Oral History Interview of
Jesse Taylor

Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
December 12, 2005
Austin, Texas

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Crossroads of Music Archive

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Audio Editor: Elissa Stroman
Transcription: Cecilia Morales
Editor(s): Leah Blackwell
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The Crossroads Artists Project encompasses interviews conducted by the Crossroads of Music Archive Staff members. They hope to document the creative process of artists and songwriters from all across the Southwestern United States.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Jesse Taylor, guitarist from Lubbock Texas and longtime member of the Joe Ely Band. Jesse discusses his early musical career in Lubbock and in Austin, and recalls memorable tours and experiences on the road.

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Keywords
Lubbock music, popular music, Austin music, rock and roll

Andy Wilkinson (AW):
Let's see if it's working, yeah. Isn't this cool? I mean—

Jesse Taylor (JT):
When we start talking, I'm going to tape it, too.

AW:
Yeah, and I'll be glad to give you a copy of this.

JT:
Oh yeah?

AW:
But go ahead and do that, that way if there's—well, there's—in case one doesn't work, then you've got another one.

JT:
Here's us [inaudible] Billy Joe [Shaver].

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AW:
Oh, his book?

JT:
Have you seen it?

AW:
No, I haven't, but I've heard about it. Do you like it?

JT:
Well, it's very short on the biography side. You know, it's just kind of short and to the point. Pretty gritty, but I tell you one thing, I traveled off and on for years if you put it all together. Been a number of years with Billy Joe. And only that much of it—and Billy Joe told me—he taught me one thing I remember. He said, "Tell it like it is. I don't care if it sounds bad, it don't matter if you get drunk and thrown in jail or beat up a cop or whatever happened, it don't matter, he said. Just tell the truth. Always tell the truth. If they don't like it, well, the heck with it. It doesn't matter." So I realized that. So anyway, only that much of it is biography and the rest of it is all the lyrics to all his songs up to this point. Bill Joe still writes two or three songs a week. The guy is prolific.

AW:
I didn't know that you traveled with Billy Joe.

JT:
Oh, hell yeah.

AW:
Did you play in the band or were you in a different band that was traveling at the same time?

JT:
No, I played with Billy. Well see, first when Billy would—you knew who Eddy Shaver was, right?

AW:
Yes.

JT:
Well, Eddy kind of took off on his own. Been playing with Billy since he was fifteen and stuff. Then Eddy took off, started getting real popular. He took off with Dwight Yoakam. Played in Dwight's band for a while, then he started his own rock band for a while and everything. And Billy Joe just—hardly anything was happening with Billy Joe at that point. And I'd known Billy since the mid-seventies, you know, at least since '75. So me and Billy Joe got to talking one day and this was after Eddy had played with him for a number years and taking off. And Billy didn't have any gigs, wasn't doing anything, you know. It was kind of sad, you know. I said, "Well, Billy, why don't you let me—" he's always lived in Waco. Well, except for the time that he spent living in Nashville quite a while. But he always kept that house in Waco that he bought after Waylon did the *Honky Tonk Heroes* you know?

AW:
Yeah, right.

JT:
Well, see, he made pretty good money off that album—

AW:
Yeah, because almost every song on that album—

JT:
All his. Yeah. But then so I said, "Well, you know, let me book us some gigs." So at that point, just for about a year, just me and Billy, two acoustic guitars.

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AW:
Oh man, I would've loved to have heard that.

JT:
Well, we played in Lubbock two or three times.

AW:
I must have been out of town or something.

JT:
We played at that old place, Caboose. Then you know that place Ronnie Thompson had. They used to have live music there. Where else did we play? Oh, we played outdoors at that Tommy Thompson's place, where we played on the roof of that shed, you remember that? (both laugh) And then it was kind of funny because the roof had an angle to it.

AW:
You had to be careful.

JT:
You had to make sure you didn't drink too much before that gig because if you staggered forward a little too much, you were liable to keep going off the edge of the roof. (AW laughs) But anyway, we did that for a while and all. I don't know. And then, let's see. Then Ely called me back for, like the tenth time I re-joined the Ely Band. Was doing that. And then Eddy came back and him and Billy started their band, Shaver, they called it. But then when Eddy died, I knew—I told my girlfriend, I said, "I bet you we're going to be hearing from Billy Joe here pretty quick." And sure as heck, you know, it wasn't about a week later that… Billy—he took that really hard. He still takes it hard and all, but he just kept on working. He played that night.

AW:
He did?

JT:
That Eddy died. They had a gig. It was New Year's Eve.

AW:
And he went ahead and played it?

JT:
He went ahead and played out at Poodie's. You ever been to Poodie's?

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AW:
No, I haven't.

JT:
It's out there by where Willie's ranch is out in Briarcliff. Willie and all the boys came out, got up and set in with Billy and everybody was you know, just giving Billy some support there. But he did the gig. I couldn't believe it. But anyway, then sure as heck Billy called and said, "I need you, man." He's always calling me and saying, "I need you man, I need you bad. Really need your help. You're always there for me. I know you'll be here for me." So then I played with him again for a couple of years. But this was with a band, you know. Full—well a five-piece band. Then we teamed up with Kinky Friedman. And boy, that was a blast.

AW:
That must've been a great experience.

JT:
Then we toured all over with Kinky. Hell, we went to Australia and toured Australia and Hawaii and did an album.

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AW:
Really? With Kinky? Is it under Kinky's name or under—just a combination?

JT:
Well, in a band. Well it wasn't really a band, it was an acoustic band.

AW:
I haven't heard that, but I can tell it's—I can tell it's something I want to hear. *Live From Down Under*.

JT:
The quality is not all that good (laughs) but it's fun and it's interesting. Hang on just a second, let me do something. If you want to stop the tape.

AW:
Okay. Before I stop it, let me note that this is December the twelfth. It's the afternoon and we're at Jesse Taylor's house in Austin.

JT:
I've never seen a recorder like that.

AW:
Isn't that a nice little thing? It's an Olympus. And it's digital, and it comes with software where I can plug it into the computer and download the file and listen to it. So it's real handy, and good quality. You can even plug a microphone into it if you want. But it's got these two little mics built into the front that actually do a pretty good job.

JT:
Billy gave me a little mention in here. It was pretty funny actually. Just a couple of lines, but.

AW:
He seems to be playing a lot more now, too.

JT:
What's that?

AW:
Billy Joe seems to be playing a little bit more now.

JT:
Oh, God, Billy's—man, he's right back up there on top. Billy's bigger than he's ever been. Ever. Yeah.

AW:
I'll tell you, he's just one of my very favorite writers.

JT:
But it says right here, this paragraph, and then it doesn't say anything again until this second paragraph. That one's funny there, and that's a true story.

AW:
"We played wherever they would book us, even though it damn near killed me." (laughs)

JT:
Isn't that something? That's funny.

AW:
(laughs) Oh, "let's play one more, let's do another one."

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JT:
Billy was saying, all along he was saying, "Stop. End the show. Just one more." And by one more, he meant this one.

AW:
Yeah, not an extra one.

JT:
This is it. And every time he said that to me, I thought he was saying, "One more, keep going," so I looked down at the set list to see what's next, and turned around, and I was kind of the semi-band leader, and I turned around and cued the band into the next song, and Billy would be going (breathing hard). He was dying of a heart attack on stage, man. It was—I didn't know, I thought he want wanting—I thought he was having [break in recording] I almost killed Billy Joe.

AW:
That's a great story.

JT:
I know.

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AW:
Hey, tell me about your dad, because I didn't know anything about your dad or your family early, you know. What's his name?

JT:
Well, it's a strange story because see, I never really knew my dad that well either. He more or less deserted my family when I was ten years old. But he was a guitar player who—well, he was a weekend warrior. He used to play at a place called the Bloody Bucket. You've heard of that, haven't you?

AW:
Yeah.

JT:
And the Glassarama, where Buddy Holly played.

AW:
Yeah. What was your dad's name?

JT:
Homer.

AW:
Homer?

JT:
Homer Taylor, yeah. Him and my uncle, [his] name was Barron, B-a-r-r-o-n Taylor, they played together too. They'd like do duos or something like that. He actually played for a while in a band with Wayne Maines and James Maines. I don't know if Sonny was in that or not. It wasn't officially the Maines Brothers, but Lloyd's got a poster of it.

AW:
Really?

JT:
Yeah, and they're all decked out in the same Roy Rogers clothes. (laughs) They've got on those ties.

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AW:
Did I tell you that Lloyd—I just talked to Lloyd a little bit ago and he said for me to tell you he's going to call you. He just got back in last night from L.A.

JT:
Oh, good.

AW:
Yeah, so.

JT:
Yeah, he's got some stuff for me he's had forever. We can't ever connect.

AW:
Well if there's a busier human being on the planet than Lloyd, I'd like to meet him. Except you wouldn't be able to meet him, you'd never find him. (both laugh) He's hard to come by. So you pointed that picture out on the wall up there. That's your cousin he's playing with there, the fiddle?

JT:
It's his first cousin, my second cousin.

AW:
And what's his name?

JT:
Frank Strawn. S-t-r-a-w-n.

AW:
Before he left the family, did you get a chance to—I mean, did he—since he was a weekend warrior, did you get a chance to hear him play, or was it—?

JT:
Oh yeah, sure. Yeah. And I remember he always played around the house. I have great memories of him sitting around playing that old country stuff. Of course you know he played the old country. Great memories of him and my uncle sitting around, jamming in the living room. But strangely enough though, I never really learned anything from him. You know, I never picked it up—I was ten years old when he left and I didn't meet my father again until I was thirty.

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AW:
Really? That must've been strange.

JT:
Yeah, it was.

AW:
Well, did you—had you gotten a guitar before he left?

JT:
No. I got—I started playing when I was twelve years old. By the time I was thirteen, I was already playing circles around my friends. I was going, what's wrong with these guys?

AW:
Well what motivated you to get a guitar and play? Was it having grown up listening to it, or was it something else?

JT:
Well actually, I'd always loved music, you know and all. Always liked listening to the radio a lot. But to tell you the truth there's—these Mexican guys lived down the block from me, from my mother's house there in Lubbock on First Street, in the Arnett Benson. And I still see this one kid. He was in the same grade as me. And he's my age and all. I still see him once in a while. He

had some older brothers; there were a bunch of boys in his family, and he was about the youngest. But his older brothers had a Hispanic band. I don't know whether they were playing Tejano, conjunto, or what, but that's the first time I heard an electric guitar.

AW:
Really?

JT:
Yeah. And so I went one day—I'll never forget this, ever. Went down to his house after school one day and the brothers were in there practicing with the electric guitars and I was just flabbergasted—totally floored at the sound that these guitars was making. And I just immediately—I said, That's what I want to do right there. So I worked in the cotton fields for some of my uncles, made a little money, and then my mother of course helped me out and everything. Wound up buying a—well, first, I had an old acoustic guitar, but I didn't have that but for two or three months and then I said, No, this ain't cutting it. And I got an electric guitar. So I basically started out playing electric. And strangely enough, I started out playing lead. Everybody normally, first they'll learn the chords, you know, you learn E, G, A, C and D and all that. Well instead I picked it up and trying to learn how to play Ventures music. That was my big hero band back then, was the Ventures. And so that's pretty much when I started there and that was my first exposure to bands and electric guitars.

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AW:
So you really started with bands. It wasn't starting as a solo player and then becoming a band player, you started out right at the beginning.

JT:
Yeah, always.

AW:
Where did you get that first guitar? Do you remember? That first electric.

JT:
I think I got it over there at Harrod's. Remember that old Harrod's on Avenue Q?

AW:
Yeah, I do.

JT:
And who was that guy that worked there forever? Clyde?

AW:
Yeah, I think that's right. I remember that Harrod was the conductor here for the symphony.

JT:
Bill Harrod, yeah. Yeah, he was. I never really dealt with him much, he just owned the store. He mainly like sold pianos and stuff. But this guy—I think his name was Clyde. And he was the one that, you know, handled the guitars and drums and all that stuff. And that's where I got it. It was a DanElectro.

AW:
DanElectro, which then was a fairly inexpensive guitar and now they're really popular, aren't they?

JT:
Yeah, this was a great one. I'd give anything if I still had it. It had that glitter, it was kind of a light brown, gold-ish brown with glitter in the paint and white patent leather around the head. (both laugh)

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AW:
There's probably some Japanese guitar collector who has that now. (laughs) Well, so what was it like, musically, to—this is really interesting, being a guitar player myself, not a good one but at least good enough to know how difficult it is to start with leads instead of starting with chord progressions and putting the lead in those.

JT:
I don't know. Because to me, it didn't—it was innate. You know, something that I decided I should do, it was just something that happened, you know. And so I didn't ever really think about it, you know? I just—instead of playing the chords, I wanted to play the (sings guitar lick to "Walk, Don't Run") all that. That's what I wanted to play and so I did. After about a year, I was pretty good, you know, for a little kid.

AW:
Well, where did you get to play, being thirteen?

JT:
Oh, we played at junior high school parties. We'd play the junior high school dances and private, you know, like little parties people had in their garage. Then we'd play the talent show at the school.

AW:
Did your band have a name?

JT:
Yeah. The Epics.

AW:
The Epics. Well, that's a great—

JT:
First band I was ever in.

AW:
That's a great band name, too. What was the name of the Hispanic kid that lived down the block that you heard?

JT:
Alphonso—A-l-p-h-o-n-s-o. Gongora. G-o-n-g-o-r-a. Gongora. Yeah I saw him the last time I was there.

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AW:
He still lives in Lubbock?

JT:
Huh?

AW:
Still lives in Lubbock?

JT:
He still lives in the same house.

AW:
Really?

JT:
I can't even believe it.

AW:
That's on First Street—what hundred block?

JT:
Let's see. My mother lived in 3308 First Street and he lived in the next block up, which would be thirty-two hundred. I don't know the exact address. He's up there. We had fun, man. It was great.

AW:
Well what—again, being that age and playing music is not all that easy. I mean, what happened after The Epics? What did you do?

JT:
Oh, just a series of teenage cover bands, you know. We played a lot of Chuck Berry. Played some Jerry Lee Lewis, you know, rock and roll mainly. And then of course time went on and then you know, and then the mid-sixties came around and the English invasion hit. And then it was like, well I was totally fascinated by that whole deal. Loved all those—I still do. I loved all those sixties English bands. You know like The Stones and The Animals and The Yardbirds—all that stuff. And then we stopped playing so much like—well, we'd always played Chuck Berry and stuff like that, but we stopped playing that so much and started doing modern rock. Grew our hair out long, which back then was—you know, if it was half an inch over your ear it was serious. That was serious long hair, boy. They called them freaks. You were a freak. Fly my freak flag. (laughs)

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AW:
So let's see. What year were you born?

JT:
Fifty.

AW:
Fifty. So you were oh—

JT:
About fifteen.

AW:
Fourteen, fifteen when that—

JT:
Something like that. And then I—well, when I was about sixteen, something like that, I—two really big things happened. One was that I was over at a friend's house and this friend, he pulled out an album he had just gotten somewhere, and it was Jimmy Reed, you know, blues. And I had never really been exposed to blues, you know? In Lubbock nobody played the blues. And I just

totally flipped out. I heard that stuff and I said, Wow, this is what I've been wanting to play all along, even as a kid and everything. So then I went and got every blues album I could possibly get my hands on. And then that just snowballed as well it would into guys like especially Freddy King—major, major influence on me.

AW:
How hard was it, even finding those records in Lubbock then?

JT:
Wasn't that easy. But you could find them, you know. There was a record store that used to be on Thirty-fourth Street.

AW:
UV Blake?

JT:
Huh?

AW:
UV Blake?

JT:
I think that might've been it. It was over by that old movie theater.

AW:
That was it, because they'd let you listen to a record before you had to buy it.

JT:
Well, they would have—they carried some blues. And then I pretty much just stopped all the rock stuff and started playing blues. That was one important thing. And then just about right around that same time, the other really important thing that happened was I met Jimmie Gilmore and Joe Ely. Back then, you know—well anybody that had long hair—and like I said, I had long hair, not all that long, but anybody that had long hair and played music knew each other.

AW:
I was about to ask how you met, because they were older.

JT:
Yeah, they're three, four years older than me. So I was always the kid.

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AW:
Where did you have an opportunity to meet them? Playing gigs or—?

JT:
Yeah. I played with a guy named Lewis Cowdrey some. You ever heard of Lewis?

AW:
Yeah, I know the name.

JT:
Harp player. And he knew Jimmie. And Jimmie knew Joe. Jimmie and Joe were in Monterey High School together, in the same grade and stuff. And then I just met 'em through that circle of people and then got to playing with them. We wound up actually starting a band there. I guess I was about sixteen, seventeen. It was called the T. Nichol House Band. Which was T, period, Nichol, N-i-c-h-o-l, House Band.

AW:
That's an interesting name. Where did it come from?

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JT:
Well, T. Nichol was this old beatnik guy who lived over on— I believe it was Eighth Street over there. And he was like—

AW:
By Texas Tech over there?

JT:
Yeah, in the Tech ghetto, yeah. And he was like pre-hippy guy, more like a beatnik guy. But he had—his house was like a twenty-four seven constant party or meeting place, everybody coming in and out of there, met a lot of people there. That's where I met Angela Strehli who first brought me to Austin. We just—actually, we just started bringing some guitars over there and playing over in the corner, me and Jimmie and John Reed.

AW:
John was there then?

JT:
Oh, yeah. Yeah, I've known John since I was about fifteen. He's older than me, too—

AW:
Was he playing with—he wasn't playing with Tommy yet, was he?

JT:
Oh, no. He was playing with at that time, a lady named Kay Reed—no relationship. But he was one of us, you know. So anyway, and then T.J. McFarland, the drummer—

AW:
Yeah?

JT:
Well, everybody called him Tiny up until, you know, not that long ago people started calling him—he switched back to TJ. He started bringing some drums over and so this guy who owned the house name was Tommy Nichol.

AW:
Tommy Nichol?

JT:
Yeah. And so you know we just started playing over there at regular parties and thusly, became the T. Nichol House Band. And then we started going out and doing a few little gigs. We'd play at—did you ever hear of the Oz Coffee House?

AW:
Yeah.

JT:
Played there a lot and then we'd play over there at—you remember old Charlie Ray? You know that place in the alley back there, over there where his mother owned the flower shop? Turned into a restaurant later.

AW:
Yeah, it later became Mesquites?

JT:
Yeah.

AW:
Yeah, it's between Broadway and 13th in the alley.

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JT:
And we played there and the same deal, we weren't old enough to go play clubs and stuff.

AW:
Was the Purple Onion—?

JT:
Huh?

AW:
Purple Onion, was it going then? It was a coffee house, styled itself as a beatnik joint in Lubbock, there kind of down on University.

JT:
Was that in the alley?

AW:
It's about 15th or 16th and University, over in that area. It was there for a while. I didn't know if you had played that.

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JT:
I don't know. Can't remember that. Of course, by that time I was going in and out of Lubbock quite a bit. We played together a bunch. Then all of a sudden, you know, well, '67, '68 rolls around and the whole Haight-Ashbury thing hit out in San Francisco. All these bands and hippies and everything out there taking LSD and stuff and we were like, boy, we need to be out there.

AW:
Don't want to be left out.

JT:
We all loaded up and moved to Berkeley, California. You know, it's right there across the Bay Bridge, the Oakland Bay Bridge.

AW:
You said you were in and out of Lubbock a lot then. Were you playing music in and out of Lubbock?

JT:
Not really. I was more or less hopping freight trains.

AW:
Oh, really?

JT:
Yeah. Riding the freights a lot, going to L.A, Los Angeles. As a matter of fact, the first time I ever hopped a freight I was running from the juvenile authorities because they kept kicking me out of school all the time for long hair and they just didn't like me. They had my number. You know—commie, one of them commie, hippie long-haired kids, you know. They'd make me go cut my hair and I'd go cut it and it'd be about as long as yours and I'd come back and they'd still say, "No, cut it." They were just messing with me.

AW:
Yeah. Now was this junior high or high school?

JT:
This would've been in the tenth grade. So basically, my last real year of school was the ninth grade because once I got in high school, I was already into the guitar and staying out with my buddies, Jimmie and Joe and John and Tiny and all them guys. At school I made straight Fs. If I had to have went back another year, I'd have to take the whole tenth grade over. But they were messing with me so bad that I just stopped going, you know. The juvenile authorities came sniffing around because the state law is, you're required to go to school until you're seventeen. And I was just sixteen. I wasn't quite seventeen, almost. And then one day I came home and my mother was all upset and the juvenile authorities had been by looking for me and said, "We're taking him to detention," to the kiddie jail and all. She told me that, and I went, "Whoa—" And I took off and went and hung out at this friend's house where I used to stay all the time. And then this other good friend of mine named Sam Cox, he had already been out to L.A. on the freight trains and everything and they were having a party over there and Sam said, "Well, I'm fixing to go hop a freight train and head out to L.A. to see some friends of ours we got out there. Anybody want to go?" I go, "I do!" (AW laughs) Perfect opportunity. So that's the first time I jumped on a freight. And then thereafter for years, I rode them damn things. I rode 'em, Ely rode 'em with Jimmie, rode 'em with Sam a bunch, rode 'em by myself a bunch.
Let me—before I forget these two stories here. Let me back up here. Because this is really interesting stuff. I meant to say it a while ago, but I started getting ahead of myself. But back when my father and my uncle used to play at that Glassarama deal and everything. Well, they got a gig over there one night, but they needed another guitar player, somebody to fill in. Either my dad said to my uncle or my uncle to my dad—the other said, Well, what about that skinny kid that's always down at the Laundromat down there on—I believe Ninth Street. He's always hanging out in the Laundromat playing, maybe he'd come play with us. Yeah, he's pretty good, he's a good guitar player and everything. So they went and found this skinny kid that played guitar, took him out and did the gig with him at the Glassarama. It was Buddy Holly.

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AW:
(laughs) The skinny kid at the Laundromat?

JT:
Yeah I saw Buddy—I never saw him play, but you remember the old Hi-D-Ho?

AW:
Yeah. Down on University? Or Thirty-fourth Street?

JT:
No, that's the—the original one was at Third Street and University, or College Avenue it used to be back then. But my dad would take me over there once in a while for burgers or something. We'd go and I'll never forget. You know, I was just a little kid, but my dad would say, "Look, there's Buddy." There would be this big, pink Cadillac kind of circling into the Hi-D-Ho, a convertible with the top down and there would be Buddy in there with about five girls in the car. (AW laughs) And I'd be going, Golly, boy this is just more fuel for the fire for what I want to do. So I actually saw Buddy a few times, but I never saw him play. And the other story I was going to tell you is: did you ever see that album—that CD that John Reed and I did?

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AW:
No, I didn't.

JT:
It's a guitar album, an electric guitar album. You know, I was telling you about how The Ventures were big heroes of mine and everything. Well, we got ol' Nokie Edwards on there as a special guest who is the one and only lead guitar player The Ventures ever had. He did all that stuff, all that, "Walk, Don't Run," "Perfidia," all that stuff. Well we got ol' Nokie on our album. Boy, you talk about proud, I was—

AW:
Oh, that's great.

JT:
I was so proud. I'm still proud. (talking in background away from recorder) This is all instrumental.

AW:
Oh, really? Oh, thanks. Do you mind if I put—I'm going to listen to it, but do you mind if I put it in the Southwest Collection?

JT:
Whatever you want to do.

AW:
I think I'll make a copy for me to listen to, but I think this is the kind of thing we want to have.

JT:
Yeah, Joe Ely did the liner notes. It's pretty cool.

AW:
Oh yeah, man. I appreciate it. This is recent, just a couple years ago.

JT:
Yeah. I've got to use the restroom.

AW:
I'll put this on hold here. Hello, hello. See if that's working? Yeah.

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JT:
Yeah, I just wanted to throw those two stories in.

AW:
Oh, those are great stories. Anytime you have a story that you want to throw in, throw it in, because we don't have a schedule or an outline to follow here. It's just whatever comes to you to think about. But I am interested in the—when you left to go to California to the Haight-Ashbury scene in San Francisco, Berkeley—when you got out there, did you get into the music scene as well or was it mainly the cultural scene that was—

JT:
Yeah, we were playing music out there. It was a lot easier to find places to play around there, even if you were underage, to get into the clubs and stuff. Because like around Lubbock you know, it was—well, for one thing, there wasn't hardly any place to play outside of the Oz or Charlie Ray's place or something like that. Couldn't get in them bars and stuff. Pretty strict about kids coming in there. But in California, it was a lot more open. Plus, in California you had—especially San Francisco you had a whole lot more gigs that were out—the park gigs. Love-ins, be-ins, whatever. All that stuff, and we played—we took the whole band out there, all of us, The T. Nichol House Band. We went out there and starved to death. (both laugh)

AW:
I was about to ask. Those love-ins and be-ins were a good place to play, but you couldn't pay the rent doing that could you?

JT:
No.

AW:
Well, so you played together as a band out there?

JT:
Uh-huh.

AW:
That's great. Now, in this band you were still playing electric guitar, right?

JT:
Oh yeah. Because we had T.J. on drums—Tiny.

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AW:
So you had to have some—now, were you, and Jimmie and Joe writing material then?

JT:
They were. I've never been very much of a writer at all. I've written a few songs that have gotten recorded, but I just—that's just not my forte. I mean, I wish it were, but I just don't have it in me. It's not like—you just don't decide that you're going to be a songwriter and go out and start writing songs and make 'em good. It had to come from some inner well inside of you, you know that's really got that poetry in there and everything. Personally, I could never stop listening to, or learning the guitar licks and the music parts to ever take time to write lyrics, you know.

AW:
Do you think that it's also true that that ability to play poetry with guitar also has to come from someplace?

JT:
Oh, yeah, sure. It does, it's just a different medium. But yeah, sure, it's the same thing, it's just a different way of expressing it, you know. I mean, it's all music. But you know I just was never—anything I ever wrote, I've never liked. It wasn't just me being too self-critical, it's because it wasn't any good. (both laugh) I'd write something and I'd think while I was writing, Hey, this is

good. Okay, this is pretty good. I'd get up the next day and read it and I'd go, Oh, God, what was I thinking? I must have had too many beers or something.

AW:
That's the way I feel about my guitar playing. I play it and I think, That's not too bad, then I hear it back on the recorder and—well, how long were you out in California?

JT:
Well, at that time, I was out there for close to a year. And then we all just sort of drifted away. Couldn't really get anything going. Then I started living with Jo Carol Pierce, do you know who she is?

AW:
Yeah.

JT:
She and I just decided to move back to Texas, move to Austin.

AW:
Why Austin? Because that was way ahead of the curve.

JT:
Yeah, we had both already lived here and you know, Austin was more or less the—you know, what San Francisco was to California. Austin has always been the hip town, you know.

AW:
Yeah, even that long ago.

JT:
Yeah, even back then. Even before then, it was, you know, beatnik and all that. The (snaps fingers) guys.

AW:
Right. So you came back to Austin with Jo Carol?

JT:
Uh-huh. Lived with her for a couple of years. I still see Jo Carol a lot. I just talked to her about two days ago. Should've called her and have her over here.

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AW:
Yeah, how is she doing?

JT:
Oh, she's great.

AW:
Yeah, I would at some point like to interview her, too.

JT:
Yeah, well I could sure get you in touch with her.

AW:
That'd be great.

JT:
And the Hancocks, have you—

AW:
Yeah, in fact we're talking. I've got to call Connie right now. I don't know where they are, I've got some things to give her. We're talking to them, the same thing that I mentioned to you about in terms of having a place to put all those materials.

JT:
I see them a lot, too. I play gigs with them.

AW:
With the [Texana] Dames?

JT:
Not on a regular basis, but fairly often, they'll call me up. They use about three different guitar players. John Reed's one and Paul Skelton, you ever heard him?

AW:
No, I haven't.

JT:
Great guitar player. And me. And you know, if they can't get one or the other, can't get John or Paul they'll get me. Just a couple of weeks ago, I played a big wedding with them.

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AW:
They're such fun.

JT:
Oh, golly, what a hoot. Tommy, he never ceases to amaze me.

AW:
He's his own classification.

JT:
Did you see the film *Lubbock Lights*?

AW:
No, I haven't. They had a showing of it in Lubbock and I was out of town. Somebody told me you can get it on DVD and I've got to get it and have a look at it. I heard it was a good film. Did you like it?

JT:
It was pretty good, yeah. There's some more things, more they could've done, less of certain people they could've used, but—

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AW:
That always happens, doesn't it?

JT:
Yeah, but all in all, yeah, it's good. It's worth watching for sure. You can get it at Waterloo.

AW:
Waterloo?

JT:
Yeah, that one at Sixth and—

AW:
I might stop there while I'm in town and pick up a copy. Well, so in Austin, when you were back in Austin, were you playing with Jo Carol?

JT:
Oh, no, Jo Carol wasn't playing music back then. She was always writing, but she wasn't really writing songs, she was just writing. All the time: scribble, scribble, scribble. Write, write, write.

And then amazingly enough, all these years and years and years passed and all of a sudden, she became a smashing success.

AW:
(laughs) I had in mind that she'd been doing that all along.

JT:
With these wacky songs that she writes, you know. And they're brilliant. I mean, wacky, but brilliant.

AW:
Well who were you playing with and what was the scene then when you were back?

JT:
Back then—then I started playing in some, you know, blues rock bands. I had a band with Tiny McFarland, a guy named Don Lupo and we had our little blues power-rock trio, you know. We played the Vulcan Gas Company. Well, let's see now. First though—let me back up here. My first real gig in Austin was—you read that story there in the Redneck Rock book?

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AW:
Yeah, the Jan Reid book.

JT:
About Angela and how she came down here. And we started playing in these little blues joints on the east side. There was this famous old rock joint called the Vulcan Gas Company. You ever hear of that?

AW:
Yes.

JT:
And we played there a lot and then we played those little joints over on the east side. I played with her for a while. Then later on—you know, I was always doing a lot of different things back then. I wasn't really focused very much. Even though I was always playing, I wasn't really focusing on any one particular thing and really putting a lot of energy or time or thought into it. I'm just like, Hey, let's go play some music man! That kind of thing. So anyway, then I moved back out to San Francisco and while I was with these guys here playing the Vulcan, we used to open gigs for Johnny Winter. His bass player, a guy named Tommy Shannon who wound up being the base player all that time for Stevie Ray Vaughan and Uncle John Turner, the drummer. You know, they were like rock stars already. They had the cover of *Life* magazine at one time,

you know. That's a big thing. They had split with Johnny Winter and moved out there and I'd moved out there. We had a mutual friend, a bass player named Keith Ferguson. Did you ever know Keith?

AW:
No, but I've heard the name.

JT:
Well, he was with the original Thunderbirds, Fabulous Thunderbirds, all that time.

AW:
With Jimmy Vaughan.

JT:
Kim Wilson and Mike Buck, that's the original ones. Plus Keith is just a notorious bass player/rocker guy around town. A good player, too. But anyway, Keith was living out there, too. I ran into Keith one day and Keith said, "Hey, remember those guys from Johnny Winter's band, the bass player and the drummer?" I said, "Oh yeah, we used to open gigs with them." I kind of knew them, not really. You know, acquaintances. He said, "Well man, they've moved out here and they're starting a band. They've got the whole band together." They had Tommy and Uncle John and that keyboard player and a lead singer guy and they were all really good. And he said, "And they're looking for a guitar player. As a matter of fact, they're auditioning guitar players. It's what they're doing. So I'll line you up with 'em, where they're staying at. You should go over there and sit in with 'em and play with 'em and see what happens."
So I did, and he told them about me and all. He said at the time for me to come over and play. And by this time, I was getting pretty good. All ego aside. Not being egotistical here, but I was getting there. And he was real funny. I'll never forget, we got over and we played this first song in their living room. They had a big living room all set up with equipment all over the place and stuff. And the first song we ever played was that old Muddy Waters song, "Got My Mojo Working." You know rock—a blues/rock version of it. And I just played loud and fast and everything. And then we ended that first song and everything and the keyboard player, a guy named Mike Kindred turned around on his stool and went, (claps) "Damn! Where have you been?" So I was hired on the spot. And that was the first really—that was a whole new level of band for me.

AW:
What was the name of the band?

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JT:
Kracker Jack. Spelled with a K. K-r—yeah, Kracker Jack. Great band. Well, we stayed out there for about a year. Once again, that town was just—it was just inundated with musicians, you know. It was hard to get gigs. Or hard to make any money.

AW:
This was back in the Bay Area?

JT:
Yeah. And so we're like, well, you know, we'd probably do a lot better in Texas.

AW:
Was there a touring scene for bands like that, then Jesse? Or did you have to have a label and a record?

JT:
Yeah. No, not really not much of a touring scene that I know of, anyway. It was just pretty much local-type stuff—clubs. There were several clubs we could play at, but you couldn't make any money there. So we all lived together in one house. Of course, it was a big old house and everybody had their own room and stuff. Communal-type living kind of deal.

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AW:
That was part of the style too, wasn't it?

JT:
We just up and decided one day, boys, I think we can do a lot better back in Texas. Let's go home. So we all moved down here to Austin and were an instant success.

AW:
Still the same name?

JT:
Oh, yeah. And we became almost overnight the biggest, most popular band in Austin. And that lasted for a couple of years. That was a great band.

AW:
What happened? People move on to different things in the band?

JT:
Yeah, everything after a while—I don't know, everything just seems to, you know. You start wanting to do something different or this and that, I don't know. Plus, there always seemed to be girls involved. (both laugh)

AW:
That's true. Well, about what year would this have been when you were back in Austin playing with Kracker Jack?

JT:
Oh, that would've been about '78, '79. Yeah. About '78. From about '78 to '80 is when we did that. We kept that going for quite a while. We never put a record out, though and I'm so sad about that because that was a good band.

AW:
Well, now, by '78 hadn't the Ely Band been around?

JT:
Oh, yeah. No, no, no. I meant to say '68. I'm sorry.

AW:
I was going to say, gosh, I thought that was—'68 to '70.

JT:
I'm losing track.

AW:
That's good, okay. I was thinking, Boy, I missed a whole decade here.

JT:
No, this was '68 to '70.

AW:
Well, so what did you do after that?

JT:
Well, I did that for a while. I tell you, I just got fed up with the whole scene, you know. I don't know, I just needed—you know, do something different. And once again, I'd met another girl. (both laugh) There's always women involved behind the scenes. I moved back to Lubbock.

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AW:
So about 1970, you moved back?

JT:
Not that soon. More like about '71 or '72. Something like that. And then I just basically kind of hung out there in Lubbock and did a little bit of everything, really. Not much playing though.

AW:
Wasn't much place to play, was there?

JT:
Not really. But I mean, I never stopped playing. I never put the guitar down and just dropped it or anything. I still played, although I don't do that anymore as much. I still played every single day of my life, even if it was at the house for a couple hours. I just couldn't not do it, you know. And then in about '70—well, I met Stubbs—Stubb, you know, C.B. Stubblefield in about '73. He picked me up hitchhiking. You ever hear that story?

AW:
I've heard that story.

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JT:
Yeah, it's a true story. And I had—I lived over there by Mackenzie Park, where that hill is. And I had always walked by that place walking to town or hitchhiking to town or whatever. And I'd always walked by that little joint there on East Broadway. And a lot of times I'd walk by there and somebody would be going in or somebody would be coming out. It was all black folks then. But sometimes just as I'd be right there, or I could see in as I was walking, the door would open and I would look in there. There'd be this smoky, dark bar with the jukebox turned up real loud, blasting out B.B. King or something like that. God, I wanted to go in there so bad. But it was kind of a scary place. It was dark in there and there was a bunch mean-looking black dudes coming in and out. Even though it turns out they weren't mean at all, they were just mean-looking.
But so Stubb picked me up and we went down the hill and back up the hill and then he pulled in the parking lot there and he said, "Well, this is as far as I'm going here." I said okay, well thanks a lot. And I said, "You go in this place very much?" And Stubb, you know how he talked—he said, "Son, I owns this place." And I said, "You do? Golly, I've always wanted to go in there. I love blues." Stubb said to me, the very words were, "Well I'll tell you what, sir," he always called everybody sir. He said, "I got a beer and a barbeque sandwich that got your name on it. Come on in." So that was the start of, you know—I mean, the rest is history as far as that goes. But then in wasn't until like a couple of years later in about '75 that I was sitting over there one night. I would just go in there and hang out there with them guys and drink beer, eat barbeque,

listen to the jukebox, and I was just sitting there one night, kind of lost in thought, and I got to thinking, You know, this would be a great place to bring a little blues band in here and play some blues. So I talked to Stubb about it. And I'd never even told Stubb that I was a musician.

AW:
Really?

JT:
For some reason. It just never came up. And I asked him. I said, "Would it be okay you think if I came in here with some friends and we played some music? We could just set up on the corner over here." Stubb kind of looked at me suspiciously like, Well, what do you mean, music? Well, what kind of music? And I said, "Well, blues, like you've got on your jukebox there." And by this time we were real good friends. He liked me a lot. He said, "Well, yeah. Whatever you want to do, Jesse. My place, your place." And so then, strangely enough, later on that same week, I ran into Ely at the Main Street Saloon. I was telling Joe, I said, "You know, I've been hanging out at this little dive, barbeque dive over on the east side and I want to go in there and play some music, some blues. Would you be interested in coming over there and playing?" Joe's like, "Yeah, sure. Sounds like fun to me." And then John Reed was there—I got John and—can't remember who else I got. I think it was Gregg Wright on bass who wound up being the original bass player for the Ely band.

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AW:
So it was Joe and John Reed and Gregg and you?

JT:
Uh-huh. And then there was a drummer—what was this guy's name? His first name was Tom. And I can't remember what that guy's last name—well, so we went in there—this is a funny story. We went in there on a Sunday afternoon and we wanted to do an early kind of deal, you know and everything. Get started at four o'clock. Well all that week before we'd told all our friends that we're going over to play music in this little barbeque dive over here on the east side Sunday. Joe was telling some people and Gregg and John were telling some people and all. Everything. I got there that afternoon and the place was packed.

AW:
Really?

JT:
Just packed out. Full of white kids—well, people our age. We weren't exactly kids by then anymore. It was just packed. And they were all white. And Stubb, and his regular clientele and

his whole staff, the few people that worked there, the waitresses and Little Pete—remember Little Pete?

AW:
Yeah, I do.

JT:
They were all just kind of like standing back with this wild look in their eyes. Kind of like, what's going on here? Are we supposed to be doing this? It was almost like they were afraid that they were going to get in trouble for it or something. I don't know what they thought. They were just taken aback by the whole deal. Well anyway, we got to playing and boy, everybody just loved it. And Stubb's—the other clientele, the black folks, of course, they loved that blues stuff. And we played and played. Everybody had a great time. Come the end of the night, everything had cleared out and I'm standing there with Stubb over by the counter where the cash register was and everything. Stubb is standing there and he's got this wad of money, this stack of money about two inches high. He sold every single beer, every stick of barbeque, every drink, everything in the place, gone. And everything, and he's standing there with this wad of cash, just kind of like, incredulous, like, what just happened? And this is the classic Stubb. He looked at me and he said, "Jesse? You think you all could do this again next week?" (both laugh) And so we did, on and on and. That was the start of the Stubb's Bar-B-Q gig.

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AW:
Yeah and the Sunday jam and everything. Every bit of it.

JT:
Oh yeah. Boy, those were some fun, fun days. God, man, we'd go in there and play sometimes until four o'clock in the morning, you know. And cops would come and everything and Stubb would just run them out. They'd just say, "Forget it man, let 'em go, keeps them off the street anyway." (both laugh) Never got busted. And he was selling booze in there. He'd go out to the strip—he didn't have a distributor or anything, he'd go out to the strip and buy two, three bottles of whiskey and two, three bottles of gin and vodka and that was the bar. He didn't have any license for that.

AW:
Could you even get a license in Lubbock in those years to do liquor by the drink? Was that legal then? It may not have been.

JT:
I don't know. I remember for a long time where it wasn't; you had to have private membership. I can't remember if by then it wasn't already—

AW:
Yeah, I don't remember when that happened.

JT:
Let me get this back here.

AW:
You bet.

JT:
Would this be good to have. These little deals here are cool. Just a little portable recorder.

AW:
Yeah. Do you need to get another tape?

JT:
Yeah.

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AW:
I'll stop this just for a minute. (pause in recording) Now, the other thing is when you come on to that material, you don't need to worry too much about organizing, because we have people on staff that will go through and itemize everything and put it in order where it's easy to come by and you'll know exactly what there is.

JT:
I've got pictures and—itineraries, posters.

AW:
Oh man, that's great stuff. Just great stuff. Another thing is old recordings, if you have old recordings. We can stabilize the ones that are starting to deteriorate and then make a digital recording of it. And that'll keep it from disappearing, if you've got that kind of stuff.

JT:
Yeah. I just did a book with this girl. She's a poetress. She used my—some illustrations to—

AW:
Yeah, I noticed some of these paintings had your name on them. So you've been painting, too?

JT:

Yeah, but these are just—they're like black and white. Well, I'll show you. Let me pee again. You know what? I hate this [inaudible] I have to take this diuretic—(break in tape)

AW:
Again, if you don't mind—the problem, you know, and you know this, playing—if you don't mind, I'm going to rearrange things just a little bit, and get this a little closer to you. As you know, the problem with playing is you're always gone. There's always so much stuff going on in town—

JT:
I know. It's like—what I really like about—see, I just now got wore out on touring. I have toured so much. I mean, over and the years and years and years. I've been to Europe, you know, at least twenty-five times. All over the place. Been to Eastern Europe, been all through the Caribbean and parts of South America and Hawaii. Like I say, Australia. Over and over and over and it's like—it gets tired. And you know my health isn't so hot right now either.

AW:
Yeah. It's rough enough when your health is good.

JT:
Yeah. But drawing I can just sit here and draw all night long. Sometimes I won't get started until about midnight and I'll draw until the sun comes up. I get on a roll. I can't stop.

AW:
Speaking of touring, I remember one time I was in England touring. I was all by myself. I had this really—he was a nice guy, but he wasn't a very good agent, he was booking my gigs and taking me around. I was essentially lonesome. And you were playing over there at the same time. A couple of times we played in the same place and one time you left me a message: "Sorry I missed you," because I'd left a message for you. Do you remember doing that?

JT:
Yeah.

AW:
It was in London. It made me feel so good, to know that there was somebody—even though I hadn't come across you—that there was somebody else I knew that was over there, traveling around, eating the same bad food.

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JT:
In England. You get over to Italy and France—boy that's good food.

AW:
Yeah, I never made it that far.

JT:
I love Italy. Everybody asks me, Well, what's your favorite country? And I would always have to say Italy. I just love Italy.

AW:
Is it just the food or is there more to it?

JT:
Oh, the people, the lifestyle, their culture. You talk about a fun-loving bunch of people, the Italians, [in Italian accent] they just don't really care about too much. They're like—I'd say, What time should we start playing? "Oh, you know, I don't know, whenever you want to start, you start and then you play." "Well, how long should we play for?" "Oh, I don't know, you play however long you want to play." Inevitably they'd always say, "Now, we go eat." (AW laughs) Boy, would they ever eat.

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AW:
Do the Italians like the blues that you play?

JT:
Oh, yeah, absolutely. Yeah, one of my albums is under the Italian label Appaloosa. Yeah.

AW:
Well, so how did you get started doing that sort of touring? Was it—

JT:
With the Ely Band, actually. When we got that first recording contract with MCA Records. I believe that was 1976. We did that first album, that black and white cover that Milosevich did? Just the title of the album is *Joe Ely*. Then we toured.

AW:
So is it safe to say the band kind of began after you started the Stubb's jams?

JT:
The band sort of evolved from that, yeah. It was kind of like that's really where the band evolved from, and then once Joe had gotten a gig and had some guys together to play, needed a guitar player—I'll never forget, it was over at that—used to be a bowling alley there on North University, the Longhorn Ballroom, or something like that. Do you remember that?

AW:
Yeah.

JT:
Yeah. Opening up for Earl Scruggs. Yeah. Big show. Great show. Ely called me up and needed a guitar player, so we went and worked up some songs and that was the first gig I played with him and then I just stuck with him and it became a band. Then we wound up—well, we're good friends with all those guys in Lost Gonzo Band. You know Bob Livingston?

AW:
Yeah.

JT:
You know, he's from Lubbock.

AW:
Yeah, he graduated from Lubbock High the same year I graduated from Monterey. And Gary P.

JT:
Yeah, Gary P. And they—

AW:
John Inmon, is that right?

JT:
John Inmon was in there too. And we had gotten to know Jerry Jeff—that was back in Jerry Jeff's really wild, raunchy, out-of-control days. He was scary. (phone rings) That guy scared me. Oh come on.

(Answering Machine):
Hi guys. It's me. Jesse, I'm sorry I missed your book deal on Saturday.

JT:
Now we've got to listen to it.

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(Answering Machine):
I got the message on the machine on Saturday, and you were talking about tomorrow or something and that was Sunday. And Sunday I had a gig out in Vernon. I couldn't make [inaudible] Friday, but the event was on Saturday, which really bummed me out because I would have loved to come along [inaudible] and something to do. Anyway, I'm really glad you're out of the hospital. At least up and moving about and doing stuff. That's really good news. So when you get a chance give me a call. Alright, talk to you soon man, bye bye.

JT:
He's a great player. Steve Power is his name. I doubt you would know him.

AW:
I don't. Well, who was all in the first incarnation of the Ely Band?

JT:
Well, the first recording band—there were some other people in it before, but back—what's widely accepted as the first Ely, real Ely Band that did the album, that got the recording contract and all—oh what I was going to say was, we got that contract because Jerry Jeff and them were on MCA, and they had taken a tape of us to—went down to MCA Records and MCA sent out a—flew a guy out there to Lubbock to hear us at a gig at the Cotton Club back when we were totally packing the Cotton Club. You know that place held seven, eight hundred people. He was thoroughly impressed. Kind of like your fairy tale deal. It hardly ever happens, but the record label got a copy of the tape. They sent a representative out, heard the band, loved the band, signed us up. It's hardly ever that easy.

AW:
Yeah, that is sort of fairy tale.

JT:
But it was Joe of course and Lloyd Maines and Gregg Wright, Steve Keeton on drums and me. It was just the five of us. And about—I believe it was about the second album then we got Ponty Bone in there. And then he became—so then it was a six-piece band. And that's how I really got started touring all over Europe and everywhere was with Ely. We were really popular over there. And I made a lot of friends over there and all. Later on, years later, I started doing—I'd do a little solo project of my own and it would get put out over there. And then I'd get asked to do Jesse Taylor tours over there. And I would go over there and put a band together in London. So I'd stay in London all the time, because I knew tons of musicians by then.

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AW:
So who were some of the musicians that stick out in your mind that you [inaudible, speaking at same time]?

JT:
Did you ever meet Slim? The big fat accordion player?

AW:
Yeah.

JT:
Everybody knows him. Slim. That's all he goes by is Slim. Him and then of course the record label people over there helped me. They'd find a bass player. Usually I'd always have Slim in there because he played real good, filling—fill you know. Because I never had really, really liked doing the power trio deal. I always liked more instruments in a band to fill it up. I mean, I can do that and have done it many, many times, but I prefer having a real band as opposed to just the three.

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AW:
And why? What do you like better about it?

JT:
I like the fact that I can relax more into a song and fall back into the song rather than have to concentrate about keeping something going at all times because I'm the only lead instrument in the band.

AW:
In the trio, does that limit what you can do also as a lead player?

JT:
The trio stuff?

AW:
More than what you would do in a fuller—

JT:
Well, it—I wouldn't use the word limit because you just play a lot. But what it does is it creates a situation where you don't have the—you can't get real tasty like you want to, you know. You can't just do real tasty little licks that you throw in there because you've got to keep going all the time in a trio. Because if you don't, it's just going to be bass and drums playing. And I'd like the

deal where I can just throw in like fills, guitar fills. And somebody else is holding down the rhythm. I could relax more into the song that way. So I'd always have at least a four-piece over there. I did an album with some guys over there—Terry Clarke and Michael Messer. You ever heard of them? Terry Clarke?

AW:
Clark with an *e* at the end of it? C-l-a-r-k-e?

JT:
I think so. He comes over here a lot. He's a great singer-songwriter. We did an album called *Rhythm Oil*.

AW:
Rhythm Oil?

JT:
Um-hm. I got copies of all that stuff around here somewhere. I'll dig it all up. So we can get some of this clutter out of here, then I can start going through my stuff. Yeah, and who would you ever guess wrote the liner notes? Johnny Cash.

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AW:
Really? That's an honor right there.

JT:
Sure is.

AW:
That's a real honor.

JT:
Yeah, Johnny Cash wrote the liner notes.

AW:
So these European tours you would put together as the opportunities arose and not always with the same band, but sort of the same—?

JT:
Right. Matter of fact, it would generally be different people, you know. Simply because people I'd used before would be off doing other things. Hard to nail everybody. But that was—there's good players over there. Some of them guys are great players.

AW:
I know the few times I was over there in the UK I've run into—in the oddest places—people that never got out of their hometown who were just brilliant players. Particularly up in Scotland, like Glasgow and places like that. I played one night I remember, there was this band that was just terrific. Had a fiddle player that was really great. Of course he knew I was from the States and from Texas. As soon as he found out I knew Richard Bowden and a few other fiddle players, you know—and he knew all those players. But the guy never left really the slums of Glasgow. Just a terrific player. You're right, I would run into people like that in my personal experience.

JT:
You know the name of the place in Glasgow I used to play?

AW:
No, the place I was playing that night was a dance, a benefit kind of thing. In fact, the downtown part of Glasgow by the time I played there, they'd had sort of a revitalization. It was kind of pleasant right there on the river. But we were playing in a really bad part of town. You had to hire someone to watch your car while you were playing. I don't know if I'd want to go back and play that spot. Well, so the Ely Band went on for a fair number of years.

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JT:
Oh, yeah. That first run was—for me—well, for that band was about eight years. Of course, we had some personnel changes. Our drummer died, or got killed or something. They never did really—Robert Marquam. That one went on for about eight years and then I once again got fed up with the scene here in Austin and this and that. Went back to Lubbock and hung out there for a while, lived with yet another girl. (both laugh) Then a couple of years later I got back in the Ely Band. Went on a for a few more years there and then I don't know, that one kind of drifted apart. A couple of years later, I was back in there. (both laugh)

AW:
That's probably the longest—the most you've played with any one particular group isn't it, with Joe.

JT:
Definitely. Over twenty years if you put it all together. Well over twenty years. Did you ever hear of that album we did, the *Live at Antone's*?

AW:
Yeah.

JT:
Boy that was a good album. That album rocked.

AW:
Yeah and I think live records are hard to do, to really capture the spirit of the thing and still be a good record. Yeah, no, that's a great record.

JT:
No overdubs. You know how a lot of guys will take the record and then take it back into the studio and they will have the separation—the microphone separation and stuff?

AW:
So they can fix their mistakes?

JT:
Yeah—be able to—you can go back in there, and even though this is a live album, you can re-do your lead. There was none of that on this album. That album is straight just like it happened. Two nights they took and they took the best of them. The best of them from one night and the best of them from the other. But that's a good album. That may be my favorite one that we did.

AW:
What is your favorite album of yours, period? Do you have a favorite?

JT:
That I recorded and played in? I kind of like that one.

AW:
The *Live at*—?

JT:
No the John—[*South Side Guitars* with John Reed] Really, that was to me more meaningful because I really sunk back down into my roots on that album. John and I both have very similar musical tastes and backgrounds and stuff. Because he played all the Venture stuff and everything, too when he was a kid. And you know, that was sort of—it's just something that I always wanted to do. That could be my favorite one right there.

AW:
Good. I can't wait to listen to it.

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JT:
Got Glen Fukanaga on bass, you know Glen? George Rains on drums. You know George?

AW:
I know who he is, I don't—

JT:
He plays with Jimmy Vaughan. Played with that old band, Mother Earth—Tracy Nelson. Great drummer. Good guy.

AW:
Well, I can't wait to hear it.

JT:
Well, it's all guitars. Not a vocal. Thank God. Between me and John, boy—

AW:
(laughs) I've heard you sing before. Didn't hurt my ears. I haven't heard you sing often. Well what—I know this is the kind of question you hate to get—

JT:
What's my favorite color?

AW:
No, (both laugh) your favorite food. All the fans want to know. What is it that drives your music? Is there a thing that you can point to?

JT:
The closest thing I could come to an answer about on that one would be the need to be creative. I just have some kind of built-in need or desire—well, more a need than a desire to create, to do something, you know. Whether it's with music or whether it's with art or something. But I mean, I never could be a regular worker guy, a 9:00 to 5:00 average John Doe guy, you know that had an average job. That stuff just always—you know, I mean, I've had jobs before, out of necessity. (both laugh). Because the rent's four months behind and I'm fixing to get kicked out or something like that. But I think it's the—I just have this creative energy that has to come out. Now, where that came from I don't really know. But it's just always been there. And plus, also, the love of music. Because I was one of those guys—one of those kids that would hear that stuff and you know the hair on the back of my neck and my arms would stand up. One of those deals like the Hawaiians called it Chicken Skin music.

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AW:
Yeah, in fact Ry Cooder a great album by that name. Is that what draws you to people like Joe and Butch and Jimmie and all those people who also do so many other things besides play?

JT:
Yeah. Well, that plus the fact that you always—you know, as you yourself get better, you know, better at what you're doing and all that then you're drawn to play with other people that are on more or less on your level. Because you know, you want to play with the best people you can. Because that's what makes you better. That's where they bring it out in you. It's the inspiration, the inspiration there.

AW:
What is left for you to do with your music? Are there things that you haven't done yet?

JT:
Oh God, yeah, a ton. Right now I'm really wanting to get back into—get somebody to find to one of these labels and put together—I'll find somebody when I'm ready. Not quite ready right now doing so much other stuff and all. Getting these books knocked out and all that, but go back in the studio and just record stuff that I want to record. And I don't care what it is.

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AW:
And that would be like—for example, like a Ventures song?

JT:
It could be a Ventures song and then it could be an old blues song. Or it could be a country song, you know, or something, but just stuff that I want to do. The next project I've really got in mind here is the—I'm going to take these albums that I already have out, because some of them are out of print now and take them to, you know Jerry Tubbs?

AW:
Yeah.

JT:
The genius guy, you know. How many songs can you get on a CD now? Twenty?

AW:
Well a regular CD has seventy-four minutes. But people are starting to do DVDs, which are—they're lots bigger.

JT:
I might do a double. But I want to take the best—because see, I own the rights to all that.

AW:
Well, that's good.

JT:
And I want to get the best of the best of all that and compile it all into one disc and just put it out as the best of Jesse Taylor. That's something I really want to do. And Jerry said that digitally, he can take that stuff and make it sound like it comes right off the master tape, as long as you've got a brand-new, untouched CD. And I've got some that have never even been played and haven't had the plastic off of 'em. Jerry said that'd be way better to take them off that, and Jerry said he can make it sound like—he can probably make it sound better. (AW laughs) He's brilliant.

AW:
We all need somebody like that. Well are there some experiences in playing or performing that stand out for better or worse or are worth putting down? Stories about playing gigs, various things that are of interest to you?

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JT:
Well, there are things like touring with The Clash was, you know—those gigs. I'll never forget this one gig we played. It was at the Palladium in Hollywood at their big—sold out. The Clash were peeking out and that's your serious punk-rock crowd. Ask Lloyd about this story. I never seen Lloyd get mad—maybe two or three times in my life. Mr. cool, calm and collected, you know. And we're playing this gig, and these guys—it seemed to me that a lot of these kids back then were not just really—it was like part of their scene was that it was required for them to be obnoxious assholes. You get up there and throw shit at the band and spit all over the band. Big old hockers, you know, all over you. And we were playing and these kids were like—they were taking hot dogs, throwing hot dogs, taking Coke, those paper cups with Coca-Cola and ice and making them into like a baseball. And when one of those things hit you, it hurt. As a matter of fact, Gregg Wright, our bass player, took a beer bottle right in the forehead. He was so pissed off he just let the blood run. He didn't even bother to wipe it off or nothing. His whole face was covered in blood. And I'll never forget looking over at Mr. cool, calm and collected Lloyd Maines, and there's this big old hocker of goo and it's literally hanging down off the end of his nose, going [makes noise]. And Lloyd, boy, you talk about disgusted, man. We actually, for some reason flew back out of there that night and boy, it's like nobody could wait to get on the plane and get out of there, man. There's so many—and then there's some really great ones, too, like playing in St. Louis and over to the side of the stage, there's some kind of commotion over there and everything and the guys, they just—somebody wants to come up and sit in with you

all. What? You just don't just say you want to come sit in with the band, jump up there and everything. I look up and here comes old Chuck Berry, bounding up the steps.

AW:
So Chuck Berry sat in with the Ely Band?

JT:
Oh, yeah, played his ass off.

AW:
Was that fun?

JT:
Yeah, it was. And there's just—I don't know. Boy, I'd have to think on that, there's so many. Playing with Bruce Springsteen, that was a big thrill.

AW:
Was he with his band, the E Street Band?

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JT:
They were over there fixing to start a tour, but he was playing with us, with the Ely Band.

AW:
Really? Oh, that's great.

JT:
Yeah, that's why I want to find that damn package and everything, because that photograph I have—he was standing next to me in this picture, and we've both got our guitar and we're looking at each other, and our faces are about this far apart and we're both kind of bent at the knee, face to face. Me and Bruce Springsteen, rocking out.

AW:
That's cool. Where was that?

JT:
In Belfast, Ireland. They were starting their UK tour over there. But yeah, been some good ones and bad ones. (AW laughs) I guess some of them were playing at the Cotton Club back in the old days. I mean, the biggest brawl you ever seen in your life would break out and there would be fifty guys fighting all at one time. Bottles crashing, tables going down and women screaming and everything and the band just kept on playing. I saw that a number of times.

AW:
Now this was after—Tommy didn't own the Cotton Club then, did he? He had already sold it?

JT:
No, but when I very first started playing there, he owned it, and going here, he owned it. He would let us come in and he had a special spot for his hippie friends, because them cowboys didn't like us at all. They all wanted to start fights. I don't know if you remember, but there was this big old bouncer guy there named Bear. You can imagine the guy. He looked like a bear and he was about as big as one, a big old thick black bear. Bear ran—he was mad. Tommy would just instruct Bear to keep a close eye on us, make sure none of them cowboys got over there and started beating us up. We had our own little spot, right in the corner on the right side of the stage, up front there we'd all sit and hide. (both laugh) Yeah, those Cotton Club days, I tell you, that was some of the most fun because that was before we ever, you know, got famous if that's what you want to call it, or got you know, record deals and all that stuff. And that was just nothing but pure music. I mean, real, pure, unadulterated for-real music.

AW:
What made the difference in getting a record deal and that changed it from for-real music to—

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JT:
Well mainly, the gigs. Like all of a sudden, next thing I know we're going up to New York City and playing up and down the East Coast and all over the United States, back and forth, crisscrossing the United States. Then we started in on Europe.

AW:
Did they expect something different out of you at these different gigs that didn't allow you to play the same kind of music or feel the same about it that you did at the Cotton Club? Was it more routinized?

JT:
Oh—I don't think so. Not really. I mean, although I will say there were—back then, there were a few times, probably more than a few times that we'd get up and we'd get booked into these, you know, country honky-tonk places that were kind of staples on the country circuit. And see, we got labeled—they didn't know how to label us. Were we a rock and roll band?

AW:
Yeah, and so those country people were a little bit surprised, weren't they?

JT:
Well and a lot of times, we would get, you know, some catcalls and hoots and hollers from the audience. "Hey! Play some country!"

AW:
So what did you all do? What did Joe do when you got that?

JT:
We just kept going. We didn't pay any attention.

AW:
And keep laying the things that you played?

JT:
Yeah. Well, because, you know, the ones that were yelling like that, there were that many more that were really enjoying it. But there was some of that, yeah. But Europe, there was never anything like that over there. They just—except on some of those Clash tours.

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AW:
(laughs)Well, were there parts about those tours with The Clash that you enjoyed?

JT:
Oh, yeah.

AW:
So it wasn't all—

JT:
No, no.

AW:
Punk rockers.

JT:
Not every gig.

AW:
Were the audiences different for The Clash in Europe than they were in the US?

JT:
Yeah. But there were some good ones over here, too. Like, we played that Monterey Pop Festival, the new one. Not you know, the original one that everybody played. That newer one—played that with The Clash and that was great, a great audience. I don't know. We caught a lot of hell on those tours. Those kids—like I say, for one thing, a lot of them, all they wanted to hear was actual real screaming, pandemonium, punk-rock music and everything, you know. The other thing was a lot of 'em, like I was kind of saying a while ago, I got the impression that they had a role to play. And their role was to be a punk rocker and throw shit at the band.

AW:
Did the punk bands sort of encourage that to a point?

JT:
Oh yeah, uh-huh. Yeah. That was part of the punk revelation, was, We're doing things different. We're doing things our way.

AW:
So why did The Clash, or why did The Clash management, why did those folks have you playing? Because you're much more melodic.

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JT:
Because Joe Strummer and Mick Jones, the two front men—

AW:
Mick Jones used to be in the Rolling Stones for a while?

JT:
No.

AW:
Different—no, that—

JT:
That was Brian Jones.

AW:
Brian Jones and Mick Taylor.

JT:
No. Mick, he was the guitar player and did some vocals, too. But you know, Joe Strummer was more or less the front, head guy in The Clash and everything. They loved the Ely Band. That's how that came about. They just loved the Ely Band. They used to go—they'd do record store deals here in the United States and everything. They would—they'd be playing Clash music in there and everything and Joe Strummer would come up to me and say, [does English accent] "Hey, turn that fucking shit off! Do you have any Joe Ely?" And he'd make them put on Joe Ely. Andy, this is Kim.

Kim:
Hi.

AW:
Andy Wilkinson.

Kim:
Nice to meet you.

AW:
Hope you don't mind me over here invading your household.

Kim:
Oh no, not at all. Welcome. Sorry it's a mess.

AW:
Oh, don't worry.

JT:
Kim's a schoolteacher.

AW:
Oh, good. That's interesting. What age?

Kim:
Special education, kindergarten through second.

AW:
That's a tough job. Special Ed. is a tough job.

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Kim:
Been doing it for a long time.

AW:
Good for you. Let me ask you one more question and we'll put this aside for a little bit. Were you with Joe when the band opened for the Stones?

JT:
Oh, yeah.

AW:
What was that like? That's like mega—that's about as high up the ladder as you can get with rock and roll.

JT:
That's probably the biggest concert I ever did. We'd done some big shows before. Like touring with the Dixie Chicks, God almighty, I couldn't believe those shows. We'd go play Madison Square Garden, the Bulls arena in Chicago, the LA Forum. I got the itinerary, and it'd have the date and the venue and everything, and then all the way down the line in the last column, sold out, sold out, sold out. But I'd say the biggest show probably ever was the Rolling Stones. It was kind of scary. It was intimidating. I was doing all right, actually, until I went out at one point. I was hanging around backstage and they had these big curtains, you know, covering the equipment and stuff and I went out and looked out that curtain. I shouldn't have done that. I looked out there, and it was Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Arizona. And it was like, you couldn't even see individual people all the way in the back of it. All you could see was just waves of movement. And you knew it was human beings. But it was great. I got to meet all the Rolling Stones.

AW:
And what was it like, working with them?

JT:
Oh, they're wonderful. Great, very nice guys. Real down-to-earth. You wouldn't believe it. They both played—I mean Ronnie Wood and Keith Richards played that black guitar up there because Newman had made it. Went back and Newman took me back there to their little old green cinder block dressing room. Had to go through this maze to get to 'em, you know. But everybody knew Newman, because see, he'd been head guitar roadie for four, five years with the Rolling Stones.

AW:
Oh, I didn't know that.

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JT:
And they all played. They all had a bunch of Newman guitars. They loved his guitars. We all went back there—or I went back there, separately, really. Met everybody and they were real nice. But a funny story about that is Keith Richards—you know Newman was introducing me to everybody, introducing us and all. This is Charlie Watts here, this is Ronnie Wood here, Bill Wyman was still playing with them, Mick and all that. But anyway, he introduced me to Keith Richards. I don't know if you've ever seen—you ever seen Keith Richards up close?

AW:
No.

JT:
It's a scary sight. (laughs)

AW:
I've seen him on film, and the last time I saw him in person he looked a lot younger, in the seventies. He looked a lot younger.

JT:
It's a scary thing. His arms and legs are about that big around. He looks like walking death.

AW:
You know what also amazed me in looking at—my kids for Christmas last year got me a five-DVD set of the Stones of their last big tour a couple years ago. So there are lots of close-ups of his fingers and he looks like he has arthritis. His fingers are all real—the knuckles are real knobby, yet he's still playing. Playing well.

JT:
He's barely got any flesh on his body, for one thing.

AW:
It's just bone.

JT:
And white, I mean the palest, whitest skin you ever seen. And his teeth are brown. The guy must be worth a billion dollars and he won't go have his teeth fixed. Old brown stained teeth. And he grins at you like this and he looks like Satan himself. Newman introduced me to Keith and he shook hands with me like this. (AW laughs) Jesse Taylor, guitar player for the Joe Ely Band. Keith said to me, "Oh, yes. *Musta Notta Gotta Lotta*," which was our latest album. And I'm just—wow. Keith Richards has been listening to me play guitar. John Reed met him up in a bar

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up in New York City. John would play with Doug Sahm. Doug and Keith came out to see Doug and John has the same birthday, and they were introduced. John says, he said, "You know, we share the same birthday and everything." And Keith said, "Oh, you're a lucky man." (AW laughs) I need to get something—

AW:
Okay, let's turn this off. I warned you, I rode you pretty hard here.

End of Interview.

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