would kind of laugh, but a lot—but one time—came backstage, some big, dark guys and they said, "You don't be making fun of Saddam Hussein."

AW:

What country were you in then?

BL:

I was in—I believe, I was in Pakistan. Said, "Don't be making fun of Saddam Hussein." And he said, [Indian accent] "That's not funny. He's a very good man. A great man. Even you will admit that he's a very bold man." And I go, "I do admit he's a very bold man." I said, "I won't. I just was—I just—" And so, I got this thing from the state department that said, "Advise Livingston as to the sanity of talking about Saddam Hussein in a light way because this is not good." And so, I was in this—I was in Bangladesh, and that country fell. They had to get me out, but all those Indian workers in Kuwait, hundreds of thousands of them, had poured out onto the Jordanian desert. They were sitting there, stranded, and all of this Indian airline traffic had been

taken there and sent back. So I had no way—there was no Indian airlines, so I finally—and everybody's trying to get out. Everybody's certainly trying to get out of Bangladesh, too. India was stable, you know? But they were just doing something for their people. And so, I remember having to get on some midnight flight and all the other gigs being cancelled in Bangladesh. They flew me to Kolkata. I was kind of stranded there for about three or four days. They took care of me, state department. And then, I got on a train and went all the way across the country, to Bombay, and got my plane out of there, and went back to America, but so that was '92. After Clinton came in, things didn't get better and I didn't get booked back in there again until '98. By the time '98 came along, Tucker was a good guitar player and he was—Tucker was his own guy. Taught, self-taught. I taught him stuff at first, but he was self-taught. Really brilliant, really sharp, and the most prolific person I know. But he didn't know—he's not a—what he says, he's not a player. "I'm not just going to go sit in and play with some," but he learned and got disciplined and learned a lot of my songs and learned some of these old folk songs. I remember we had a—we were going to go do this tour and I said, "You need to learn some country licks," and we went to see Champ Hood. And Champ just kind of sat around and just showed him a couple of licks that Tucker uses to this day, whenever he plays kind of country, he always has that derivative. So we went in '98. We did India, Pakistan, and Nepal, and met a lot of friends, you know? I mean, I went to Peshawar, solo, and this was in the late eighties, [coughs] but Muslim country. They pick me up in Peshawar. There was nobody to pick me up. [Phone rings] The train—the plane was not there. Hold on.

AW:
Sure.

BL:
Hello? Hello?

[Pause in recording]

BL:
Well, he's playing. They're playing tonight.

AW:
Yeah. Where are they playing?

BL:
At Thread Gills. They start it at nine.

AW:

Thread Gills. Which one? South? North?

BL:

South, I guess. Oh gosh, it probably is north.

AW:

Yeah. Call him and find out.

BL:

That would be easier, wouldn't it? We could actually—

AW:

Well, the only wrinkle in all this, I've got my guitar in the back. I didn't want to leave it at the hotel. I've got it in the back of the van. Is that a cool place to leave a guitar, in the back of a van?

BL:

You can take it in.

AW:

Okay.

BL:

[On the Phone] Freddie, is it Thread Gills North or South? Okay, North. Nine o'clock. Well, maybe we can come by for just a little bit. All right. Adios. Bye-bye. [End of Phone Call] We could actually go eat there.

AW:

That's fine. I haven't eaten at Thread Gills in a long time.

BL:

It's still good. Well, are we going? Are we rolling?

AW:

Yeah, we're rolling.

BL:

Okay. So Tucker did the tour with me in '98, and we went to all these places and I can't remember where I left off, but Tucker was great and it was father and son. And they loved Tucker, and especially, the young women who worked for the state department loved Tucker,

you know? And he knows no stranger and he could talk to anybody. So he had—I mean, there's people that up to just when he got married here, this last April, he had something like nine thousand email addresses and he deleted them all. [Laughter] Said, "I'm getting married. I'm not going to have a past anymore." He just kind of erased them all. But yeah, Tucker was—we did places like—we went to that first tour. We also did the east coast and we went up to Kolkata. Here's a vignette from Kolkata. Is this okay?

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

BL:

Tucker and I play. You know, Tucker and I are father and son. I mean, that's hard enough and to be on the road and so, sometimes, we were definitely father and son about it. He can say anything he wants to me because I'm his dad. And so, Tucker's headstrong. So we were in—he never liked to go—you know, we'd have to do a lot of state department that he wouldn't want to do, like go have dinner with the student association. He was like, "Let's go." You know, but we had to go, and we had to meet people, and we'd go visit culture ministers of countries, and stuff like that, you know? And just exchange of ideas.

AW:

Well, that's part of the gig.

BL:

It was sort of the gig and I made that part of the gig because when they found out I liked to do that stuff and to talk as much as I like to talk, they said, "Okay. We'll make use of it." But I loved it. We'd stay with people a lot of times. Home hospitality, they called it. So they put us up with Indian families or Pakistani families. And so, a lot of five star hotels, too. They made us stay there. So we play in Kolkata one night, at the U.S. American center. After the show, incidentally, at this time, this tour was really strange because I had developed some severe pain in my leg before I actually went on the tour and it was killing me. Something was bad wrong, but I didn't know what it is. In India, you can walk up and say, "I'll take a gallon of codeine at the pharmacy," and you get it. I was taking pain killers, and muscle relaxers, and all kinds of anti-inflammatory. I didn't know what was wrong and nothing would touch it. I was pretty spaced out, but I still had to do the tours. So when I'm playing, I don't think about it so much. At night, really painful. After I got back, had an MRI, and I had a ruptured disc, and I had to have spinal surgery. But all the time I was doing this, so I remember the Kolkata show for two reasons because I was so spaced out that show. I would kind of blank out, you know, telling the stories, but I couldn't—I wasn't as fluid, and so I would kind of get back, and I just kind of spaced out while Tucker was playing his lead, and then, we'd get back to it, and I'm supposed to be doing something, and I didn't do it. I'm just kind of—I remember getting so spaced out. I remember

him coming up to me and saying, “Dad, you’re supposed to tell a story. Start talking. Say something.” You know? And it was like, so—oh yeah. So I tell this story. We had a pretty good show, strangely enough. This guy comes up to me after the show, [Indian accent] “My name is Samad Roy [?] [1:50:50]. I am the world’s foremost exponent of Bengali music. I loved your program and you have to come to my house and visit. Please.” We said, “I don’t think we can do it.”, “Only thirty minutes. Thirty minutes. I just want you to come. Please. Honor me, to come.” You know, it’s like, “Honor you to come,” and he’s this Bengali folk singer. Pencil thin mustache, kind of guy, and he was sort of urbane. The state department guy said, “If you can do it, it would be good.” So, we go to his house. Tucker goes, “Oh.” We get there, the place is full of these Bengali musicians, and he lived in an apartment on the sixth story of this apartment complex and it was this rambling apartment. His parents lived there and his wife’s parents both lived there, and their kids, various places out in the midst of this dwelling. His son was a Bombay session man on the piano and could play. They had a piano and the guy could tear it up. The first thing happens is he starts playing and the guy goes, [singing Indian accent] “Unforgettable,” and he starts singing Nat King Cole songs, and all these old standards. The guy’s playing, and so I’m just like thinking I’m in a [Federico] Fellini movie and Tucker is nowhere to be seen. I kind of go looking for him and I look in the kitchen and there is this servant young girl, Malinka. She’s about seventeen or eighteen. He’s in there talking to her and she can’t speak a word of English. He’s doing sign language, he’s helping her chop vegetables, and he’s just kind of talking to her. And I go, “Okay.” And so, pretty soon, it gets to be about ten-thirty at night. We’d already been there an hour and a half and I’m ready to go. He goes, [Indian accent] “You’ve got to eat with us. You’ve got to have dinner.” I go, “Oh no. It’s way too late, you know? We’re just going to go.” “No, you’ve got to have dinner with us.” And Tucker goes, “We’ve got to stay.” [AW laughs] And I go, “What?” He goes, “No. We’ve got to stay here.” So then, we say, “Okay.” So we go in and I’m sitting around the table with these guys and they’re telling some musical stories and we’re talking. He goes, [Indian accent] “And you know, Bob. I just love Tucker. What a wonderful boy and he’s such a homeboy. Always wanting to be in the kitchen and help prepare the food.” [Laughter] I was like, “Yeah, right.” So after we finish the night, we go off, we get in a taxi. We’re going back to the hotel. Tucker’s going, “Dad, did you see her? Isn’t she the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen? I think I’ve found my Indian bride. I’m going to get married to her and take her down to South India and introduce her to mom.” I go, “You’re crazy. What are you talking about?” He goes, “No, no. But did you see that wasted necklace she was wearing and that plastic ring? She’s so poor. I’ve got to help her.” So we go up to Assam, which is the city—which is the state just south of China. We play in this big hotel and this beautiful thing. And then, we go out to this music festival they’re having and we’re videotaping the whole thing. Everything, we’re videotaping. And we get onstage with these people and they give us these funny hats and present us all these kind of things. They’re playing all this music. We sit in and we play, you know? And they just—people, they love it, you know? They just love it. And these are folks that weren’t expecting it, but you know. And so, we play our formal show and at some point, Tucker goes to the market and he comes back with

these two big bundles. He goes, "When we go back to Kolkata, look what I got for Malinka." He's got all this clothes, and necklace, and a ring, and you know, just kind of an ornamental thing. Nothing really expensive. But he goes, "And look at this shawl." You know—you know what'll happen?" It's a beautiful Indian shawl. He goes, "You know what'll happen, though. She'll give it to her mother, so I got her another one." [AW laughs] He thinks of everything. We get back to India, and he calls Samad Roy [?] [1:55:12] up. He goes, "Samad, this is Tucker," and he goes, [Indian accent] "Tucker, what's happening? What are you doing? It's so great to hear for you. I can't believe you're calling. It's wonderful." He goes, "Can I speak to Malinka?" He goes, "Huh?" He goes, "Can I speak to Malkina?" He goes, "Why do you want to speak to her?" He goes, "I've got some things for her. I want to talk to her. I want to see her again. I really like her." He goes, "Wait a minute. You're not going to be seeing—she's my servant. You don't understand the way things work here. Can you imagine what all the other servants in the building and in the whole community would think if I would allow you to see her? And they're thinking, Why does my employer not bring me a rich American to give me all these things? This upsets the whole apple cart. You cannot do it. I will not let you see her." And he wouldn't let him see her and he went to the state department, the guy, and he goes, "That's just the way it is over here. I'm sorry, but he's right, really." That's their culture. They can't do that. It's not really caste system as much as—even in the village we lived down—or the people that worked for us. We're only allowed to pay—it's like, I have someone do the clothes, and do the food, and everything, you know? You have servants.

AW:

You can only pay them so much, right?

BL:

You can only pay them so much. Don't pay them any more because it makes everything go up. It's very strictly, sort of, regulated, you know? And so, that was—and on that same tour, you know, Tucker went off to—when we went to Nepal, Everest Base Camp, for a month and he made it all the way to the dead of winter and actually, summited Annapurna, which is next. It's an easy mountain to climb. People were dying of altitude sickness and Tucker's running up the mountain, you know?

AW:

Geez. Hey, real quick. Before we—I know we're getting close to time to needing to be going and all that. In between, like, '92, and '98, what were you doing musically, here in the States, if you weren't being able to go on tour?

BL:

Okay. I come back and I'm not doing the tours in India. At some point, I think I get, maybe, picking up some house painting jobs. Playing the odd gig here and there, but not doing much.

One day, the phone rings and it's Jerry Jeff. He says, "Hey Bob, what's going on?" I said, "Well, I'm just here. I'm doing some things." I just got back from a tour there, and I'm—or maybe I'm going to go again. I'm not exactly sure what happened. I also went to work for a radio station selling advertising in Austin, and but I'm not exactly sure exactly what year that was and I was sort of between tours. I'd do something to do it, but I wasn't playing with Jerry Jeff. He calls me and says, "Listen. I've done this new album. It's called *Live at Green Hall*, and I did it with this new band. Paul Pierce, he's playing the drums. Roland Denny on base. Lloyd produced it. It's kind of funky. We did it live at Green Hall. He said, "I'm going to take that band out. We're going to play some gigs, you know, but what do you think about helping me road manage it? I mean, you know what the drill is and you could come out there and you could be sort of road manage for us." And I go, "Well." He goes, "I've got a gig in Dallas in two days. Why don't you see? Let's do a trial run. Come up there and I'll give you a couple hundred bucks and do it for me." So I said, "Okay." So I go up, and I see this band, and I play, and at some point, I walk out onstage, and I sing with him, and he really enjoys it. The other guys aren't singing that much. The guy, Bobby Rambo, he's playing the guitar, but he, sometimes he'll sing, sometimes he won't. It's just what—and he goes—and he complains to me. Jerry Jeff complains to be about that. He goes, "Rambo's a good singer, but sometimes, he just decides not to sing. I don't understand it." And so, he loved the harmonies that the Gonzo's had. And so, he calls me in a couple of days and he says, "Well, you know, I was talking to Susan and I told her that you were going to maybe road manage this tour and she said, 'Well, hell, if he's going to be there, why would he do anything but play bass, if he could do the tour?' And I started thinking, you know, that's right. If I got Bob, then I could get Freddie again." Freddie had played in the band. He really liked Freddie. So I went on the tour, and Freddie went on the tour. We went out to the West Coast and we played this show. That's when I started playing with him again. By the time—and so I don't really know the exact year that I started back with him and I need to find out. But I think he had put out an album called *Reunion*. I had a song on it. I wrote a song called "Bittersweet," and he helped me finish it, and we had—you know, and then went on it. I sang a song. I came to the session and he had me sing something called "Boogie Mama." Just a rock and roll crazy song. He just said, "Sing it." So that's the only real contact I had with him, between those things. But by the time—and so, I really need to find out, but suddenly, I was back playing with him. I played with him, pretty much, consistently, I think, when I got back. There were times when he'd have off and there were times that I'd go and do these tours. I went on a seven week tour to the Middle East in 2000. It could've been a lot longer. At some point, we went into India, and we played, and they wanted us to go into Sri Lanka, and maybe, Indonesia, and all of these things were opening up. They said, "Keep on going," and I had to say—because Jerry Jeff said, "If you don't come back, I'm going to get another guy. We got gigs coming up. We need to know what you're going to do." And so I thought, okay, so I came back. That was in 2000. So I'm—I was kind of on and off. We'd do these every couple of years. I've been able to get a—we went to Africa. Went to—all over, you know, India, again, and the Maldives. I did a lot of solo shows myself, too, you know?

AW:

Yeah. Cool. Well, let's—this is kind of a nice stopping spot—let's do that. But then, next time we have a chance to sit down and talk, I want to talk about—or, I want to listen while you talk about the Cowboys and Indians music that you're doing here.

BL:

Yeah, right.

AW:

I think that'd be a good follow-up.

BL:

That's a great idea.

AW:

Okay.

BL:

Okay.

AW:

All right.

BL:

Thank you, Andy.

AW:

Thank you, Bob.

End of Recording

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