Interviewee: John Lomax III

Interviewer: Norie Guthrie

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Interview Transcript

Norie Guthrie: My name is Norie Guthrie from the Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, at Rice University. I am interviewing John Lomax III. Today is November 10, 2017. This is part of the Houston Folk Music Archive oral history project. Can you tell me about your early life?

John Lomax III: About which life?

Norie Guthrie: Your early life.

John Lomax III: Early life. Um, was born in New York during the war and lived there a little while, then in California a little while, before the family bought a house in West University in, I believe, 1945 or 6, when I was 1 or 2 years old. So, it was on Vanderbilt Street between, um, Holcombe and, uh, or Bellaire Boulevard and University. And, I went to school at West University Elementary. West University then was a post-war community of small one and two and maybe three-bedroom houses but nothing like it is today. My dad had bought a double lot rather than a single, so it was a hundred by two hundred feet lot, so we had a big side yard which was used, our house sort of became the playground for the neighborhood kids. My next-door neighbor was born about 2 weeks, uh, different from me, so we grew up, Jack Thomas, uh, he was the youngest of four boys, we were close buddies throughout until high school when he went Bellaire and I went to Lamar. But, uh, we all would walk to school, uh, to West University Elementary. And then, when I got to be 18 in, uh, 1962, um, no, wait a minute, yeah, 62, um, no, when I got to high school age, which would have been ‘58, ‘59, we were in an area where we had three options. You, uh, Lamar, Bellaire, or San Jacinto, San Jacinto being the high school that needed students the most, so they would take students from almost anywhere. But, our neighborhood was in an optional Lamar, Bellaire area, so my neighbor, next-door neighbor was Jack, was going to Bellaire, and I wanted to go there because his brother had been a huge football star there, and we had gone to games and so, I wanted to go there, but my parents said that it was too new a high school, and it was a bit further away, so I wound up going to Lamar and graduated in 1962, um, National Merit, um, Scholar and made straight A’s one semester. I think I got out I was, uh, 140 out of 600 or so academically and didn't really have, uh, any great interest in going to college anywhere but University of Texas where our family had a long and illustrious history going back to around the turn of the early 20th century. So, um, I did, I believe, I was sort of faintly, vaguely interested in Dart, in Dartmouth for some reason and Duke, but I'm not sure I
could have gotten in in either of them, and I knew I couldn't get into Rice. Uh, I just, Rice at the
time was a lot smaller and took a lot fewer students. It was free then. There was no tuition. But, I
couldn't quite, uh, make the grade there, so I went off to University of Texas in the fall of 1962.
And, during the early years, uh, from the time I was 9 until I was about 17, I played organized
baseball and was a pitcher and third baseman and one, uh, selection to All Star Teams five of
those years and went off when I was 15, our team went all the way to the world series for Colt
League baseball for 15 and 16-year-olds which was held in Riverside, California, and we wound
up finishing third or fourth. It was a double elimination tournament and, unfortunately, I lost the
final game 2 to 1 to Tampa, Florida. As the losing pitcher, I had gotten my cleat stuck when I
was making a pitch, and it wound up being a wild pitch, and the winning run came in, and I was,
of course, mortified. Um, the one thing I do remember from that series was that I faced Rudy
[Tony] La Russa three times, who went on to a fabulous career as a ballplayer and an even more
fabulous career as a manager, and I, he got one hit off me and popped out once, and I struck him
out once, so I can forever say I struck out Rudy La Russa, a Hall of Fame baseball coach. I kept
playing on, uh, the following year, but I had an arm injury that really sort of slowed my
effectiveness down, and I never really regained, uh, the edge that I had developed early on. And,
each year you grow up, it gets harder and harder because they're, they're more players and, uh, I
mean, there are more players sort of in fewer leagues, and I didn't have, uh, I wasn't really strong,
or I wasn't really fast, and I wasn't really a good hitter, so when it came time to pitch, I was still
pretty good but not good enough. And, by the time I got to college, I realized that it, that wasn't
going to happen. I wasn't gonna be a huge major league star and, uh, that was pretty, uh,
disillusioning 'cause that was all I had thought I wanted to do for, uh, 10 years. But, I went to the
University of Texas, and they had a huge program there, and an old fella named Bibb Falk was
the coach, and I wasn't scouted or anything. I was, went out a couple of times and saw that I was
gonna have to fight just to make the team as a scrub and just gave up and that was kind of the
last, uh, hoorah for me in a baseball career.

Norie Guthrie: Um, what were your parents like?

John Lomax III: Um, my dad was, did a number of different jobs. He had been in the Navy
during the war. Uh, he was, he had enlisted not too long after Pearl Harbor, but at the time, he
was 34, I believe, and they felt like he was too old to go overseas, but he had, uh, he wound up
getting a job, well, his job with the Navy was in physical training. He was, uh, he had built
himself up from kind of a skinny weak child who had had some illness problems, but he built
himself up into a pretty strapping fellow, and he did a lot of sports, particularly, uh, he did a bit
of long-distance swimming in the Gulf. They had some competitions back then. And, uh, he
played handball a lot, and at the YMCA, but he tried several jobs, one of which was importing
flagstone and other kinds of decorative stone. He ran a bowling alley for a while. And then, uh,
he got a stake, I believe, from his great uncle, J.A. Brown, and, at one point, met up with a fellow
named Earl Gilbert, and Earl Gilbert was a builder who had had, uh, one of his developments
went south on him, and he had lost his ability to do much financially, so my father stepped in,
and he became the money man, so to speak, not putting the money up but getting it and taking
care of it and being the dollar person while Earl Gilbert was the builder. And, they went on to
develop four or five different subdivisions in Houston. The last, uh, several were out on the north
side, one of them was called Southbrook, which we found highly entertaining, it was south of
little other than the Intercontinental Airport out there. Uh, it was way passed even Aldine, I
think. The development's still there. They, what they, they had a wonderful, uh, modus operandi, and it was also a wonderful time to be a builder in Houston because the city was growing so much. This would have been, uh, mid-50s into the ‘60s. And, they would build these two and three-bedroom houses and then rent them out 5 years, depreciate them off, and then sell them and, of course, during that 5 years, the value of the house would have gone up, so they not only reaped appreciation on the sale price, but they were able to recover, recoup a lot of costs through depreciation, and then they were collecting rents for the first 4 or 5 years. And, he did that the rest of his life, that was his primary means of, uh, making a living. My mother had a do, a degree from college and, when they met, was a traveling saleswoman for Servel Gas Company which was highly unusual for a woman in the 1930s when she graduated college. And, they met on a train, I believe, during, uh, one of his, um, I'm not sure of the circumstances, they met on a train and, uh, struck up a conversation and that led to eventual marriage and so on. And, when I came along, and my brother, my mother gave up being a working person and became a full-time housewife and mother and did not ever have a job, so to speak, the rest of her life, but she did a huge amount of volunteer work and was always running off to the church for one thing or another or going to see people in the hospital or taking care of various people in the neighborhood and just was one of these completely other directed kind of people that was always doing something. Uh, she was sort of the epitome of the idle hands are the devil's playthings because she was never idle. And, uh, our house, like I mentioned, became the playground. There were a number of boys in the general age group that I was that we'd play in our side yard because we had a side yard big enough to have a little baseball field, until we outgrew that, and we had, it was big enough for a football field and, at one point, my dad had even gotten some old, um, food cans and built a little tiny miniature golf course in the side yard with these cans for the holes and some dirt, patted, patted down dirt for the greens, and he was a bit of golfer himself, but I never, uh, in, I never got, uh, very far with golf. And, uh, he was also a baseball coach for my Little League team for a couple years and then, uh, which I played at West University Little League. I was in, I believe, it started in 1954 or 5, and I was in one of the very first classes, so to speak, of Little League. And, uh, the fields were out at West University Elementary, which they still are, although the, they've moved around a little bit, but we played games there and, uh, we got to the, uh, I got on the all-star team at 12, but we lost to River Oaks in the first game and, um, then I went on to Pony League and on to Colt, Colt League, which I had mentioned. Um, my dad started the folklore society in 1951, I believe. I could be, uh, off by a year or so, but he and Ed Badeaux who, uh, was a wonderful banjo player and, uh, musician, very trained, very skilled musician, uh, and Howard Porper and Jim Rose and Howard Belicoff and I believe there were some other folks involved in the very beginning. And in the very beginning, the meetings were at the house, and the meetings would consist of however many people turned up. Um, my dad was the treasurer, and he would give a short report of how much we had in the bank and whose dues might be due and, uh, that would take all of 2 minutes, and then it would be time to start singing. And they would, it was, um, I guess called a hootenanny then, and it became a pass the guitar sort of thing, and then it became, um, a guitar pull. When I got to Nashville later, they called that a guitar pull, and then it eventually developed into what's known as writers' nights and those have caught on all over the country and probably the world. But this was the first, my first encounter with it, and it was a very, very democratic method in which everyone who came got a chance to sing. That was that, didn't matter if you were dreadful or a pro, you'd do your song and then the next person would do theirs, and they would go around in a circle until, I guess, they decided it was time to go home. So, these went on at the house, and the folk society gradually
grew because this was in the very dawn of what became known as the folk boom, or as Steve Earle calls it the great folk scare, which, um, basically meant there was a lot of interest in folk music and a lot of commercialization of folk songs and popular artists performing them that were making very good money. Of course, uh, Kingston Trio and a whole bunch of other artists, Peter, Paul and Mary and others of that general time frame and, excuse me, um, that would be playing mainly folk songs. Uh, although they would find contemporary songs or in some cases write a few, but, uh, for the most part they were scouring and finding songs and having songs, songs pitched to them and all. So that was starting to really become a national, um, trend, and the folk society, I believe, the last meeting at the house was a very successful one in many senses; however, when my mother went to get the paper the following morning, one of our guests had had too much to drink and gone to sleep in the flowerbed, and she was mortified that the neighbors would be chatting away about what a horrible thing this was. So, the folk society moved, I believe to Hermann Park next to the pavilion out in the park, and we had some other gatherings at a park off of Braeswood somewhere over in Meyerland, I guess it's called. This was still in the early to mid '50s, and I would go along just because they, um, my brother and I, they didn't, ya know, wanna get a babysitter, I guess, or whatever so like we'd just bring, people would bring the kids and once we got out of the house and into the parks, people would bring their dogs and food and it would turn into sort of a little party. And, um, then it sort of kept growing, and so then the next step was they moved into the Jewish Community Center and started doing concerts there, rather than actual folk meetings. The meetings were still held at various places, but they were able to attract enough people to where they could put in, um, a good number of people into the Jewish Community Center. And, and then later, the folk boom continued booming and my dad became friends with Mance Lipscomb and I think first Lightnin' Hopkins, whom he later went on to manage for 10 years and then Mance Lipscomb. And so they would have shows headlined by Mance or Lightnin' and fill it up with folk society members and eventually reached the point where they could rent out Cullen Auditorium at the University of Houston and perform before several thousand people. So, in one of the shows, I believe, they had brought in Pete Seeger who had been, uh, known to the family, of course, through my grandfather and uncle. So, he came and played at, I believe, Cullen Auditorium and they had, ya know, 1,500 or 2,000 people come, turn out for that. So, the folk thing just kept growing. My dad began managing Lightnin' and eventually became the only white person that Lightnin' ever trusted. Lightnin' lived over on West Gray and he had no phone, so any promotors or anyone tryin' to book him or get in touch with him to make a record or anything else literally had to go find him. And he didn't sit around the apartment much. He would roam around in the, uh, neighborhood, and my dad would try to find him and would eventually learn the various grocery stores and backroom dice games and bars and other places where Lightnin' would go to hang out and carouse with his friends. And my dad would then, uh, tell him about whatever booking had come to him, and then, uh, arrange for Lightnin' to either go or go with him, and at some point, my dad went with him for, uh, to function sort of as the opening act and the M, the MC and also to collect the money, make sure all that was right and to bring the money home to Lightnin's common-law wife, Antoinette. Uh, otherwise Lightnin' might not have returned with all the money or much of the money. He would get in a dice game or buy a lotta whiskey or something. Actually, he drank cherry brandy, I believe which I'm convinced he drank because hardly anyone else would want any cherry brandy. So he pretty much would have the bottle to himself, and, uh, they did one memorable trip out west to the Ashgrove and to the, I believe it was the Berkeley Folk Festival. It may have been called something else, but it was in Berkeley, or in the campus of
the University of California, and then they went down and did the Ashgrove and had to fly there which, uh, Lightnin' had, had very little, if any, flying experience and was not, uh, happy about that, but there wasn't any way to drive and, out there and drive back 'cause my dad didn't, my dad was doing this on the side, so to speak. So, um, he didn't really have enough time to spend 3 days driving out and 3 days driving back. So, they flew out and Lightnin' had, uh, warmed up to ease his nerves, so he was feelin' little pain when they boarded the plane. And after about an hour, he seemed to realize that probably he wasn't gonna die. The plan wasn't gonna crash, and he stood up in his seat just to stretch and look around and just about the, that precise instant, the plane hit an air pocket and dropped which flung Lightnin' back into the seat, glanced with his back leg glancing off the seat rest which back then was not as soft, perhaps as they are now, but it was hard enough to shatter the bottle of whiskey he had in, or brandy he had in his back pocket. And then he slammed down into the seat which resulted in him having broken glass and blood running down one leg and the other leg he told my father that the incident had scared the pee out of him. And so he arrived in California with one leg full of pee and the other full of broken glass and blood. But things got better from there, and, uh, I don't think he had the same problem on the flight back. But that was the story my father told with great gusto a number of times, and, uh, so that was pretty much, he, he, uh, we would go off to visit my mother's relatives in Clarksville, Texas and my dad's, uh, stepmother and father, of course. His father, uh, my grandfather, my dad's father, died in 1948 so I really have very little memory of him other than just vague, kind of hovering things of somebody, a presence. But then his second wife, Ruby Carrol Lomax who was the dean of women at the University of Texas when they married and who gave up that job to go out and collect folk songs with him durin', I guess, the last 15 years or so, uh, she lived on a number of years, and we would go visit her until she developed, well, they didn't call it Alzheimer's then, but that was what happened to her. And my mother's parents passed away, too, in Clarksville. So, um, that takes us up, I guess, into the '60s when I, I went off to the University of Texas in the fall of '62 and really didn't spend much time in Houston except for the summers from that point until, um, I graduated in '67, then, uh, went to graduate school in history but felt like they were tryin' to box me in to being, well, ya know, with your background you should be studying western history from the 18, post-Civil War to 1900. And I just felt like they were pushing me into a, a little bin, and I had a, I wanted to learn about something a little broader than that narrow historical scope. And I dropped out of school and then immediately got drafted, of course, this being late '67 and early '68, and, uh, I had tried to, I wanted to fly jet airplanes, but I didn't qualify for that because they said I didn't have the spatial apperception necessary, and I've since learned after I looked spatial apperception leaned that it was the inability to visualize three-dimensional objects which sort of made sense because I had been a wonderful math whiz all the way up through plain geometry but when I got to solid geometry, I just couldn't grasp the three-dimensional ideas and the concepts and then as it went on into other, higher math, I kind of got lost. I'm great with numbers but not very great beyond, um, beyond that. So, um, I lost my thread there.

Norie Guthrie: Um, you were talking about being drafted.

John Lomax III: Oh, yes. Yeah. Oh, I had tried to be a jet pilot. Of course, it didn't dawn on me that if I was a jet pilot, I would probably be flying around dropping bombs and shooting people, and I never thought about that. I just wanted to fly jets and, and be up there 6 miles up flyin' around. So, uh, that wasn't gonna work. So then, uh, I realized sooner or later that this being the
late '60s that I was gonna get drafted at some point even though I'd gotten into graduate school. And so I thought well, I've got a degree in history, and I have some working, I started to take pictures so I knew a little bit about photography, and I had taken a course in Russian. So I knew enough Russian to basically carry on a very limited conversation, but I'd learned to read it a little, too. So I figured well, this is, I'm perfect for officer candidate school. I'll just be an officer, and I'll be in intelligence and I'll sit behind a desk and I'll direct the efforts against the Russians, the Ruskies, the Reds, the Commies. So then I got my physical and they said, well, you can't do that. You've got gout. I had no idea that I had gout, and I had one flare up where my ankles swelled up, and it was really, it was some of the most painful moments of my life, and I went to the health center and got, got treated, and, uh, so the swelling went down and everything. I had that one episode and they put me on, uh, colchicine benemed. So when the Army told me that I had gout and, uh, I couldn't, uh, be in officer candidate school, I said well, I guess that's it for me in the service. And they said, oh, no, you can be in the infantry, and I said, well, ya mean I got bad wheels and I can't sit behind a desk, but I can be out there gettin' shot up? And they went, yeah, yeah, you'll be fine. So at that point I decided that probably the armed service was not the place for me, and, uh, by then the popular sentiment had turned somewhat against the Vietnam War and the people were beginning to think that this was a, they'd been fed a, a bunch a bull about the reasons the war started and the reasons the war was going on, what in the world were we doing there, and why were we even there to begin with and all of that sorta thing. So that sort of developed into, I was never much of a person who, other than playing with toy soldiers, I was never much of a person that believed in war, but there we were. So, um, when I dropped outta graduate school, I got drafted for sure and I went down to take my physical at which point, this was Valentine's Day of 1968, and I was gonna take my physical and if I was found, um, to be, if I passed, I, off I'd go. I'd be inducted and be in the Army, and so I took certain steps to ensure that I was not going to be chosen, so to speak, which at the time I realized that even though the war was going on full blast, there was so much of a pool of potential recruits that they were only takin' about half of the people that went in for their induction physicals. And they were looking for people younger than I was and people that they could count on to follow orders and to basically do whatever they told 'em without any questions. So when I went to the physical which I went to riding the bus because I had spent the night drinking and carrying on with other drugs to put myself in a rather bizarre spot mentally, I went down to my physical equipped with a notebook and a camera and a tape recorder and was telling them I was there to document my own induction which right away kinda probably gave them the idea that this guy was out there, and I'm sure they could tell I had not been spending the evening sleeping. So, um, we went into the physical. Well, no, then they had the, um, the test, the, uh, ya filled out the paperwork, and one of the questions was have you ever taken drugs, and they gave ya maybe a quarter inch, one line to, uh, to go into that, and of course I had to ask many questions and the goal was just to make myself into as much of a nuisance as possible so they would realize that this was not good Army material. So I would raise my hand and say, well, by drugs, do you mean like cough syrup or what about aspirin and, and, ya know, I drank some coffee. Is that a drug, and, ya know, what about marijuana? And so, um, and then I would rub stuff out and write stuff in and just did everything I could to make myself look like somebody they wouldn't want. And, uh, everything went pretty much according to plan with the exception being that back then, they would inoculate you no matter what. You would get inoculated against whatever things they wanted to inoculate you for that you might run into in Southeast Asia which was I'm sure a long list of various maladies that were found there but not in the United States. So everyone was there in
their underwear trying not to look at other men who were also in their underwear and feeling rather uncomfortable. They had taken my notebook and camera and tape recorder, of course, when I had walked in, and, uh, the, the, uh, injections were administrated by this tall, chrome contraption that you would stand in there and it would, it would hit you with some sorta air pressure thing that would inject you with this various cocktail of drugs to keep you from having yellow fever and all the other things. And I was standing in line watching this going and in my altered state, I soon realized that this was not an inoculation at all. They were fixin' to inject me with Army kill juice and turn me into a violent killer, and I actually fainted dead away right before I was due to get my injection. I just collapsed. I've never fainted in my life before or since, but I just crumpled. And I wasn't planning that at all. It just happened when I realized that this was Army kill juice. And, uh, we proceeded on after they woke me up and got me, uh, got me back going to the, another phase and another and, uh, then we came to the hearing test and I went in to get the hearing test and they were using a machine called the Redmost portable audiometer which oddly enough I had been a test subject for the development of this machine which was developed by Trecor in Austin and we would sit in this little soundproof booth with headphones on and try to hear pings disguised with various white noise, and that was the test. And so I realized that this was my old friend, this, I had done this job for a summer, no a semester because I had flunked out my third semester at UT. So it was either go home or get a job and stay in Austin. I wasn't gonna get any money from the parents so I decided to stay in Austin and got this job, and that was the job was listening to try to help them develop this equipment which was used in submarines and other things later. But I think I was snapped back into the hearing these same sequences, and I think my hearing was off the charts because I was practically punchin' the buttons at the moment the sound hit or even before. So, I aced the hearing test but with all the other problems that I had created and, and my application and all of the rest, the Army decided that I needed to see the head doctor at the facility for that particular weekend. These are, I believe it was on a Friday or Saturday, and so I said okay, and they introduced me and the head doctor for the particular induction was named Dr. Head. I was just like Dr. Head, of course. He's the head doctor so it's Dr. Head, and so we were sitting across from each other at a table, and he was looking at my pers, my file which by then had probably gotten pretty thick, and he was stamping each page and asking me questions and [sounds of stamping]. And he's goin', well, uh, why are you here? And I said, well, I was inducted and I mean, I've been called here and they want me in the Army and I don't particularly wanna go. And he said, well, why do you not wanna go, and I said, well, ya know, I have moral compunctions that cause me great distress if I kill anything larger than a housefly. And you can imagine how well that went over, and so he said, well, ya know, what, what, what happen, what would happen if it was you and another person and it was kill or be killed? And he's stamping away, bump, bump, bump, bump. I went, well, I'd probably just try to talk to him and see if we couldn't have a beer and sit around and talk all this over. At that point, he pushed all these papers back in front of me and said, Mr. Lomax, I'm going to offer you a 1Y deferment. And I had heard people had done things in order to get a deferment and they had just, they, all kinds of crazy stuff, injecting their penis with blood and this, all these weird things that, and then they would just say, oh, come back in 6 months. And I said, well, will I have to come back and go through this again, and he pushed the papers back to me and said, no, Mr. Lomax. I can assure you this is quite permanent. Off I went, collected my sack lunch, my camera, my tape recorder and my notebooks, got back on the bus and went home, was home by 1:00. So, no Army for me and, um, that was it. I never heard from 'em again.
Norie Guthrie: So then about this time, you were, were you about to move back to Houston or you were in Houston?

John Lomax III: I was in Houston then.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

John Lomax III: I had gone to UT and gotten out and went back home and lived at, at the house on Vanderbilt and, uh, wasn't sure what I was gonna do at that point 'cause I had tried graduate school and didn't, that didn't work for me, and, uh, my dad got me a job sellin' paper products for Century Paper which was out on the, off the Gulf Freeway out near, uh, Schlumberger. I don't think Schlumberger's even there anymore, but it was over on that side of town. And the job consisted of basically spendin' 6 months learning what, Century Paper was not really just paper. It was all manner of industrial products for any company that did anything, that would need toilet paper, but they would also need mats. They would need forklifts. They would need this, and they would need that and we, so we carried thousands and thousands of products, each of which had all these specifications that ya had to learn and it had, uh, various pricing structures according to volume and so forth. And so they would put you in a room with some other folks and you would learn by taking calls. They would pass calls onto you of new customers or, uh, people that weren't key accounts so if you screwed it up, you weren't costin' the company too much money. So ya did that about a year and then they put you out, and you went out and made sales calls. But at that point, uh, the rookie, so to speak, outside salesmen were not given any accounts worth anything, and you were on a, a good part of your salary then would be on commission once you got through the training, and I found that all of the customers that I was assigned were ones that had been tried before and had not done any business with our company for one reason or another, and the locations were scattered all over Houston. So I was driving around a whole lot and winding up not selling much of anything, and so that got kind of, kind of old pretty quickly, and, uh, by then I had met my first wife, John Nova's mother, Julia Plummer Taylor, actually met her at Sand Mountain, uh, outside of Sand Mountain, and, uh, we had taken up with each other and she would, uh, come and get me, drop me off at work and then come get me so she could have the car. And during one of them, uh, at that point, she had stumbled on The, The Orange Show which was over on Munger Street a couple of blocks away from Century Paper. And this woulda been about 1968, and Jeff McKissack was still out there building it, and we became quite fascinated with that and we'd go over there and see him and chat with him, and he was a lovely fellow but just completely, uh, out of it. He was telling us that The Orange Show would be bigger than the Astrodome and he lived on this little two, two-car wide street with no parking anywhere. We were goin' where are you gonna put the cars when all these thousands of people come? Well, I'll worry about that later.

Norie Guthrie: What, what specifically was the car, The, The Orange Show?

John Lomax III: Hmm?

Norie Guthrie: What was The Orange Show?
John Lomax III: Oh, The Orange Show, uh, was, uh, folk art. It was, um, a guy who had built all manner of structures all to do with, he was convinced that the orange was the key to long life, if not indefinite life and that if you consumed oranges, that you would live virtually forever. And so he built these exhibits that were all to do with various facets of oranges and, of course, orange was one of the primary colors, but he used a lotta colors and he used found materials and he would scour around. He was a retired postman so he had a source of income, and, uh, from his pension, and, uh, they lived fairly frugally. That wasn't a real, um, expensive area of Houston, and he would go around and find stuff and bring it home and make it part of The Orange Show. It was just one of the most bizarre and interesting folk art things that you could imagine. It occupied a whole, um, lot which would have probably been about, I don't know, 50 by 50, uh, with little exhibits and buildings and sayings on the wall. It was very Howard Finster-y kinda thing. Before anyone knew who Howard Finster was, Jeff McKissack had the orange show, and, um, ya know, there would be these sayings on the wall, and all this goofy stuff but fascinating just because it was so strange. He had a little theater with, uh, tractor seats for the people to sit on and little boats that went around in a circle, and all this odd stuff. Really, I, no one could figure out what it had to do with oranges, but he would be out there every day working and we'd be more than happy to chat, and a friend of mine once asked his wife, he lived right across the street, ya know, well, don't you worry about your husband doing all this and everything, and she said, oh, no, I can look out the window and see where he is and he's not hurtin' anybody, and he's not drinking. He doesn't beat me, so she was perfectly happy with the situation. And, uh, it went on to, uh, attract, uh, some interest from wealthy philanthropists who have since kept The Orange Show going, uh, and took it over when he passed away. Unfortunately, the oranges, the, uh, power of the orange in his case ran out about 80, I believe. He put out a book all about The Orange Show and we went and took pictures on several occasions just to, uh, it was just so interesting. So, uh, I still have a lot of, of The Orange Show photographs and Jeff McKissack's book, and, uh, but they, it, it has, it was absorbed and I think it's now a private, non-profit corporation. They use it for some special events. I haven't been over in 10 or 15 years to see what's happened to it since, but I'm hoping it's still there. I hope it didn't get flooded.

Norie Guthrie: So, can you talk about some of the different, um, folk clubs that you might have visited? So, you mentioned Sand Mountain.

John Lomax III: Sand Mountain, of course, uh, and before Sand Mountain there was the Jester but it was in the, probably '50s primarily and I don't really remember much about it. I think I only maybe went there once or twice, but it was the Houston folk mecca. It was out on Westheimer near Post Oak, I believe. And my dad would perform there and a lot of the folkies that had come through the Houston Folklore Society would perform there, KT Oslin and Frank Davis, of course, being several of them. Um, Townes recorded a, had an album Live at the Jester. I don't know who recorded it but, uh, Townes Van Zandt and, uh, I was told, I don't know for sure, but I was told John Denver played at the club at one time or another on his way to stardom. But, um, there was the Jester. One place that I vaguely remember before the Jester, and this woulda been in the '50s during the beatnik era, it was called the Purple Onion, and my dad went over for some reason one afternoon and we went into this place which was on Shepherd right if you're going from Rice out Shepherd, it would be in a little strip center not far from where you go under the, uh, 59, the Southwest Freeway, a little bitty room and I don't remember much about it, but it was in the beatnik era, and there was a lotta people drinking coffee and a lotta
people smokin' cigarettes and a guy in the corner playing bongo drums, solo, a cappella bongos. And this was the beatniks and he had a beatnik beret and the whole black turtleneck and everything, and there he was just pounding away on the bongos. And, uh, so that was the, actually I guess the first club that I can remember ever goin' into, then the Jester and of course Sand Mountain, and I guess the Old Quarter was the next place that I hung out down at, uh, downtown. It's, uh, the building is still there. I believe it was the corner of Austin and Texas Streets, across from the city jail which I don't think is still in that location, but it was across from the jail and you could go out on the roof of the Old Quarter on the second floor. The first floor was the performing room, and then you could go up to the second floor which was kind of a combination crash pad and I think they had some pinball machines in there. But it was a place where some of the performers would just crash out. I mean, they'd finish and spend the night there and then you could go through a window and out on the roof where you could go to smoke joints and wave at the people in the jail across the street. And, uh, so the Old Quarter was pretty much, I guess the folk haven, although some of the folk acts would then play at larger venues. I think the, uh, Texas Opry House on Richmond may have been going by then and then there was a place, Sweethearts of Texas or –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

John Lomax III: – something like that, that was underground downtown. Uh, it was a whole sort of underground shopping area or sort of a place there, and I went there once. It, it was, ya know, it was okay, but I like the Old Quarter 'cause it was so casual. It was also really not a lot bigger than this room, so you were right up front with any performer that you ever saw there, and of course, I saw Townes there a lot. I saw Lightnin' there. The most memorable night though was when the Allman Brothers played there. They had finished a tour. They were something like third bill to I don't remember the other two acts, Cowboy I think was one of 'em, but the Allmans were, this was really early in their existence, but they had finished a tour in Houston and didn't really have much, weren't in a big hurry to get back to Macon, so they had met some girls and gotten a hold of some pot. And so they set up shop one night in the Old Quarter, the whole band, the double drumming and the six, the double guitars and Gregg Allman on keyboard sittin' as close to you as I am and did a set of Allman Brothers songs. And Townes got up and sat in with 'em and sang "Stormy Monday" and it was just mind blowing. I wish a tape of that 'cause here you were with this band that had just played the Sam Houston Coliseum for 10,000 people playin' a club for about 20, uh, habitués who were summoned quickly to have some sort of audience. They didn't have a booking that night so no one knew anything was goin' on unless you were called. It was that kinda club. Um, I was off in Austin a lot during this period though so I wasn't that familiar with, um, there's probably other Houston folk clubs and other activities that I just missed out on because from '62 through '67 I was in Austin. Then I came back here, did the Paper, Century Paper. My girlfriend who became my first wife, John Nova's mother, had an aunt named Julia which is her namesake who was a librarian over in, um, at, um, Lamar Tech, I think it was called then. I think it's Lamar University now in Beaumont. But she was a librarian and so I had talked to her some about it, and it sounded pretty fascinating to be a librarian because I had always been a reader and always liked to dig up answers to things and I was starting to write a little bit. I had written a few things in college at University of Texas. So I found out you could get a master's in library science and didn't, it took 36 hours, I believe of credit and so I went to, up to University of Texas, decided I wanted to be a librarian. So I went back there in '69, went to
summer school and got two courses out of the way and then went, and eventually got the masters in 11 months, and, uh, decided that I wanted to be a reference librarian and decided that I wanted to go to work in the Pacific Northwest. I was fascinated with that area, Seattle and Vancouver and Portland and that whole area. But at the time, this was about, let's see, this was the, August of 1970, they had had some convulsions, business convulsions at Boeing which required them to lay off thousands of people so the job market was not good, and for whatever reason, librarians were not necessarily needed. I tried public libraries from Portland all the way up through Washington and Vancouver, British Columbia and, um, I couldn't get arrested. They just didn't have any jobs. The economy was not good in those areas at that time because of Boeing's problems and there was no Amazon then. So, uh, I remember getting, the most encouragement I got was a letter from the library, the head librarian in Edmonton, Alberta who said they really weren't sure if they had anything or not but if I was in the area to please stop by. And I thought, oh, well, Edmonton. I looked it up. It was like Ed, good gracious, that's out in the middle of nowhere and 2,000 miles to get there to begin with. So I tried my luck on the east, and they had plenty of jobs so I wound up getting a job at the Mount Vernon Public Library right outside of New York City, just above the Bronx and worked there, and I had applied at Houston Public and they were real interested in putting me on, but they didn't have any positions open then. But they said probably in a year or so we can do somethin'. So I went off to New York, lived up there for a year, uh, and got, the Houston job came open so back I went, and, uh, to Houston and got the job with the Houston Public Library as a reference librarian which was the part of the library work that I really, really, really enjoyed because you were in a, you would be at a desk and anyone could come in or call in or write in with any question in the world, and it was up to you to not only find the answer but to find the backup for that answer. You couldn't just say oh, yeah, it's such and such. You'd have to say, well, according to such and such, this is, and in other words, you'd have to give your source, and it'd have to be a source with, uh, some credibility. So I loved that but then they started shoving me toward administrative work and I wasn't real interested in that. I really got off to the, the reference and also started developing, uh, an interest in young adult literature and becoming a acquisitions librarian for young adult stuff which was a field that was just really starting back in that, that time. So, I was doin' that, and, uh, my parents bought a little, tiny house for us over on Villanova, at the end of Villanova at Community Street, and we were living there. John Nova had been born by then, and, uh, Bidy, it was Julia Plummer Taylor but known to all as Bidy and I set up over there, and, uh, things went on pretty well for a little while, and then I started getting in trouble with the law for various, uh, things. I was writing, um, music reviews and I was the music editor for Space City News, the underground, quote, unquote underground paper which today would be called the alternative press or entertainment weeklies or whatever. But I wrote the reviews and wrote a column for them and so here I would be with my little write ups of the Beatles new, I mean of John Lennon's album or The Who's album or one of the local people's albums and the front cover of Space City News would be kill the pigs and all this radical, crazed, ya know, stuff and free Carl, uh, Lee Otis Johnson who had been put in the prison for 30 years for one joint which was actually, he was somewhere between two narcotics agents who lit up a joint and handed it to him, and he took the joint and they busted him, sentenced him to 30 years, he being a black person who had, ya know, they loved to do that to blacks. So, um, I also had gotten myself in trouble for finding somewhere online, uh, in an underground paper, I think the Berkeley Barb had printed, uh, secret codes you could use to make free long-distance phone calls, and I was in the middle of doing that and was busted by poli, uh, security from Southwestern Bell for telephone fraud. And so here I was with
that, and then I got busted for marijuana so my job at the public library went away, and right, right fast. And I got convicted of possession of marijuana. I had bought a pound of it which I was selling to various friends, and, uh, I was the point person, the go-to guy for a bag of weed. And I got stopped by the cops. They claimed I'd run a stop sign which of course I hadn't. I mean, who in the world's gonna run around runnin' a stop sign when carryin' a pound of weed, but, and, uh, they asked permission to search the car, and I said I didn't want to do that and they just ripped the keys outta my pocket and opened the trunk, found the pot. I'm pretty sure I was set up for somebody who's ass was in a crack and needed to – but any rate, I got, excuse me, I got found guilty for possession of marijuana and, uh, sentenced to 5 years in prison. And we appealed. I had an attorney named Mike Hunt, uh, who Dale Sofar who ran the Old Quarter had turned me onto because I think he had used him on a similar instance or some sorta problem. And Mike appealed the, the sentence and I was given probation so I didn't have to go to prison but then I went and met my probation officer, and she was a young, black lady that had just gotten out of school and this was, she hadn't been in the job 6 months, so I got the very distinct feeling that if I got so much as a overdue library book, I was goin' straight to Huntsville.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

John Lomax III: There would be no anything. They would just pick me up, up. I see you're on probation. You're gone. And I didn't think I would make a very good, uh, prisoner, so I was able to then get a job in Nashville where I wanted to be in the music business and I didn't wanna, I had already been in New York. I went out to LA and looked around, didn't like that. So I thought well, I'll go to Nashville. I got my probation transferred there, and, uh, went to see the probation officer in Nashville, and yes, he was probably about 30 years old with a mustache and long hair, and he says, well, what's your crime? And I told him, and he stopped dead and slammed his pencil down on the desk and said, look over there, and there was a pile of file folders stacked up maybe a foot and a half, 2-feet tall. He says, every one of those files is somebody who's on probation for rape, robbery, assault, murder. You call me once a month and tell me you have a job. I got real criminals to deal with here. See ya later. Ooh, this is my kinda place. So, I would call every month, and I was workin' for Jack Clement and his publicity company then in Nashville, and I'd call once a month, tell him I had a job and, still. And after about 6 months he said, look, call me if you don't have a job. So eventually the probation was fulfilled and, um, I was, um, supposedly, uh, no longer a convicted felon. Oddly though, I never had any problem voting or anything, so you're supposed to lose your right to vote and all these other things are supposed to happen but nothing ever really happened in that regard so, so I didn't go to prison.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

John Lomax III: Thank goodness 'cause I, that would've ruined my life. It would've embarrassed my parents and, and just been a disaster. I'm not the kinda person that likes to be cooped up, and, uh, prison's all about being cooped up so I could only imagine what would've happened. I'd been in jail probably six or eight times for various misdemeanor drunken driving things which back then was sort of almost a sport. You'd get put in jail for overnight and then off you'd go the next morning. Or a minor in possession or drunk and disorderly or somethin' like that and spend the night in jail. I realized, ya know, after a few of those that I wasn't cut out to be a jailbird. So, there we are, 1973 and all the way to Nashville.
Norie Guthrie: So, in Austin you met Townes Van Zandt for the first time.

John Lomax III: Okay.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: What was he like at the time, and how did you hit off, hit it off?

John Lomax III: Um, let's see. I'm, I'm not clear on the precise year that I met him, but I would guess '65, maybe, '64 or '65. He had just had one album out so I could go track back on discography, but a friend of mine named Caddo Parish Studdard, the third, who was a fraternity brother of mine and also was a wonderful performer. He played piano and is a very ebullient kind of fellow and very, uh, outgoing and good singer, even was writing some kind of interesting songs, but he said, he came up in the frat house one day and, I was a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon which I had pledged when I went to the University of Texas and got, uh, got, ya know, to act, to be an active. I was a pledge, then I got to be an active and did my one semester pledge hood and passed and so, uh, I was livin' in the frat house and he came around one afternoon and said you gotta come out here with me and see this guy. And I don't know he knew about Townes or if he even knew who he was, but he said let's go to the 11th Door which was a folk club in Austin on the corner of 11th and Red River. It was a two-story building with a bar upstairs where you could go and hang out and then you could go downstairs and pay the cover charge and hear the artists, and it was about in the Old Quarter league for capacity, maybe 50 or 60 people would fill it up. A fellow named Bill Simonson ran it. So we went to see Townes and went down there and went downstairs, and there weren't many people there, maybe 20, 30, and I was just floored. I mean, he was a very handsome, striking fellow, um, dark hair and kind of a copper skin. Ya know, he had Indian blood, I guess or something. He claimed he was quarter Cherokee but with Townes, you never knew if he was puttin' ya on or not. But, uh, I just thought good grief, uh, he had a, a lotta the songs that, I don't think he had “Pancho and Lefty” at that point, but he had a lotta talkin' blues which were really funny, funny songs. He didn't record that many talking blues, but he performed more of them that night and he had “For the Sake of the Song,” which is still one of my favorites and “I'll Be Here in the Morning,” and a lotta these songs that have endured. And I didn't much go for Bob Dylan in the early going because his voice just put me off. I didn't really think he was that good a singer. The songs of course were pretty amazing, but I just didn't have the visceral reaction to him that I did seeing Townes just right there in a folk club. We were 15 feet away, and he was not drinking much at that point or if he was, he certainly had it under control because it was just a gorgeous set, no flubs or anything and, um, I was just, I thought this guy's as good as anyone I've ever heard, and I heard a lotta folk people. And by that point, uh, so, uh, we went up afterward and just started chatting, and he was as friendly as he could be, and, uh, we visited a little and, uh, I think he may have given us, or we got a hold of the first album, and, uh, became fans. And then, um, he lived in Austin off and on during that period, or he may have been livin' there altogether at some point, but we would run into each other from time to time, and he was always friendly and fun to be around and, uh, had kind of a interesting relationship with Roky Erickson and the 13th Floor Elevators which I never really
knew all that much about, uh, the relationship, but they were the biggest band in Austin at that point and of course created psychedelic music and have records that have, after 50 years have never gone out of print. They keep getting relicensed to different people who put money up and put 'em back out, but, um, then when I came back to Houston, I found out that he and his first wife, Fran were living a block and a half from our house on Vanderbilt, just literally around the corner. So we visited a little bit here and there, and, uh, then nothin' much went on until after I got to Nashville, but he was always just very friendly, very charming, very, um, easy to get along with and very funny. People tend to, ya know, if you see the documentary about him, Be Here to Love Me, you come away thinkin' God, what a sad, horrible story, but you don't, the humor that he had didn't really come through very much in that, in that movie, but he was a funny guy and a real interesting guy, and he would, he was always tryin' to gamble and do anything you could do. You could pitch pennies, you could flip coins, you could play liar's poker. He taught me how to play liar's poker which had to do with the serial numbers on dollar bills translated into poker hands, and he would say I got three aces and the next guy would either have to top it or challenge you, and if you didn't have the three aces, you lost if you were challenged or you, or the guy might say he had, well, I have four kings. I challenge you. I, I'm sorry. He'd say you win. And, uh, the hand game which you would stand facing people with your hands out and the other person would have their hands behind them, and they would try to slap your hands before you moved them, and, uh, if you jerked before he actually would try to come at you, then you got slapped and then, of course, if you didn't move your hands quick enough, you got slapped. And I'd never heard of any of these things, liar's poker or the hand game, and he was really good at the hand game 'cause he, he was, he had a real deadpan expression that he could put on, and you really didn't know when it was comin', and all of a sudden, whap, ya know, you got your hand hit. So, uh, he was just a fun guy to be around. Um, this was before I think he would, he never was much for smokin' pot, and he never really got into, um, uppers, at least not in that period, and I don't think he ever did. But he, he would smoke a joint with you now and then, but he was not really doing much of anything. He'd have a beer or somethin'. The bad alcohol problem surfaced later on. So that was, that was Townes, and he would play the folk clubs. You could play a little circuit back then. Well, you could hit Houston, Dallas and Austin and sort of, I think there may have been one in Beaumont or maybe a club in Oklahoma City, but you could do a little circuit and about every 6 weeks you could come back. So it would be a little circle, and you could play these clubs and go around and then come around again. So, he would play the Old Quarter or whatever and then he would go to Dallas and play somewhere. I'm not sure what the name of the club was, and then there might have been one in Fort Worth, but any rate, there was a little circuit so you could keep yourself alive and, uh, if you had, uh, an album out you could sell a few at the show. Of course, you had to transport vinyl around which was not the same as transporting CDs or download cards now. But that was Townes, just, uh, I just thought, ya know, this guy's a super star. This is, this is better than Dylan, and, uh, didn't work out that way, but his songs have endured, certainly.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. So, after you moved to, um, Nashville, how did it compare to Houston?

John Lomax III: Nashville? I felt like I had gone back in time to Houston in the '50s. Uh, and I also felt a real, um, I was involved with the music business, and the music business was sort of centered in a very small section of Nashville which at the turn of the, the, the 20th century was,
um, the richest part of Nashville, all these big, old, two-story houses aligning 16th and 17th Avenue which was right close to downtown, but not in town so this was where the wealthy people lived, the doctors, the merchants, the lawyers and that area had gradually gone to seed and people kept moving further out and further out. And so the music row area was not expensive real estate, and the music business sort of after the war gradually filtered into that section and because of Harold Bradley and Chet Atkins setting up shop in those areas, both of whom had been in downtown locations and it hadn't really worked out so they had gone over into the, what's now known as music row which was really more laid out by Owen Bradley, um, and as a, they had this vision of this little section where it would be a music section, and it turned out that way. So, uh, it felt like being on a college campus sort of. Uh, it was very similar, in my mind, to Austin in that it was a state capital. It had a prominent university. It had a river runnin' through the middle of town. Uh, it was also interestingly enough, uh, it had been a, uh, nexus for its early history before it was settled by whites, it had been an Indian hunting ground because there was a salt lake nearby, and the Indians had sort of decided to make a truce and make this neutral land where they could all hunt together, or not together literally, but they would not fight. This area was a hunting preserve, sort of, for Indians that were in the area until the whites came along, of course. Then it became a, uh, river, uh, sort of a high, the highway was the river, and then it became a train nexus and then gradually interstate highways. We have three interstates running in and out of Nashville which is very uncommon, uh, for a city to have three. And then, of course it became a regional air center, but it felt like Houston had, Houston 20-some years before. It was growing and it was, uh, it was, people were very friendly like Texans. Uh, the music section reminded me of just being in a college campus. You could park your car and walk around. There weren't any parking meters, and it was all these little-bitty houses and every now and then a two or three-story office building. But it was just a very comfortable environment, and I knew Guy and Susanna Clark when I came up there, and that was about the end of who I knew. And, uh, so they helped get me introduced to various people, and I started hangin' out a little with them, and then, uh, Townes into town to make a record that never got released, uh, at that point. It got released later, became known as the Nashville Sessions, but he was up there recording this record at a studio named Jack's Tracks which was one of Jack Clement's studios, and, uh, I was working for Jack across the street at an office building he, uh, he was renting, and I was involved in, uh, his publicity company which he had a lot of artists where he was either producing them or they were on his little label that he had just started. And so he got their publicity account, as well, and he had a man named Paul Soelberg running it. It was called Information Services Incorporated, and we had, uh, correct, uh, IBM mag card typewriters where you typed this stuff into a magnetic card, and you could program in stops. So you would send out tour preps and it would be a template and, and it would go in there and you'd put paper in it. It would type up to a certain point and you could in, add in the date and the location and it would be, the rest would be boilerplate. This was the state of the art in 1973 for typing. And, uh, Townes was makin' this album at, uh, Jack's Tracks that Charles Cochran and Garth Fundis were producing, and, uh, it was gonna be called Seven Come Eleven 'cause it was his seventh album. He had done the Live at the Old Quarter album, but it hadn't come out at that point because the record company had gone bust, and the fellow, Kevin Eggers who was sort of his main guy who had the original label called Poppy, then Poppy went under, and he was able to somehow scrape together the money to relaunch the label and call it Tomato Records. But this album, he wound up never paying Jack for the studio time or payin' the musicians so the album was not, the masters were not turned over to him, and the album later came out as The Nashville Sessions, 10
or 15 years later. Kevin got a hold of a duplicate copy or something and just put it out without botherin' to pay anybody then either, so that was Kevin. Never liked to pay people. Um, so I was basically hanging around Jack's Tracks some because Townes was in there, and I was workin' next door, and that album came out, I mean, got done and there were new songs on it and everything, and then it just never came out until later. And, uh, the label that Jack started had had a record by Susan Taylor who was one of the Pozo-Seco Singers, and it didn't really do much. It was kind of in the middle of everything. Then they made a record with Bob McDill who was a very well-known songwriter from Beaumont who'd come up and had gotten attached to Jack along the way, and Jack had him in his publishing company, and they put a record out which I still have and still think is a lovely album. But it, uh, it's called *Short Stories*. It never did much of anything, but then they decided Jack has signed Don Williams who was another one of the Pozo-Seco Singers. Their career had kinda, they had a couple of hits and then it just kinda petered out, but Don had come to Nashville, and Jack had hired him to be a songwriter. And they were tryin' to get his songs cut and couldn't get anywhere with songs that Don had written so they decided to put an album out on Don as the artist. They did and then he had a couple of hits, and back then, a little, tiny independent label could compete with the majors. And so we had a couple of Top 10 records with Don Williams and launched his career on Jack's label called JMI for Jack Music Incorporated. And, uh, so Don was goin' strong. I got sort of lateraled from publicity over to the record company and started tryin' to help, ya know, Don's career and help get things going and just doing whatever I could find to do. Uh, I didn't really have a job title. I just sorta did things that looked like they needed doing and helped some with publishing statements and some with basically running errands, being a gopher. Jack had five or six locations at this point. He had two studios on Belmont Boulevard, Jack Clement Recording Studios which when they were built in the, I think '70 or '71 were state of the art, uh, studios. So he had that goin' on. He had Jack's Tracks. He had the publicity company. He had a operation goin' out of his house, then he had rented, he had four apartments rented at a place called the *Hobbs House*, and they were side by side and back to back. So he had essentially four apartments that he bashed the walls out, and you could go from one apartment all the way through to the other three without ever leavin' the building which he had just had, he also had a construction company so he had Gerald, his chief constructor just go in there and cut doors, and so ya could wander around. And two of the, two of those offices were used, two of those were used as offices, and the other two were his living quarters. So, um, he had a lot goin' on, and we got the label going, and then Don Williams went off. He had a handshake deal with Jack, but Jack had made a horrible movie, uh, a few years before called *Dear Dead Delilah* and it cost him a whole lotta money, and so the label was not having, it was having a hard time collecting and we weren't getting a lotta money in, and Don's checks were bouncing for his songwriting. And eventually, he had a wife and at least one, maybe two kids at that time. Another label came along and said, well, ya know, you could sign with us and we'll give ya $40,000.00 right quick, so that was, that was the end of Don Williams and Jack Clement. And the label went on a little while but never got another artist of any particular stature, although they released a lotta really good records, but no one else ever kind of came to the fore. The label did however provide the first training for Allen Reynolds to become a producer which he was another one of Jack's songwriters that had known him in Memphis when Jack lived in Memphis. And he, uh, he cut his teeth producing Garth Will, Don, Don Williams, and, uh, produced some other people and eventually got around to producing Crystal Gayle and then Kathy Mattea and then Garth Brooks. He produced all of Garth's. He has up until I guess he retired a couple years ago. So JMI did have an impact in terms
of creating Allen Reynolds’ career and Don Williams and putting out a lotta really cool records but nothing, um, as developed. And Jack had a lot of, uh, things going on, on the publishing side however, so he was able to stagger through and eventually pay off *Dear Dead Delilah* and move on, but it almost, it almost bankrupted him. He made this movie, and it was not, it was supposed to be a horror movie, and it was literally horrible. It just is unwatchable, even though he had Will Geer, Michael Ansara and one other very well-known artist, uh, actor in it, uh, Agnes Moorehead. All three, it was their movie before they passed away, and, but it was, it's unwatchable. It's terrible. The script is awful. The directing is awful. It was some friend of Jack's from Memphis that had never done a movie before. So, that almost sunk his whole boat, despite all the other successes he had. That was a monumental failure, and, uh, even to this day, it pops up every now and then on late-night TV, and I've tried at least three times to watch it and can't get more than 10 minutes through. It's just awful. Ya know, it was, it would have made the lowest score in Rotten Tomatoes if there was such a thing back then, but in, I've looked it up in the various film books and they all, ya know, called it a bomb, and it was. So that takes us through Don Williams and into Allen Reynolds and, uh, –

Norie Guthrie: Well, when, so this is, I think this is then starting to gear you up to, to start managing Townes Van Zandt, correct?

John Lomax III: Right. That, because JMI kinda was floundering and I felt like Jack didn't need me on the payroll at that point, and we were still, I was still getting income from my late father's estate because he had a limited partnership with Earl Gilbert and they were selling houses, and whenever they'd sell off one of the houses after my dad had passed away, it would be a nice check. So I was able to support myself because of that and, uh, I decided, well, I had kept in touch sorta with Townes mainly through Guy, but at that point, this woulda been early '76, Townes had been livin' in Colorado, and he'd fallen off a horse, probably drunk, and broken his arm. And he had his guitar stolen or busted or something. He didn't have a guitar. He couldn't play anyway 'cause his arm was broken. The record company had gone under. He didn't have a bookin' agent. He didn't have any sorta publishing deal that I could tell. So Guy and I kinda said, look, come on to Nashville. Ya know, it's a lot cheaper to live here, and you might get somethin' cut and we can try to do somethin'. And so he got here, and I just decided well, I'll, I'll manage ya, man, and we had a handshake and I took off to try to manage him. And, uh, ya know, got him a bookin' agent and got some shows so he could support himself. He found a cabin with no electricity or running water way out in Franklin and, uh, set up there with Cindy, his girlfriend at the time and Geraldine, his fabulous dog, an Alaskan husky or some Siberian husky or somethin', but really big and smart and friendly dog, but not a dog you'd wanna mess with. So Cindy and Geraldine would stay at home when Townes would off on his shows, and I, uh, put an ad in *Rolling Stone*, a little classified ad, a three-line ad and it said, uh, joined, the world's greatest songwriter, join the Townes Van Zandt fan club, send $5.00 to this PO box, and just, it didn't cost very much to put in there, and I just figured well, we might get six or eight members and at least, uh, we can leverage that. And I got, I don't know, several hundred people signed up and it was pretty amazing because almost all of them sent a letter with their $5.00 explaining how Townes had impacted their lives, and these were eloquently written in beautiful handwriting, very few typed, just obviously from the heart. And I had been used to reading country fan letters which were just, ya know, I love your music, or I need to get me a picture and, um, it would be written like in crayon on a Big Chief tablet or somethin'. And these were, these eloquent letters
that would go to great lengths to explain, several of them saying his music had saved their lives and they had been depressed, but they had played him and they put the gun down, and I mean they were just unbelievable. So, we started putting out fan club newsletters to these people, and I would use the same newsletter as our main publicity source and send to the various magazines and such and built up a bit of a mailing list. And he started to get some bookings and about this time, Kevin Eggers, the, had relaunched Tomato Records and in order to get product out in a hurry, they reissued the albums that had come out on Poppy originally, and I believe they put out the second, third, fourth and fifth albums right away and then eventually The Late, Great Townes Van Zandt came out and then they put the Live at the Old Quarter set out which had been, at that point I believe had been sitting for 4 years in the can. Uh, so, and then they brought Townes in and cut a new album with him that became what was called Flyin’ Shoes that Kevin hired Chips Moman to produce and they put that album out, and of course if you're familiar with it, it's, a lot of it's to do with Civil War and living in Franklin and what it was like to be in the war and just a really interesting record and probably the best group of players, maybe that he had had up to that point on the album. So within the space of just a year and a half or so, there were Live at the Old Quarter came back out. That was a double album. Four or five of the original albums were released, and the new album came out, so I was thinkin', ya know, well, we've got, this train's really startin' to pick up some steam. Things are really rollin', and, uh, I had been asking Kevin about contracts, things like well, what happens to, where's a publishing statement, and I was learning a little bit about the business side. And I was goin', well, uh, can I see copies of the contracts, and what about publishing statements? I haven't seen anything, and what about this, and what about that? And where, where are these songs copywritten, ya know, and what's going on? So, Kevin obviously was keepin' everything he could possibly keep and Townes didn't give a flip about money really, and so, uh, and I was not commissioning his live money so I had no income from him unless I could get, ya know, somethin' set up with record royalties or publishing royalties. So, uh, Kevin, of course was basically just siphoning it all off to himself, and, uh, knew far more about the business side of things than I did. I, Townes and I actually did a handshake deal to start a publishing company, and we were gonna have co-publishing on the songs that came out on Flyin’ Shoes. So Flyin’ Shoes came out, and we had set up a company called Honest to God Music, and none of the songs were on Honest to God Music. They were all on some other company that I'd never heard of that Kevin had set up, of course. And, um, so I started askin' about what in the heck's goin on with that, and Kevin, uh, then basically asked if they were able to engineer an ouster which he got Townes drunk and he signed a new deal and gave him some money and I was out the door. And one of Kevin's cronies named Lamar Fike, F-I-K-E, who had been, um, one of Elvis' “Memphis Mafia” boys who had been involved mainly in publishing. He was installed as the manager, and, uh, which was, ya know, goin' to do Townes no good at all because he had less experience managing than I did, and he was one of Kevin's buddies. So there wasn't any way that anything was gonna get to Townes, and I was put out and said goodbye and they gave me, uh, 90 or $100.00 or somethin' for the expenses that I had incurred in the year and a half or 2 years I managed him which was not really adequate but something anyway. And that sorta was the end, and I remember talkin' to Townes and he said somethin'. I said, expressed dismay about Lamar and how I felt like he wasn't going to be, uh, that he was Kevin's man, and Townes looked at me with those big-old brown eyes and said, oh, John, no, no. Lamar's in it for himself, and I thought, oh, just what ya need, a manager in it for themselves, not for you. So I, that really soured the relationship between Townes and I the rest of his life. And, uh, ya know, all the headway I had made just sort of went away, and, uh, the big,
uh, opportunity to me was missed, but Townes didn't really seem to mind. He, he just wanted to
go out and sing and play, play guitar and sing those songs and write 'em, and if he got home with
any money, he'd give it to his wife or girlfriend or blow it, and, uh, and he really didn't, he was
not career minded at all. He was one of those itinerant Woody Guthrie kinda troubadours that
wanted to go around and sing and play and as long as he had enough money to have a guitar and
get to the next show and buy some drinks, he was happy or pretended to be or whatever. Um, but
that, in 1978 was when that happened, and that just soured me on the whole, ya know, on
Townes.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

John Lomax III: Very sad and I realize now that it was just, I shoulda just shrugged it off and
said well, that's the business, but, um, I couldn't shake it off.

Norie Guthrie: So, during that time with him, you worked on *For the Sake of the Song*, the
songbook.

John Lomax III: Oh, the songbook, right.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

John Lomax III: Um, the songbook came about because I wanted to show that Townes' music
would hold up as poetry, that the lyrics and the phrasing and the meter and everything on some
songs were, could stand alone. They didn't really even need music. They were so well-written
and the, they sort of had a cadence to the words when you read them that lent itself to music. So,
um, my brother had a little publishing company called Wings Press that was mainly puttin' out, it
was small press putting out a lot of odd, strange poetry books, uh, including several by Vassar
Miller who had a bit of a name in this area. So I talked him into going in with me on the
songbook, and we got Townes involved and I said we wanna pick X number of songs, I don't
know, may, maybe 12 or something. And, uh, we'll have on one side, we'll have the, the sheet
music and on the other side the lyrics and then he would make some comments about each song.
And then we had some photographs that I had hustled up and, uh, my brother found an artist to
draw some little line drawings, and I wrote an introduction for it and, uh, discography, and, uh,
the photograph on the cover was taken by a guy named Wood Newton out in a rundown shack
out round the corner from Townes' rundown shack of him lookin' out the window. And when the
color balance was right, which it wasn't always because they later used that on an album cover
and other usages, but they didn't get a hold of the original four color. Back then you had to have
the four-color negative things and so it never, the color balance never came out, but the original
books, to me it looked like a Vermeer. It just had that glow that the Dutch masters had, and here
he was staring at this empty building kind of thing with his golden Vermeerish glow and, uh, I
just thought it was staggeringly attractive and we put out, uh, hard cover and soft cover of the
book one run, and, uh, I then realized after we had pressed it up and everything that I had not
even thought of nor tried to obtain any sort of permissions for using the song, music on one side
of the page or much less the lyrics. So there were some, uh, correspondence informing me of this
infraction and we didn't repress it, and my brother never copywrote it. So the book wound up
going from him to, let's see, when he passed away, he put it in his will that a friend of his, a fella,
another poet named Joanie Whitebird became the owner of Wings Press and Joanie wasn't any better at business than my brother or myself. So not much happened with that, and then at some point she died and Wings Press wound up with a guy named Bryce Milligan over in San Antonio who, uh, kept, uh, who sold off, I got a hold of him down the trail years later and found out he still had a stash of 'em, and I bought everything he had left. And, uh, eventually those have been given away, all but, I have maybe one hardback and two or three paperbacks and that's all that, that's left, and they're now up on the Internet for staggering amounts of money. And people have said, well, ya know, you could re, you could do an updated version and add material and copyright that and put it back out there, but I just didn't have the stomach for it. And, uh, I don't know that it would sell enough to justify being put out or if somebody wanted to do it, I'd be happy to help 'em, but I didn't really wanna do it myself and no one has jumped up offering to do that. So, um, those are the only, the book is out there, and that's the end of it in terms of there ever being any more unless someone else wants to do it. Since it never was copywritten, then the essay that I had written and, uh, the essay that I had obtained from a woman named Lola Scobey who wrote a, the essay for the book and I paid her and of course paid the photographers, uh, all of that then just got taken and used without any permission, payment or otherwise.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

John Lomax III: Uh, when Townes' records came back out on Rhino Records, they just used the, Lola's bio and some of the pictures and no credit or payment or anything else. So that kinda soured me a little, too, uh, and I never even got into the publishing issue of who, who was actually the publisher and who I should pay and how much I should pay or anything down the track. I thought about tryin' to go back and make all that right and then copyright the book, but I never did and so it's never been copywritten.

Norie Guthrie: So you mentioned your brother, um –

John Lomax III: Mm hmmm.

Norie Guthrie: – Joseph. Can you tell me a little bit about him?

John Lomax III: Joseph, uh, had Wings Press. He also had an actual old time printing press that he had obtained that he would make, um, really neat little cards and letterhead and stationary and invitations and all that sorta thing with an old-fashioned letter press where you would lay out the type on [sounds of press] one at a time and, uh, he did that. He was a writer and a photographer. He was a dancer. He had a, uh, working, a very good knowledge of French, so he was, uh, a supporter of the Alliance Francaise here in, uh, Houston and, uh, produced a documentary on Reach, called Reach for the Stars that was shown on local TV, which is about the space effort and did a whole lot of different things and, uh, hadn't really, uh, he was getting money also from the, my, our estate, from the family estate and the houses that were being sold and, uh, he, uh, hadn't really set, settled on any one thing. He wrote some neat articles. One for Space City and one, uh, in the Texas Historical Quarterly I think about Zydeco music and took a lot of photographs and really hadn't – his career was sort of bubbling along in a number of different areas and then he got AIDS and this was in the, the late ‘80s before they had, uh, much of, any idea of what AIDS was or how to treat it or anything else and died at the age of 39 in 1988, uh,
which, uh, really was awful. Uh, we had sold the family house by then because it was gonna cost
a whole lot to – we had to have it rewired and we had to have a whole lot of things done to the
house on Vanderbilt and he was living in it and, uh, we decided that we should sell it and he
would, he bought a house over on Yupon in the Montrose in probably no more than a year before
he died, before he even knew he had any, in this disease. Uh, we sold it for I believe $295,000.00
in, uh, 1986 or 7, which I really regret selling it. It'd be a couple of million dollars now just for
the dirt probably. But, uh, we both wanted, needed the money and I wasn't using the house at all
except when I'd come to Houston, which wasn't that often and, uh, in order for him to continue
living in it, it would require a lot of maintenance and a lot of money up front to pay for the
rewiring and new heating and air conditioning and all the sort of things that eventually have to be
addressed when you have a house. So that was totally devastating, uh, thing to happen and he
had, had, had the, uh, the tapes that I eventually released on my father is the album called 
Folk 
but he had, my dad had done that in 1969 and I was off in New York at the time and didn't even
notice it happened, but he just sat down and recorded every song that he was used to singing at
his performances that he still liked and on cassette at the house on Vanderbilt. Just sat down and
sang 'em and, uh, tapes then went to Joe, 'cause my dad died in '74 and the tapes then went to Joe
and then when he passed away I still didn't know these things existed. When he passed away,
they were included in his belongings, which came up to us at about the same time that my third
wife, Melanie, whom I met at Anderson Fair, uh, and I moved in together and her father died at
about the same time that Joe died so we had four sets of belongings arrive within a few months
of each other that had to be sorted and figured out and all and the tapes sort of just got, I didn't
know what they were and so, at any rate, uh, he was the keeper of the tapes in addition to all his
other things that he did. He kept those tapes instead of throwing them out or losing them or
anything else. Kept the tapes and then I actually had them transferred once, probably 5 years ago
and the guy transferring it, I later found out, I didn't listen back to 'em. I just thought it's just a
tape transfer. He didn't do a very good job so when I realized that they were in not that good of
shape. I mean they didn't sound the way they should, I went and took the original cassettes and
my dad's album and went over to a mastering place with some engineers and we listened to my
father singing the Folkways album from 1956 and then we listened to the cassettes and tried to
make sure that we were getting the pitch right and all of that, as well, as good as we could and
surprisingly even though we went back to the original cassettes, this was in 2016, I guess, uh,
they were still fine. I mean all but one. One cassette apparently when he recorded it next to a, too
close to an air conditioner or something 'cause there was this hum in there that really just, you
can't, there's nothin' you can do. I mean you can't take a cassette and get rid of a hum like you
can on a multi-track. So, but, that affected maybe – there was another 20 or so songs that we just
couldn't use but between that, those songs, the songs that he did, uh, for the Folkways album,
which he did as a solo and then he had one with some of the Folklore Society cronies called The
Texian Boys, where he sang lead on some of those. So we have probably almost, uh, 200
performances of his that hopefully will somehow see the light of day. He had one song on, uh,
the Kerrville Folk Festival album and, uh, the two Folkways records and then all these a hundred
and 60 or 70 songs that, that he left, uh, to my brother and then I have now started to delve into
in which 16 of which came out on the 
Folk 
record that we got out in May and I didn't think I had
much of a chance to get out a record label to put it out so I put it out on a label that I had set up
years before, just to have a vehicle to get them out there.

Norie Guthrie: When did you start writing about music in Nashville?
John Lomax III: Well I had started here in Houston – well actually, I started in Austin in college and then in Houston and then in ‘73, when I went to Nashville, I obviously had lost my outlets which were all in Houston and I got involved with a fellow named Harvey McGee, who had started a magazine called, Hank and Hank was very much modeled after Buddy Magazine which had been published and I think still might be published out of Dallas, which was, uh, cut down tabloid sized, uh, music magazine about Nashville and country and, uh, so, I got to know Harvey through, uh, Anita Hogan, who at that time was Anita Moore, who worked for Jack Clement and they were good buddies and they had, they were Nashville natives. So Harvey had the magazine called Hank and I wrote a few features for him. It was one of those, uh, no money but you got a lotta glory, so to speak and so they focused on those type of artists andsongwriters and I was sort of running in that crowd. Steve Young was another one that I remember and that at least got me a place to write in Nashville, but I also was writing – I had met a fellow named Mark Pucci, P-U-C-C-I. Mark Pucci, out of Atlanta and he had a magazine, well, he's out of Atlanta now but at the time he lived in Memphis, he had a magazine called River City Review and I wrote a few things for him. It was another, just sort of, uh, under, not necessarily underground but a music mag, a low profile music magazine. Low only because they didn't have a lot of money to attract, you know, big ad dollars and then there was also a magazine called Zoo World, that I wrote for that was based somewhere in Florida, that was, uh, monthly, uh, fairly, a little bit more substantial than any of the others that I was writing for at the time and at the same time I was still writing for, uh, Pacifica's magazine that I think was called a The Southern Voice and they changed the name and I'm not totally sure now what the second name was but I was sending, uh, features down there every now and then. Another, uh, kind of freebie volunteer effort. So at least I had, uh, some places to put writing and some ways to communicate with the outside world about what was going on in Nashville. So from about, I think it took – I moved to Nashville in June of ‘73 and I think before the end, the end of the year I had found Hank and started in writing for them. So, from that point until 1980, it was sort of sporadic these mags, the Hank lasted about a year and a half, maybe 2 years. The fellow running it, Harvey, had, uh, – it was always a race for him to try to get to the printer with enough money before the drug dealers found him and sold him some cocaine and marijuana and whatnot. So, it was and he, he, he had a partner who was doin' the business. The partner got upset or something and they split up so here's Harvey, who was really a, an artist by nature and temperament having to handle the business and that of course didn't succeed so, I think by ‘75 Hank had, uh, sung it's last song, so to speak and, uh, I worked for Jack and then I managed, uh, Townes Van Zandt from ‘76 to ‘78, when Jack's business sort of fell off and it seemed to me that he didn't need me on the payroll, uh, because there wasn't, he, he had signed Don Williams. Don had gone off. I mean, because Jack never signed him, Don signed the deal. He had gone off. Uh, the JMI record label was floundering and so I went off and managed Townes and in 1979, I took a job as the oral historian for the Country Music Foundation Library and Media Center and that position came open when the previous oral historian, Doug Green went off to start The Riders in the Sky and become a performer, which he still is and The Riders in the Sky are still going and I worked
there at the foundation for about a year, a year and a half but got very, uh, disenchanted there. For one reason, I was spending most of time – when I came into the position there was no organization. There were just tapes everywhere in tape boxes, not necessarily the correct tapes in the tape boxes. It was all being done on reel to reel at the time. Doug had been good about doing interviews but very poor about organizing the results or even, uh, transcribing them. So, I'm spending a lot of time transcribing with a reel to reel recorder and a foot pedal and getting, you know, getting these interviews kind of organized and so we knew what we had and what we didn't have and we knew how many reviews and so on, but it was all being done in the basement of the Country Music Foundation, which at the time was on 16th Avenue and, uh, it just seemed to me that I was, I was cooped up and I never really liked being in one spot all day long, especially in a basement and especially transcribing 'cause I wasn't that great at typing and I wasn't, uh, used to doing foot pedals and going back and forth and back and forth and it's painstaking work, as you know. Now they have automatic transcribing and so forth but of course, they didn't then. So in, uh, I guess early in 1980, I decided what I needed to do was to start a magazine and I did, it was called *The Nashville Gazette* and I got two fellows with me. one of 'em named, Thom King, T-H-O-M, Thom King, who was, who had had a previous magazine called *Take One*, which sort of had a double meaning in that it was a free tabloid, a full-sized tabloid that was put out every month for people to come around and get and it was, uh, entertainment and light news content, but a lot of entertainment and restaurant reviews and movie reviews, music and so forth and a fellow named Richard Hartbert, who would, moved here from New York, moved here being Nashville and he was, uh, more of, uh, he knew the production process. He actually knew how to get all this into an actual format to take to the printer, which was very handy 'cause I had no clue about that part. I was bankrolling it and I was the music editor which I was sort, was sort of hiding behind that rubric rather than having my name on the mast head as publisher or editor in chief, which I actually was, uh, but I just wanted to focus on music. So, that was when I started my regular column, uh, writing columns about Nashville's music scene at the time and what was going and so forth and I called that one, I think, “Song City Serenades.” So these were little newsy tidbits, short brief in, you know, try to get as many things in there as you possibly could given the, you had about one page to do it and, uh, so I was doing that and, uh, we ran early features on Rodney Crowell and on Lacy Dalton and Gail Davies and Joe Sun. We got Tom T. Hall to write the, uh, main feature in the very first issue and it was, uh, critically extremely successful. The daily paper at the time was still covering you know, Dolly and Johnny Cash and the big stars but not much other than that or and they were covering of course, non-country things which we did also but we tried to sorta augment what they were doing and with a focus on how our local scene was beginning to develop, which at the time there was no Bluebird Cafe and there were about – the Exit / In was there but there were only 4 or 5 actual viable live venues and of course 4 or 5 thousand musicians all wanting to play. So, it was a critical success but I had no idea of how to get ad money and we never did find anyone that could sell any ads worth a flip and we never could crack through to the ad agencies and of course we ran a lotta ads as freebies just to give the impression that we did have a bunch of advertisers. It was also a freebie and it was a monthly and it lasted, I think 6 months before I just got tired of funding it and had never really got any, I don't think we had more than a few hundred dollars come in, in that whole time in revenue and, uh, we did sell a few subscriptions to out of town people, where they would pay some money up front but it was very low and so, at, after 6 months, we had 5 issues. We missed 1 month just because we didn't have it together. Uh, we, uh, just basically pulled the plug. We did have one interesting thing in that this singer, Kathy
Mattea, who went all into win CMA female vocalist of the year and so forth, was our receptionist and helped with the typesetting and layout and stuff. Just a charming, lovely, lovely lady and, uh, very friendly and really good for the, to be our contact with the outside world. So, the magazine was a failure. I lost probably 20 or 30 thousand dollars on the whole thing but what it did do was give me a regular outlet to write these columns and so I had been sending issues around to various publicists and other journalists and so forth and after the magazine folded, then I was contacted by another, uh, monthly, no, this was a weekly called the *Aquarian Weekly* that came out of New Jersey, I believe and so I started more, I morphed the column over into there and put a new name on it and started writing for them and that went on about a year, a year and a half before they kind of ran out of money and, uh, -- but during that period I had another 20 or 30 columns written so by then I was really into doing these columns that, that I can, have continued to do, uh, right up until this month, I'm writing the last columns for the magazines that I write for in Australia and England. In fact, uh, I've sent off the one to Australia and I'm gonna send the one to England off, uh, today, tonight and that pushed me probably to over 400 different, uh, columns over the course of that 37 years and I'm just guessing would think that was something if you figured they're all different lengths of course because by the time I reached this point, I had written for maybe, columns for maybe 15 or 20 different magazines and each one was a slightly different, uh, word length so I would just estimate somewhere around 750 thousand to 800 thousand words went out during that period and even when I wrote two, like the last two, the English and Australian magazines, I couldn't just take one of’em and slam it into the other, uh, to the other magazine because it's a different market. They have different people that they wanna know about and I also felt like it I did use the same item in both, I had to sorta rewrite it a little bit or change it up some or usually the deadlines were different and so there might be a new development that happened after the, when I sent it off to one magazine and got ready to send it to another. So that was, uh, that was the start of the whole writing columns and writing about music from Nashville. So, from '73 onward, I was, it's been pretty steady, even when I was managing people and doing a lot of other things, I kept writing the columns just because I was used to doing it. And at various times it provided a decent income. Um, there was a U.S. magazine called *Country Rhythms* that lasted a couple of years, no, it may be 3 years. And it was a glossy, slick national publication, so I got a pretty good, um, 3 or 4 hundred dollars an issue, write columns for them and an occasional feature. And I also helped supply photographs and chase down things for them. The same man published *Fangoria* and some other very niche-y kind of magazines, uh, mainly to do with heavy metal and fantasy, and science fiction topics and thought maybe that a country boom had come along by then. This was toward the, uh, one of the country booms. This was probably, uh, the mid-80s when I was working with them. So, it's just been pretty consistent to write these newsie little tidbit columns. I call 'em yack-yack columns 'cause it's pretty much 50 to 100-word paragraphs and as many as I could get in to the column, which had to do with basically what's happening in Nashville that I thought would be of interest to the particular magazines' readers. So, that's, that's pretty much the story of that. It also really help me broaden my scope of contacts and get my name around the city as somebody who was, you know, an active journalist and got lots of free records and concert tickets and things like that. A few T, back then you got T-shirts, too. Lots of T-shirts. And, uh, so, it, and it was, and, uh, invitations to various social events which, uh, would involve free food and beer, which was two items high on my agenda at that point. So, it was, uh, it was, it's been, uh, fun to do up until lately when I realized that it's the, the market for that sort of thing having to do with country has really dwindled. And so the amount of money that you can make doing that has dwindled and it's
gotten down to the point where it's, in some cases, less than ten cents a word and it's really slave wages. So, one reason I'm giving them up is just that I've kind a figure I've done enough low-paying journalism and writing about country to, uh, to sort a hang a, hang it up and retire from that and look, look to doing other projects that. I've had three different books in various stages of progress and I just can't seem to focus enough time and energy on any one of them to get 'em to where they're pretty much done to where I could take it to a publisher and have pretty much the whole book laid out. Um, so, um, it just seemed to me that, it, the a, I don't know how many years I've got being 73 now, and why spend more time writing columns for very little money, that take, uh, substantial amounts of time to prepare because of, even though it doesn't take that long to write it, it, during the interim between one issue and the next, I'm continually gathering up possible topics and throwing them in a folder so that when I get ready to write it, I have all the raw materials sitting there to choose from. And while that doesn't take a lot of time per, you know, per iss, per, uh, for each one of these little things to dig up and slam into a folder, by the time a month, well, in the case of the English magazine, it's every two months and the one in Australia it's every three. By the time it rolls around to write the column then I've spent, you know, 5 to 6 hours probably gathering up the topics and the raw material that I wind up writing about. I'm just sort of, I'm ready to move on, let's say and so, uh, no more columns. At least I don't think so. Now if, uh, the New York Times or the Washington Post or someone came along waving a large amount of money, then I would probably reconsider. But that seems fairly unlikely. All magazines are having a hard time, not just country ones. And most of the ones that I've written for are long gone. And then it's sad, but everyone wants things on their cell phone now.

Norie Guthrie: So, how did you come, how, how did you make the connection with Steve Earle and begin managing him?

John Lomax III: Well, there was quite a bit of, diff, time between when I managed him. When I met him, it was in, uh, either December of ’74 or January of ’75, and he had come to town, I think at that time, he was something like 19 years old. And he had dropped out of school very early on, and really, literally started following Townes Van Zandt around like a little puppy dog following a big dog and, um, learning his craft. And, uh, so, he came to town and Guy, he knew Guy Clark through, uh, I guess, maybe even the Folklore Society or maybe through, uh, just the circuit and knowing Townes, would certainly put him in contact with Guy. But he turned up, Guy sent him over to visit and, excuse me, and I was on the verge of going off to meet him in France, the annual music convention that's sort of the, still the biggest international gathering of buyers and sellers of independent music projects. The major labels don't really need that 'cause they already have their own network of their affiliate branches and scattered all over the world. So, it would people that weren't associated with major labels, and they were mainly licensing songs and master recordings from other places and bringing them into their territories. So, I was going off to that because I had been working as a friend with Rocky Hill, and had been helping a label in New York get him a record deal. Get him to sign a deal. I was sort of working more for the label to convince Rocky to make this deal, and the, uh, um, we were gonna go to meet him and it, it reached the point where we were gonna go to meet him, and he was gonna land and meet him, and they were gonna give him $10,000.00 to sign. And also, they had already bought and given him a dobro, um, a, an actual old fashioned, the metal resonator guitar. And so, uh, I was headed off to meet him fairly soon, and my wife at the time, Julia Plummer Taylor Lomax, uh, was, had
developed a serious drug issues and our son was, um, John Nova, at that point was, uh, I think 5, 4 or 5 years old. And I was really concerned about leaving for 2 or 3 weeks. We were gonna do, meet him and then go to England and Rocky was gonna start his recording for this new label. I was really concerned about having, uh, my wife in charge of my son while she's having all these drug issues. And, so, uh, Steve and his wife at the time, his first wife, his sort a high school sweetie, so to speak, Sandy, came over to the house just to visit. And he played some songs and I was quite floored. And, so, we worked out an arrangement where he and Sandy would live in the house for the, I think I may have been gone up to a month. They would stay in the house and help, you know, keep the house clean and help me to do babysitting. And, uh, that was a great relief for me. She was very, uh, straight and narrow type person, and Steve hadn't really developed any drug issues or anything at that point. So, um, I met him then, and, uh, over the course of the next 8 years we sort a kept in touch. He was in Nashville that whole time trying to get a record deal. He had told me when he arrived that his goal was to get a record deal by the time he was 21 and he was 19 then. And I thought that he had the talent, certainly. And was kind a surprised to find that, uh, he didn't really had, get anything going that way. He had several different bands at one time or another that played locally, but never really got over the hump, and never got a record deal. And Guy had put him in his band and bought him a bass. And, uh, he'd, he already knew how to play guitar so it wasn't all that difficult to morph into playing bass guitar, and put him out on the road with him some. And also hooked him up with his publishers, who I think had a company called Chaparral Music. It was, um, Pat Carter from out in West Texas and Roy Dea, D-E-A, who was a producer in town. And, uh, so Steve was writing for them and going out with Guy, and trying to get something happening when he was in town with these various bands. And, uh, also I think he had some jobs as a tape copy fellow, which back in that day it was still reel to reel, and so he would make a copy of the reel to reel tape of a song and take it over to pitch it to someone. And he would be the guy for the publisher that would go, go around and do this. And then I think he worked at an Italian restaurant as a dishwasher. I mean, he had a number of jobs and just never really had gotten much happening. So, uh, Pat and Roy decided, uh, they would start a little record company called LSI and LSI, uh, was named after a recording studio that they owned. And they made a little EP of four sides with Steve and some musicians around town, a drummer and bass player. It was very, uh, very much a, uh, throwback to rockabilly. It's called Pink and Black, which were, of course, the official rockabilly colors. And, uh, it had “Nothin’ But You” and, uh, some other, four tracks on it. And was put out to look like an album with the small hole in the middle but it had four tracks and played at the, uh, speed of a, of an album. It was so, a lower, uh, a lower rpm rate and then you could get a little better quality. And I heard this little Pink and Black and just absolutely adored it. It was so fresh and so uncluttered. And even then, Nashville was starting its trend toward over production and filling up every possible track with some sort of noise. And this was, uh, only with the, only, only with the three instruments, and maybe a rhythm guitar in there. But it was, um, just fresh and it just appealed to me. And he sounded terrific. So I started getting ahold of these EPs, either from Steve or eventually I bought a bunch of ‘em and was giving them to everybody I could think of. Just like boy, this is so cool. Give it a listen. Not with any intention of anything happening, but just trying to share music that I thought was lovely, sort of like our family has done for all these years. And back then, I was writing about music still, a lot, and I had somehow worked my way into where I could go over to the CBS Records building, which later is, of course, now Sony and just occupy an office. And start making phone calls and doing various things, or could use their, mail-out facilities and in return, I would, uh, talk to a lot of DJs and
found out things about records that were, that they needed from Columbia or Epic, the two labels that CBS, uh, had under its umbrella at the time. So, the, the swap out was that I would, uh, notify the promotion people of their, their needs and in return, get use this office. And it was totally empty, no one was using it. And, uh, um, just get Steve Earle's stuff mailed out to various people and use their mail room, and also try to help them out. So, that went a long a, a while, and as a result of that, I pretty much had the run of the building, which was quite lovely, because it was a major label, and I could go talk to people and whatnot. And I had found out that Steve's little EP had actually gone into the building and to the A and R department, which was run by a lady named Bonnie Garner. And for whatever reason, she had not decided to pursue Steve. So, by this time, this *Pink and Black* and I had, I had, there was, it was like a crusade for me. I was just determined to make something happen, partly to help Steve, but partly 'cause I just thought it was music that people should hear. So, one day right before I was going off on vacation, I left a copy on the desk of the fellow running the entire operation, named Rick Blackburn. And just, uh, left it there with a note saying, you know, I think this is really good and see what you think. And I believe it was the next day, he called up and he had gone ballistic over it, just like I had. And just really, really, really, really liked it. And, uh, wanted to get a hold of Steve, and wanted to sign him, and all of this stuff. So, we, uh, eventually that did in fact lead to a record deal with the, uh, his first recordings, other than the LSI thing, came out on Epic Records. They, they just basically bought the tracks from Pat Carter and Roy Dea and, uh, put out, uh, two of 'em as singles. “Nothin’ But You” was one of the singles, and, uh, I'm not sure of the other, but they put 'em out as singles and very little happened. One of 'em charted but it got into, just nudged its way into the top 75 and lasted 3 or 4 weeks and bailed out after having peaked at 64 or something like that. And the second one didn't chart at all. So, at some point during all this, both Rick and Steve came to me and said why don't you manage, why don't you take over and manage Steve. He had no manager at the time, of course. So, I wasn't too excited about managing again, because I had been, I felt, treated badly when I was managing Townes. And, but I thought, well, you know, why not jump back in. This was in 1983. So, Rick came to me and said look, radio doesn't want this. Radio wants a bigger sound, that is more production and, uh, more people playing and more going on than this bare bones rockabilly. Which was delightful for me and for Rick, obviously, but radio was turning up its noise about it. Radio always thinks it knows music better than the people that make it. So, Rick said we need to get another producer and we need to go back in and record some more things. And he said there's several people I have in mind and, uh, he gave me a list of three names. And so, Steve and I started to work our way through the list. And the, I think the second person we talked to was Emory Gordy, Jr. Emory's a very well-known bass player who had moved to Nashville from California. Hadn't been in town very long at the time, uh, eventually married Patty Loveless, and they've lived happily ever after. But, uh, Emory was, uh, when we met with Emory, he and Steve hit it off and seemed to really have a lot of musical, um, ideas in, in common. Emory, uh, Steve was aware of Emory and, uh, I believe he, he had been working some with Neil Diamond and, uh, he might've been in Emmylou's band at that point. So, uh, they hit it off and we went back to Rick and said, hey, you know, it looks like Emory's the guy. And, and he said great, let's go ahead and they bankrolled, uh, him to cut our whole album. And, uh, which they did and they, they had already bought the four tracks from Pat and Roy. They paid, I think, $40,000.00 for those tracks. And they sent Emory in, and made a full, full band record with, Steve didn't really have a permanent band. They were session players that they brought in, including Emory, of course. And, uh, so, that album came, uh, got done, and they released a single from it, and it did almost exactly what the first batch did. It got up and took
a, nudged its way into the chart, worked its way up about 10 spots and psssh, it was gone. And they put out another single from there, and that went nowhere. It didn't even chart. So, here we were. They didn't wanna release the album until they had a hit single, and without having an album released, it was really hard to tour. I had gotten Steve hooked up with a, uh, booking agent at the time named Andrea Smith, who had been booking Ricky Skaggs and doing very well with him. And, but she didn't have a lot to work with, without a hit single or an album. It's really hard. We couldn't get any reviews in magazines off of singles, really. Uh, so, things just were not looking very good. And about this time, in order to play at all, to play out and to have the sound that we heard on, that people would hear on the record, if anybody heard it on the singles, we needed to, uh, have a full band. So, Steve hitched up a couple more players and, uh, added a keyboard, Kitty Moon, and, uh, added another guitar player, and moved his bass player to guitar. At any rate, it morphed from a three piece to a five piece. And then he had written a whole bunch of new songs during this proc, this period. He was a pretty prolific writer. He still is. And so he had a whole lot of new material and we decided that what we needed to do was to basically re-introduce him to the record company with the new material, not the stuff that had already been recorded and was sitting in the can, but, uh, the next chapter with, with the new band and the new songs. So, we got the okay from the label to pay for a rehearsal hall and a little bit of food and beverage money. And, uh, so we had, uh, we invited all the record company. It was basically, hey, you, you know this guy but he's different now and you gotta hear this. This is way cool. So, uh, at the time, uh, Nashville had just gotten its first restaurant that served fajitas. I mean, the real fajitas, not, uh, fajita salad or any of that, but the ones wrapped up, uh, Mexican style, chunks of meat wrapped up with guacamole and other, salsa and whatnot, and you rolled it up into a soft tortilla. It was a couple of young kids from San Antonio that had gone to Vanderbilt and opened this business. And so, we thought, boy, it'd be so cool. We'll have fajitas, we'll have this new music, and every, this will be wonderful. They'll go crazy and everything will be great. So, uh, we laid out the food and laid out, of course, it had beer and wine available, and the, the label turned up to, to see this. And, uh, the first six people that came through the line, I realized, rather late in the game, that no one other than us, knew what the hell fajitas were. So the first six people that came through the line ate all the beef, and just piled up their plates with the meat, and a little of the guacamole. And then the rest of us spent the rest of the evening harassing me about the food. What is this? You're trying to just have us eat salsa and chips, and rar rar rar rar. So, uh, that part didn't work. And meanwhile, Steve and the band got up and went through pretty much all of the songs that later emerged on *Guitar Town*. And it just went swfft, over their heads. Just like, what is this? So, when I saw the reaction, or non-reaction, I realized that, or that this was not gonna work really either. And, uh, so, I figured we would get dumped off the label fairly soon. But meanwhile, sometime in the middle of this, Pat and Roy got upset with Steve over something. It was High Chaparral Music, I'm sorry, the publishing company. They had some kind of squabble with Steve and they just cut him loose. Didn't renew his contract. And here he was, a guy with a major label record deal and no publisher, which is very unusual, but it was a real good thing for me, being manager, to go out and shop this fella because he already had a deal and an outlet for whatever songs. So, I started going around town pitching him to various people. And I, the first stop was CBS' own publishing company, which at the time was run by Jimmy Gilmer. Who, uh, had come to Nashville with his background being in the band called The Champs. He was a West Texas fella, and The Champs had that monster hit called “Tequila.” It was an instrumental and every so often, it would stop and they would go “Tequila,” and back it would go. So he, the Champs had a couple of other minor hits, but, uh, Jimmy Gilmer wound up
in Nashville and he was running CBS songs. And I thought, boy, this is a slam dunk. But he didn't want any part of it. And I had several other places I took him and I couldn't, uh, including Combine Music, which was pretty much the top independent publisher by far in town. And for whatever reason, they didn't want to get involved. Steve could be a little abrasive, let me put it that way. And I think he had burned a lot of bridges that I was unaware of. But he was, uh, his, uh, his performance rights organization was ASCAP, which he had gone with because that was who Guy had gone with, when Guy had gotten started. So, I went to meet with the fellow at ASCAP named Merlin Littlefield, another Texan. I think he's from the same family of, the famous Littlefield's ranching and oil and what not. At any rate, Merlin suggested I take him to a company called Silverline/Goldline, which was being run by Noel Fox, who had been a member of the Oak Ridge Boys. And he was, uh, a bass singer for them. The Oak Ridge Boys, of course go back, I think, all the way into the '50s. But they had yet to make their mark in country music. They were still primarily a gospel group. But they had bought, or established Silverline/Goldline, and Noel, who was apparently not the greatest bass singer in the world, was basically moved over from the band to run the publishing company. But he was a really, really personable guy who just knew songs. He really did. He had signed several artists, several singer/songwriters, and had had a fair amount of success. So, I went to see him and played him some of Steve's stuff and he just, the new stuff, and he thought it was wonderful. And I later found out, or I think I sort a knew, but he had had a relationship with Tony Brown, that dated back to when Tony was playing gospel music. Tony being the, one of the top producers in Nashville to this day. And a fabulous keyboard player, and so, he was at the time over at MCA Records. And I thought well, let's see. If I got Noel stirred up, Noel wants to turn Tony onto it, and if Tony likes it, bam, we got a deal. So, uh, I pretty much just, once I got Steve the deal with Silverline/Goldline, I thought instead of going and badgering Tony, let's let Noel carry the ball because I knew he would and sure enough, he got Tony all excited and they went down to, uh, some sort of retreat down on the Gulf Coast at a, in, uh, Gulf Shores, I think. And, uh, hung out some with Noel and Tony, and Steve, and some other people. And so, Tony got to hear him actually play these songs in person rather than just listening to the tapes. He got all stirred up and so, eventually, that led to the deal with MCA, in which the same songs that Epic had turned up their nose at, became Guitar Town with the help of Emory, who came on to produce that, along with Richard Bennett, who had just moved to Nashville from California. And who had been Neil Diamond's band leader for, I don't know, 15 years or something and was a-, uh, encyclopedia of music and a, incredibly talented guitar player. So he and Tony, and Emory, all three were involved in producing Guitar Town and Guitar Town came out in, uh, '86 and basically put Steve Earle on the map. Uh, he had a couple of reasonable hits with country radio, but the album was a publicist's dream and the publicity of MCA department got it to everyone. Up to and including Bruce Springsteen who was highly impressed. And, uh, but at the same time during the lead up to Guitar Town, I was, I had planned okay, we're gonna get Steve launched and then I'm going to, uh, sign some more acts and build my management company on the basis of having a hit act and, uh, you know, moving forward from there. I hadn't gotten any money from Steve. In fact, I had put him up for a while when he, his second wife split up. Uh, Carol, who's the mother of, uh, Justin Townes Earle, who's made a bit of a name for himself also as a singer/songwriter. But they had split up because Steve had found another girl at that point. Uh, I've lost track. I think he's been married six times to five women, or maybe seven times to six women, but, uh, and currently not married. But any rate, uh, he needed a place to stay, so I put him up, and I was deferring any commissions for any of his, uh, live shows and I was also funding a lot of things. Buying equipment and whatnot. So, uh, he
called me up one afternoon and said, hey, come on over and meet me at the publishing company. I wanna talk about my career and all. I said, oh, sure. So, I trotted over to Silverline/Goldline and it was after hours, so, uh, he was up in Noel's office sitting behind Noel's desk. And he says, uh, we briefly chatted about something or another. And then he says, well, John, you know, I can't figure out what it is that a manager does, so I'm gonna have to let you go. And I was like, oh?

Let's see. I got you two record deals and publishing deal in less than 2 years, but you can't figure out what it is a manager does? Artists tend to think all this happens without anybody but themselves involved. It's just like I'm so great, the world will discover me without any help. So, I just, I was, I couldn't think of anything to say other than thanks for the memories and stalked out, pissed off, of course. And, uh, that was the end of my management of Steve Earle. This was in early '86, a little bit before the album that I had helped arrange was released. And, uh, I was pretty, uh, upset about it all. After a while, uh, oh, and I'd also set Steve up with the attorney that negotiated his record deal, Dick Frank, who was one of the top lawyers in the music industry. And was throughout his career and his son is now a top attorney. So, I had made that, built that bridge for him, too. So, uh, um, sent word over to Steve who by then, had gotten his advance from MCA for the new album and sort of said, well, you know, where's the money? I spent this much on, you know, and I've deferred commissions for this much and, uh, nothing ever happened. So, I went and hired a lawyer and sued him. And, uh, David Maddox. And was paying him out of my pocket rather than on contingency. And so, we, uh, we had all the pre-trial warm up depositions and so forth, and, uh, eventually, before we got to court we settled. And I settled for a really, I think it was around $30,000.00 or something, which was about half of what I had spent. Some of what I had spent I didn't have receipts for. I had either lost 'em or never gotten one. And, so, it seemed to me the best thing to do was just to settle up and, uh, move on. And take the money, which we had worked out a payment plan over a period of, I think, 2 or 3 years. And, uh, I did get all the money. In fact, the last batch came in a couple of months early, so I can't say that, uh, he was dishonest with that part of things. I got paid and, uh, on what I settled for, which was less than I felt I deserved. But being an idiot and not knowing anything about music, I didn't insist on part of publishing for the deals that I had arranged for him in the publishing world, which he stayed in that deal with Silverline/Goldline for close to 20 years and a couple of times it got sold to other companies. I never got anything out of that. But I'm sort of, I've always been, uh, a little naive about the business side of music. And, uh, engaged in a, what I would, I guess, call magical thinking. But, oh, it, you know, it's all right. Things will work out and, you know, they didn't. But at any rate, um, he went on to fame and glory. And, uh, once again, I was fed up with management and I believe at that point, I went back to work for Jack Clement, who had re-launched JMI Records with an attempt to re-establish Stoney Edwards, this really, really good black country singer who had had a little success, but he had no label. And so Jack started JMI up again and I went over there to help in that effort. So, that's Chapter 2 of my management career.

Norie Guthrie: Mm, you have also managed other artists after Steve Earle, um –

John Lomax III: Mm hmm.

Norie Guthrie: What did you take away from those experiences?
John Lomax III: Well, let's see. I guess the next, uh, after Steve Earle, was when I discovered, so to speak, David Schnaufer, who actually was deposited on my front porch one day. I, at that point, I had split up with my second wife, and had moved into, uh, a house over near hill, Hillsboro Village. And it was a Sunday afternoon in, uh, probably February or March, maybe of '86. And this fellow I had known who was head of sales for CBS, and we had gotten to be kind of friends, Drew Ponder. Uh, I was sitting there watching pro football and feeling pretty pitiful about everything that had happened, and Steve, uh, Drew knocked on the door and said, uh, John, this is David Schnaufer and you two should know each other and turned around and walked off. And so, I said well, come on in, and we talked a little, and he told me his story, which was he was a dulcimer player and he had won half a dozen local and regional contests, and then had won the National Dulcimer Championship in, uh, Winnfield, Kansas, a festival they have every year. I think still do. So, he had, he was a reigning, and, or maybe had just won it 2 years before, dulcimer champion. And I knew next to nothing about dulcimer other than I could identify one and knew that you played it with this noter and it had four strings, and you had one hand doing this, and the other running up and down the neck. And, uh, it was pretty much a rhythm instrument. Uh, I hadn't really even listened to Jean Ritchie who's the only other dulcimer player that really ever, uh, that had up to then bumped into the public consciousness from, during the folk boom years. So, when I found that out, I said, well, you know, play me something. So, he got this dulcimer out of the case and sat down and played “Steel Guitar Rag” on the dulcimer with picking it with all his fingers and thumbs. No na, no noter running up and down the neck, but played it just, ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch. And “Steel Guitar Rag”'s not an easy song to play on any instrument, much less when you've got four strings and two of 'em are paired drones. But he made it sound terrific. So, I was kind a floored, and he played a couple more things. And I thought, this guy is phenomenal. So, I started managing him at that point. And, uh, we made a couple of records together. I had a relationship with, uh, Allen Reynolds, who had bought one of Jack Clement's studios and, uh, called, renamed it Jack's Tracks in honor of Jack, but Allen had bought it because Jack was in one of his sort of low cycles of his financial shoo, woo, shoo. It went up and down with Jack, because he wasn't very good with money. But, uh, he sold the studio to Allen and, uh, he had, he had installed a studio in an old building that at one time was an, uh, art studio for an artist by the name of Gil Veda, who painted these God awful things on velvet paintings, you know, of Elvis and other things. And then it became the JFK Memorial Museum when it was bought from Gil Veda by a named Aubrey Mayhew, who had accumulated a lot of JFK memorabilia. And then Jack bought it from Audrey, Aubrey Mayhew, who had to leave town because of some financial misdeeds. He was, uh, running a, uh, local division of a, uh, label that Citron, who was a big, uh, pre-record, uh, blank tape manufacturer. And he apparently had taken a whole lot of money and used it for his own purposes rather than the record company, and so he had to leave town in a hurry, and he sort of disappeared and left Jack in charge in of his son. And, I don't know if Jack bought the studio or he handed it over or whatever, but any rate, Jack had then put, made it into a recording studio and recorded, started recording there. And that was, uh, kind of his experimental studio. He had, uh, two others up the street which were full-owned, commercial studios. This one was sort of used for his publishing company. And, so, uh, I convinced, uh, Allen's engineer, Mark Miller, to, uh, and worked out a deal to use the studio when they were not recording somebody. And so, we took David in there and made, uh, a record that we called Dulcimer Player. No, Dulcimer Player was second. The first one, oh, I'll think of it in a minute. But we made a record and, uh, it was all solo, duos and trios and on the trios, we were able to get to Mark O'Connor to play fiddle. And, gosh, you
know, he was phenomenal, of course, and still is. He's long since departed Nashville and the world of session playing to form his own band. And he's just got a new record out with his family, his kids. Solo, duos and trios mixed between traditional, cover songs, and things David had written. And Mark engineered it and Melanie, my wife, helped put up money for it, and I put up money and so we made this record. And, oh, it's the, it was, uh, no it wasn't. Uh, at any rate. It was, uh, we put the record out. It was cassette only. This is how long ago it was. This would've been, uh, '87 or '88, by this time. And, uh, I set up a little record, uh, company called SFL, which, uh, I told people variously stood for Sounds From Lomax, Sex For Lunch, So Few Lyrics and whatnot. But it was, uh, just a vehicle to get David's record out there on a label that look, looked more impressive than it was, of course. And, uh, a fellow over at, uh, CBS that I had gotten to know, Bill Johnson, went and moonlighted and did all the graphics and under the pseudonym of Billy Dakota. And, uh, so we had a professional-looking album and, of course, working with Mark Miller in that studio and with those players, uh, we had a very professional sounding record, which was unusual for a dulcimer back then. What dulcimer records there were tended to be sort of recorded in someone's house with one microphone sitting at the other end of the room. So, we had something that sounded a whole lot better than anything that he was competing with.

And, uh, I tapped in and learned about what network there was for people in the dulcimer world and there was, of course, even a magazine. And, uh, through the magazine we found a number of different vendors and, uh, sort a got, we sold a reasonable number, uh, of cassettes. And more than you could a possibly expect. I mean, huh, a couple of, maybe two or three thousand, which for the dulcimer instrumental was pretty amazing. And we didn't try to get any radio air play. It was all instrumental stuff on a cassette, so, uh, we really didn't have that going for us. But it really helped David go out and he would do festivals and workshops, and it was a pretty easy, he was kind of a cheap date 'cause he'd, it was one person going around and he could do maybe two shows and, uh, a festival. And then I would sometimes be able to hook a, hook him up with a house concert in the area where he was playing. So that went along for a while, and then we decided to make another one. And so, we made Dulcimer Player. And, uh, then that was probably '80, '88 or '89. And by then, CDs had started to make their appearance and we realized that to compete, we needed to have, uh, a CD out there, but we had, by this time, uh, 40-odd tracks on the first two, uh, cassettes. No, no, we didn't have 40. We had about 25 or 30. So, we took every, we were able to get all but two tracks onto one CD and we called it Dulcimer Player Deluxe and that was a CD, so we had two cassettes and a CD by then. And, uh, that did reasonably well, too. We had the same, we had, uh, some of the different players. We had somehow Chet Atkins took an interest and he had played on one of the tracks, on the very first cassette, and that got us a little bit of notoriety. Uh, what a sweetheart to do that and never charged us anything, just did it, and sent us the cassette one day. We sent him over the tracks that David had done, and he overdubbed his guitar on 'em. So, um, that went along and started doing pretty well, and we decided well, we need another, we need to record again. And this time, we'll do a matching set. And so, we did Dulcimer Sessions as a cassette and a CD. And in that one, I decided that the dulcimer needed to take a step forward in terms of the public perception and I had several, um, very well-known people play on it. Albert Lee, who was one of the world's best, and is still is, best guitar players who we happened to hook up with who would come into Nashville periodically and we caught him on one of the times that he was in town and had an afternoon, and he came in. We went down to Texas. David had developed an interest in Santiago Jimenez, Jr., who was the brother of Flaco Jimenez, but some thought he was as good, if not
better, then Flaco, but was never very well-known. I don't think he was as aggressive in pitching himself. So, we went down to San Antonio and made a track with him. We signed, we did a track with a fellow named Sandy Bull, who was a steel guitar player, but played num, a number of instruments and, uh, was actually made one of what's now considered one of the very earliest World of Music albums. But he was in Nashville and nobody was paying any attention to him, so we brought him in to play on a track. We got Jack Clement and a full band in for a track. We got a fellow named Gove Scrivenor who was an autoharp, incredible autoharp player, and he was in on a track. And we, uh, actually got Mark Knopfler from Dire Straits to come in and play on a track, uh, which, uh, was a real, a real, uh, nail-biter because, uh, he, uh, I didn't really think about it, but he makes these Dire Straits records with, you know, a massive 48 tracks or something, and electric guitar, and over dubs, and over dubs, and over dubs, and mixing, and this and that. Very, very elaborate procedure. And we wanted to have him play acoustic guitar and just come in and do it live. Uh, we did “All I Have to Do Is Dream,” the old Everly Brothers' song. And the day before the session, Mark Miller, who was still involved as the co-producer and engineer, got a call for an Emmylou Harris session that they needed to do over at Jack's Tracks. So, we had to move the session, find another engineer, and get it all ready to go on very short notice. But we were able to pull it off. And, uh, we got all ready to go and sure enough, Mark Knopfler drives up in a car by himself, no posse, and no anything. Just comes in, walks in with a guitar, and says hello, I'm Mark. And just the sweetest fellow. And he agreed to do this for a normal session rate provided that we pay that to his favorite charity, which had to do with children of some sort, English children's fund. And that he couldn't be prom, more prominently featured than any of the other players, which was very nice. So, we, I was producing them without my sidekick, um, producer who actually knew music and I, of course, didn't. And, uh, we made two or three runs at it and that was when it dawned on me that he wasn't really used to recording acoustic or recording live. So, uh, we stumbled through it. And, uh, after, I think, three passes, the engineer said that he had enough to where he could switch around and, you know, make it, make it sound great. Make it sound like one fluid take. So, off he went. And, uh, we finished that record up. And my concept was to make a pop dulcimer record. And we were still using the formula of part cover songs, part old time traditionals, and part, uh, David's material. So, we put that out and, uh, it didn't really do as much as I thought, 'cause we pissed off the dulcimer purists using all these big name people and this advance production. And we were, didn't have the resources really to get out to the world at large. So, Dulcimer Sessions didn't do that good. And it, uh, was certainly a lovely record but, and we used a picture on the front, we tried to replicate a photograph in, uh, Jack Hurst's Nashville book that was of Uncle Jimmy Thompson and The Solemn Old Judge right before the first Opry performance in 1925, or one of 'em, George D. Hay is standing there, and Uncle Jimmy is sitting there. And we posed it as if it were the same picture. And it had Jim McGuire, one of the top photographers in Nashville, who had done all of the photo work for the other albums, uh, at a rate far below what he is used to getting. But he loved music and he was a player himself and believed in the project. So, we had that cover and we put it out and no one knew what the hell the cover, the reference for the cover. And, uh, then sometime after the first album and the second one, David had met a fellow named Tramp, whose real name was Michael Lawing, but he had gone under the name of Tramp for many years, who was a Suzuki method, uh, fiddle, guitar, vi, I mean, fiddle, violin, whatever, player and was extremely talented. And they had begun to jam with a group called Walk the West, which was a 4-piece rock band in Nashville. They had had a record deal with, uh, Capitol Records out in Los Angeles as a rock band. And that record had not done all, particularly well.
And so, they began moonlighting by adding David and Tramp, and they dug up a fellow named Sam Poland to play steel and they became, when they would do that, they called themselves The Cactus Brothers. So, and I thought, well, you know, I could get this band, might have a better chance of really cracking through and meanwhile, that would benefit David, who was playing with them. And, uh, you know, it would be a win-win for everyone, the Cactus Brothers would morph from, they still had their deal with Capitol and we were able to lateral them from L.A.'s rock division into Nashville's country division. They kept the same publisher, which was, uh, Almo Irving Music, which, uh, was actually wa, the Nashville ber, uh, branch of a company called Rondor that, um. So, they were still on the, on the plate. And the, uh, Capitol was, allowed us to go ahead and sort of become The Cactus Brothers and make this record, which was supposed to be country, sort of. Country enough. I mean, by then there was seven pieces in there. It was sort of like a hillbilly stringed orchestra with, Tramp could play 12-string and guitar, and mandolin. The steel player could play dobro and lap steel. And, uh, David, by then, had discovered a place in California that made electric dulcimers, solid-body electric, so he was able to be heard through all this, and wasn't just playing an acoustic dulcimer. And then we had our guitar player, electric guitar player, electric bass and a drummer, and then the lead singer, who played acoustic or electric and sang. So, when that all got to clicking, it was a fabulous sound. Just unlike anything, because, oh, the, uh, the guitar player, the lead guitar player also played banjo. So, we had at our disposal virtually every prominent stringed instrument there was. And, uh, so, I took on The Cactus Brothers as the manager and continued to manage David as a solo artist. And, I got Allen Reynolds, who at the time had, uh, already made a name for himself producing Don Williams and then of Kathy Mattea. And, no, Crystal Gayle. He had done Don Williams, Crystal Gayle, and I think, was then starting and doing Kathy Mattea. But I got him to agree to produce the record along with Mark Miller. And, uh, the engineer from the David Schaufer sessions. So, and that put us in Jack's Tracks again, and we were able to get a, a rate far below the normal rate to go ahead and do The Cactus Brothers' record. We got a fellow named Cal Roberts, who was a Pulitzer Price-winning photographer, who won the Pulitzer for spot, spot news photography, some years before. He had been, uh, going to the grocery store in Los Angeles when some gunman may, or did a robbery and ran out into the parking lot and the police and them were having a gun battle and he just pulled out his camera and started shooting. And, you know, a lot of people say they've done this or done that, so I checked up, and sure enough, there he was. He won the Pulitzer. So, uh, he took the photographs, and we made a video of The Cactus Brothers. And the record came out on, uh, Capitol Records. And went nowhere. Just absolutely nowhere. Even though I still think it's a fine album. It was mostly Paul Kirby, the guitar player, as the writer. We did a couple of, of in, uh, I think we, we may have done one instrumental, in addition to we morphed in “Fisher's Hornpipe” that we had made for David's record and put it on that record. And then brought it over and stuck it on this one also. Capitol thought it sounded really cool, and it was. It was one of those things where it was live to 2-track. We were rehearsing and Mark was smart enough to record the 2-track rehearsal. And it just came out breathtakingly good, and even though we tried to replicate it on the multi-tracks, we never got it sounding as good as the live to 2-track, so. And we had made a video of, of that. So, we, uh, morphed the video and the track over onto The Cactus Brothers album. We, uh, and then they made another video of “16 Tons,” the old Tennessee Ernie Ford thing. And the videos did very well on CMT and, well, it was TNM then. They got a lot of, of play so we were able to make a toehold with that. Um, the “Fisher's Hornpipe” video we changed from David Schnaufer to David Schnaufer and the Cactus Brothers, and it was actually the most played instrumental video
in the history of the Nashville network. Very well done. Uh, here again, I was able to get incredibly talented people for a fraction of what they would normally have charged just because they believed in the project and David, and the music. So, all that came about and then at the end of the day, nothing much happened, so. We had been signed by Jimmy Bowen, who was probably the most famous Nashville producer since Owen Bradley and, uh, he would produce multiple acts at a time, with engineers trained to know exactly what he wanted. And then at the end of every day they would send him over the roughs and he would listen to 'em at night, and then send instructions back. And he might have three or four projects going at once. And he also had developed a system where he would make the artist a co-producer, which was pretty much unheard of in Nashville at the time. So, they would be more invested emotionally in the project, instead of just feeling like a hired hand, which was the old system. The producer would bring the artist and hand 'em the songs and say get in there and cut 'em, and hurry. And the artist would want to cut 'em in hurry because they had 3 days off the road and then they'd be back on the road. Uh, and so, Jimmy, uh, had believed in the band but no one thought that the album that we put out had anything a country radio would go for, and so they consequently decided not really to work it very hard, and they didn't. And, uh, they wanted to put out “Crazy Heart” as the first single because Tony Brown had wrangled an invitation for The Cactus Brothers to be the bar band that was shown in the George Strait movie, *Pure Country*, the one and only George Strait movie ever done. And so, the band was flown down to Fort Worth and we were, uh, the back-up band that was playing when George and the love interest or something had interaction and they would flash and show the band off and on. And made 'em record this really, kind a sappy love song that no one in the band liked, but we went ahead with it, and then they decided not to use any of the band's things on the soundtrack. The soundtrack for *Pure Country* was all George and it became the biggest record, I think, he had up to that point. And so, uh, David had been drafted the song that they had to sing, involved a keyboard, and David was made, put on front of the keyboard, and told to pretend to be playing a keyboard. And, of course, it was all pre-recorded, the track, and they were just pretending to be playing it in the movie. So, that happened and that gave 'em a little bit of exposure, but it, and they, the label wanted to put out the song “Crazy Heart,” which wasn't really our favorite, but they thought that it would be a huge hit. And then the label took over making the video. And they made a video that wasn't nearly as good as the videos that we had already done on our own with “16 Tons” and the “Fisher's Hornpipe” video. It was kind a cheesy, really. Uh, but that didn't work either and the single didn't go anywhere. And, uh, meanwhile, Jimmy Bowen developed, uh, throat cancer and had to quite, had to leave the label and go off to, um, the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, I think, or somewhere and get treated. Fortunately, they caught it early enough and were able to knock it out and Jimmy is still alive to this day, although he hasn't been involved in music in many years. But, um, a lady at the label, Renee Bell, was saying look, you guys, we, we had signed originally for, uh, two albums with the label having four options, I think, or three. So, we had the, um, funds and the budget to do a second album, and she said you guys better get going in a hurry, because there's gonna be somebody new coming in here and we don't know if they're gonna do anything. So, we rushed in and recorded a second album, uh, called *24 Hrs 7 Days a Week*. And but this time, Allen was, com, uh, was just disgusted with the label and the way they had treated The Cactus Brothers. And even though he had, by this time, started working with Garth Brooks, and Garth had started to really take off, the label didn't, you know, they just didn't, they wouldn't go along with his artistic vision. And it was kind of like you're a bunch of people involved in administration and marketing telling this guy who was producing one of the hottest acts there is,
and who had also who had written a number of hit songs, that he didn't know what he was doing, and this band sucked, and they weren't gonna work it. And so, he opted out. And so, I went over and got Randy Scruggs, um, interested, and so, he produced the new album. And by this time, the band had had some sort of schism with the drummer and they had fired our drummer, who I thought was wonderful. And brought in another, a guy they knew to be the drummer. We'll not, we'll not put his name out there, but at any rate, we were in the studio with Randy and, uh, we'd done 1 or 2 days' worth of just laying down basic tracks, trying to get, get our groove going, get the mojo working. And Randy came up and said look, the drummer's just not happening. You know, he's not, he's, he's erratic and you guys, we gotta do something here. This guy's not gonna work. But I think I can get Kenny Aronoff. Ooh, well, let's do that. So, he was then, uh, John Mellencamp's drummer. And, uh, the, Mellencamp was based, I think, up in Indiana, so it wasn't very far away, and so we got him to come down there. And, uh, that was really amazing to watch this guy. He would sit there and we would play the song that we wanted to record, and he would sit and listen to it once or twice, and then fill up a page, a full page, of indecipherable but to him, squiggles of one kind or another, which were his little shorthand for how he was gonna play this track. Then we would go in the studio, this would take maybe 15 minutes. Maybe he'd go, went through it three times. We'd go in the studio and whap, first take. Bam, everything perfect. Just, this guy, was really good. Still is. So, that, everything picked up steam then. That was the, the mojo, was Kenny Aronoff and then having a solid drummer that was gonna keep the beat, and then also just inspire everyone. He, he was one of these go, rah, rah guys, and real friendly, and real enthusiastic. And I had learned by then that that, a good part of the studio experience is having players that are really uptempo'd with each other and really friendly, and really joking, and really, make the atmosphere conducive to creativity. So, Kenny came in, we made the record 24 Hrs 7 Days a Week. We turned it in, poor Jimmy went off. They brought in another couple of people. And they weren't all that excited about everything. So, we, we had booked an event at a local club to kind of let 'em see what the band was like live, and say, well, maybe you don't like the record, but look at what, you know, what we can do. And, uh, it was in a Music City Mix Factory, which was this 5-story building that was gonna have a restaurant here and a rooftop bar, and a couple, uh, a couple of, one party room and a, and a music room, and just the state of art. The newest, biggest, coolest room ever. But it had not quite been finished, but we had already gotten everyone ready to go, and for some reason, construction delays and this and that, and the other. And the guy running it had not gotten a liquor license, so, or a beer license or any license, so here we had the label coming in expecting to be, uh, treated with some hospitality. So, I had to run out and grab a few cases of beer to hand around to the record company. And, uh, our lead singer had, uh, developed a serious alcohol problem. In, in fact, we had even a friend of his was basically assigned to monitor him the day of the gig, to try to keep him from drinking anything before the gig, because if he, if we could keep him from drinking before the gig, then even though he might be drinking during the gig, he usually could get through it without any serious problems. But this particularly evening he had slipped away from his minder and started in before the show, continued during the show to the point where he was not even able to stand, and was forgetting lyrics and just a disaster. And here are the label, this was our official label showcase, and our lead singer was on his knees. Well, he didn't throw up on stage, but I mean, he did everything else but and slurring words, forgetting words. And so, that did not really impress the record company. And, uh, that probably hastened their decision to not work our record at all, and so, it was technically released. Although it was sort of put out to sub, satisfy the contract, but never, I don't know that they had ever gotten
anything much going for it. So, uh, the lead singer, by the way, the next day insisted that he wasn't drunk. His, uh, guitar player, his, uh, bass player's wife had videoed the whole event. And even after seeing the video, he still insisted he wasn't drunk, even though after the show, he had gone across the street to Cal Roberts' house and continued to drink. Then was caught on the way home and slapped with a DUI and put in jail. But he insisted he wasn't drunk during the show. This is, sure. So, uh, we, uh, we were, uh, like the old boll weevil song, we were then looking for a home. And, uh, this, we had the advantage of having this finished record, which even though it belonged to Capitol, they allowed us to use it as a shopping, to shop with other labels, to show 'em what we could do. But by then, uh, it was pretty much decided that the band was too rock for country. Which today, would be hysterically funny. Uh, but back then, you know, and they were really a rock band, but they knew country stuff, too. Paul's, uh, the lead singer's brother had been a very successful songwriter who wrote "Is Anybody Going to San Antone," and some other hits. And we had pretty good country songs, and they could turn around and do a Hank Williams song as good as anyone. And then follow that with, uh, a War song. Uh, not a War, uh, uh, a battle song, but the group War. They could do something from them, and then they would do "Blister in the Sun" from the Violent Femmes, and then they'd turn around and do a Bill Monroe instrumental. And, I mean, it was just staggering the breadth of their repertoire and their ability to pull all these different types of music and, and be absolutely terrific doing it. But, uh, the word had gotten around, of course, that we had serious alcohol issues with the front man, and a couple of the others were not far behind. And we, I wasn't able to get anything going on for 'em, nothing. And so, that whole thing just sort of petered out. And in the middle of all that, David decided that he wanted to go into the early dulcimers and had developed a real interest in digging up dulcimers from bygone days, and collecting them, and playing them, and making records, solo records with these old instruments, and playing really old songs. And so, that was not a course I was interested in pursuing, so David and, and I parted company. And shortly after that, the, when I couldn't get The Cactus Brothers another deal, oh, oh, well, I had gotten actually both albums released overseas, in England and Europe. The first through EMI, Capitol's parent company who put it out over there, who put the first album out. It was just called The Cactus Brothers. And, uh, they put that out and did a pretty crappy job, actually. But at least it had gotten out over there. And so, the second album, I received permission from the label to shop it to another record company or anywhere else I could find. And so, I got a record label called Demon to take on the second album and put it out. And they did. They sold as much in a week as Capitol had sold in 5 months on the first album. And they went ahead and I think they sold five or six thousand, which, at the time, was pretty good over in Europe. And we had, uh, made the first album at what I call Western Surrealism on the cover. We had found an artist that David Schnaufer had actually found, Mack White, who lived in Austin, who had done these, uh, comic books that were really, that were, uh, a little bit on the, uh, rough and raw side in terms of the content, but he was a fabulous graphic artist and, uh, he had this image of Billy the Kid with a third eye in the middle of his forehead and that was against the background of flying buffalos and rattle snakes and a western setting and it was really striking and unusual and unique and so that became the cover of the first album and they, he created a comic book for Cactus Comics, and so when the label did put the record out we had a comic book for 'em and we had this bizarre front cover and it was really unique and different but I guess too different and then the label backed away. That was the first album. The second album we had a more standard picture of the band on the front. So Western Surrealism went right over everyone's head just like Steve Earle's songs at the Epic party when we tried to get the label to pay attention and, uh. So that, that
chapter ended about, by now we've worked our way up to, I think, around '93 or '94 when it just went away. There wasn't really any reason to keep going if without a label the band couldn't, uh, you know, when you got seven people in a band, that's a lot of mouths to feed, and, uh, we were playing local clubs within a 300 or 400 mile radius every weekend and playing locally but it wasn't enough money to really keep going and we, without any boost from the record company, it just sort of petered out so to speak and so that was my third and fourth management attempts and, uh, yet to hit the pot of gold but bloody but unbowed I continued in the management world. In, uh, let's see, '90, probably around '95 or so, a woman that I had gotten to know named Kimber Clayton came to me, no this was '96 I think, at any rate, Kimber and I had known each other. She was a really good looking, very, very talented on stage artist and she had a deal with Curb Records and her manager at the time was a fellow named Joe Meador and he was also managing Ronnie McDowell. For whatever reason, Kimber didn't think that things were working out for her with him or with the label and so she came to me and asked me to manage her and so I decided to have a go at it. I mean this was an artist with a record deal already and I thought, well we can get this train moving. She had already recorded some things for them and that sounded pretty good, but it never did, uh, that never panned out, uh, to any great degree. The label, before I had come along, the label had put a single out and a video, both of which I thought were pretty good, but for whatever reason after 2 weeks they just pulled the plug and they hadn't released anything else for her and so she had come to me hoping that we could, if I could get some momentum back for her and, uh, things just kind of bobbled along a little and, uh, nothing much was happening with Curb and I tried to get a meeting with Mike Curb, who ran the label, and, uh, he lateraled me over to the head of radio promotion, who, um, kind of subtly let me know that, that she wasn't really part of their plan going forward as they say. So, uh, we, uh, decided that, well then, uh, let's see. Then a little, it wasn't much after that they went ahead and released her and just said this isn't happening, we're letting you go and it then took a sa-, I was then shopping her to other labels and at the same time in touch with the legal department for the label in California to get a formal written release from her contract. And this took a year to get what's basically a template with her name put in there and you're out of here, see you later. And I later found out that that was one of, uh, Mike's techniques was hoping that we would sign another deal during that period and then he would jump up waving a contract and they would have to pay him off in order for their deal to work. And, uh, it, so eventually though we did get that, we shopped her around, we couldn't get anything going. She was able to, though, she found a fellow to produce some things for her that were line dance oriented tracks and she developed a show, which basically was based around her putting a live vocal to the tracks and she would go out to these line dance clubs and sing live to these tracks and because she was not only an attractive blonde but also just a dynamite performer, just very personable, very, uh, good stage movements, um, and she would spice it up quite a bit. I mean, you'd think it's a boring kind of show with somebody singing to a bunch of tracks and no band but she was able to make it work and I was able to take some of these tracks and get them licensed in England and to, not to Demon, to a different label called the Hit Label and in Australia, actually. I got licensed projects for, uh, a song that she did called “Jose Cuervo,” which was a remake of the “Jose Cuervo” that was, had been a big hit for, uh, Shelly West, Dotty West's daughter, a few years before. But the version that Kimber did was a lot more high energy and a lot, I thought, better, and so she would go out and we put that out as a single to the dance club. There was actually a circuit of line dance clubs at that time, and, uh, you had a, they had their own little chart and their own little world of tracks and we. We knew the guy who did the charts and she got in top, I think she got to number
2 right in there with all these major label artists and other people. There she was and so that lead
to some bookings around the states and then we eventually got some bookings going for in, uh,
England. And, uh, the same deal. She'd just go out and sing to these tracks and, uh, afterwards
she had developed this fabulous technique of, she would carry a Polaroid around and, uh, would
have her picture made with fans who would come up and buy a CD or a picture. She was selling
glossy pictures and her, uh, CD that we made of the line dance tracks and then she would have
her photograph made with these people and charge $5 and then bam a minute later they'd have
their picture in their hand of her and the fan and, uh, it cost her, excuse me, about a dollar, uh, for
the film. And so, you know, it worked pretty good. Things were bubbling along kind of. Uh, I
should mention too, which I forgot during The Cactus Brother's section, that we made, uh, I
think five different tours of Europe and that to me was the biggest payoff was getting to travel all
over Western Europe in a van driving around and, uh, seeing places, including two different
tours of Norway, which was just mind blowing. It's so gorgeous there and, uh, it was before the
prices had gone through the roof like they have now. And, uh, I would have to be the driver or
the navigator because no person in the van had any skill at reading a map and figuring out how to
get from point A to point B which was sort of like God you guys went to school, right? But they
didn't, eh, that part didn't stick, so as a result I got to be in the front seat all the time and saw a lot
more of the scenery than people in the backseat in the far back, which was. It was a splitter van,
which had a bunch of, all our gear in the far back and then two rows of seats. The second row
without any windows and all. Let's see, the second row you could see a few things, the third row
was just totally empty. By this time, David had departed the band and so we were a six piece
instead of seven. Uh, so back to Kimber, we did a couple of different tours of Europe and, uh,
made, uh, “Jose Cuervo” became a big hit within that little community of line dance people.
And, uh, I never could get, uh, the makers of that tequila, of Jose Cuervo, to pay any attention to
it because they seem to think that country people didn't drink tequila, only rich New York
sophisticates drank tequila. Their advertising agency being in New York and they didn't want to
hear about somebody singing country, but it wasn't a country track at all, it was a rockin’ line
dance sort of track. So, uh, that did reasonably well and established her in that world and gave
her a chance to make some money. During her period with Curb, she had also been signed to
their publishing company and was getting a draw of, I think, $700 a week even though she didn't
write songs, and part of that was due to Mike Curb's generosity who had told her father, who
died suddenly of a, he had a brain tumor. The father was a professional gambler and one day he
realized that he had, he was not keeping any records in paper, obviously, being gambling
booking being illegal, everything was in his head and one day he realized he had forgotten
several bets and something and went to the doctor and they said oh you have a brain tumor and
within six months he was bam, gone. Kimber's mother had gone on and married someone else
and they weren't getting along particularly well and all of a sudden her dad was gone so Mike
had made a deathbed promise to her dad to take care of her, which he did for several years,
financially, even though the record part didn't work out, but he was paying her, she was making
this money, and then when the deal ended, so did the publishing draw. So she was starting to
make a pretty good living doing these line dance things and then, uh, we did a, Steve Keller was
the name of her friend who was producing her, and Steve, uh, had, uh, decided that we should do
a remake, er, he and Kimber decided to do a remake of, uh, “Addicted to Love,” the Robert
Palmer huge pop hit and they did and it was all gussied up with, you know, sp, uh, the things that
you needed for line dance tracks. And we would have, uh, one of the line dance choreographers
create a dance for each of these songs and “Jose Cuervo” had its own dance and “Addicted to
“Addicted to Love” had its own dance and it did about the same, a little bit less successful than “Jose Cuervo” because we were in these country line dance clubs and they weren’t quite as familiar with “Addicted to Love” than they had been with “Jose Cuervo,” but it still did well enough to where she could continue to go around and play the line dance circuit. But it was, uh, the line dance thing in America kind of, you know, it launched with Billy Ray Cyrus and “Achy Breaky Heart” and then it did pretty well for a few years. Overseas it was very interesting because some countries it stuck and some it didn’t. It went through Ireland in maybe 6 months from start to then out the door. In England it became popular and stayed that way for a while. In the Netherlands it became popular and stayed that way. In Germany it did nothing and so forth. Then in Australia it was sort of almost like, um, Ireland in that it swept in and then it was swept out within a short period of time, so the license deals we had made in those countries didn’t, uh, lead to anything more. So, uh, and she got on some compilation records as a result of all that and that was a little income for her too, but the, the whole line dance thing sort of started to peter out after a few years and the number of clubs that were featuring line dancing at some point or another during every week started to fade away and they would just transfer to DJs playing records. And over in, uh, in England it, uh, it started to have a hard time because the clubs that would host the line dance evenings realized that their audience was mainly upper demographic people, maybe 40 to 60, who would come to the club and might buy one drink maybe. A lot of them would smuggle in water and so they would be not spending a dime in the club for food or beverage. So the club was, the clubs gradually shrunk down because of that, the line dance people didn't want to spend any money and so the clubs realized that they could do better with something else and so that kind of started to go away. Uh, and we didn't really have anything much else to fall back on. We weren't selling enough of the little EPs we would make from these two singles, “Jose Cuervo” and “Addicted to Love,” and at the same time, about ‘96 when I started with Kimber I had found Kasey Chambers down in Australia, which I found through, uh, a fellow who had licensed David's record. May- his name was Laurie Dunn and he had a label called Massive Records. And Laurie had licensed, uh, David's record and then never released it or anything, but he had paid the, paid the money to license the tracks for Australia for, we handpicked a dozen tracks and put it out and we wanted to call it One Man, Two Hands, Four Wires but that didn't happen, but meanwhile he was feeding me various releases that, that, uh, they had put out on another artist, one of which was a group called The Dead Ringer Band, who had an album called Home Fires and, uh, I heard that and I was driving in my car when I heard it and I'm just, almost had to stop to pull over, it was, it just really hit me and it turned out The Dead Ringer Band was a father, mother, sister and brother, four, you know, their two children and dad played the guitar and mom played the bass and Nash Chambers, the son, played the drums and Kasey Chambers, the daughter, was the singer. And, uh, they had this sound that to me sounded like a modern day Carter family. It was just gorgeous stuff. Home, homemade almost. Well it was homemade recordings, very, very, uh, unsophisticated in terms of Nashville, but there was a, Kasey had this sort of Tammy Wynette catch in her voice and had this melancholy sound and she was just 19 at the time but they had spent, I guess by then, 4 or 5 years beating, beating up the road. Uh, up until the kid, the kids, when, when Kasey was literally a babe in arms and Nash was 2 years old, the family had moved from South Australia to the Nullarbor Plain where they made a living 8 or 9 months out of the year when you could actually survive out there, and they had made their living hunting foxes, which entailed driving around all night in a Toyota Land Cruiser with a hole sawed in the roof and daddy would stand up in the front seat while someone else would drive and they had a spotlight and they would shine the spotlight around and they'd pick up a
foxes' eyes and that would freeze the fox briefly and daddy would bang him. And he, they got to where they could bring home 30 or 40 foxes a night. You had to hit them in the eye or the head because the fox fur was what they were after. And, uh, they would bag them at 300 yards, which is just unbelievable to be able to hit a small fox's head from that distance with a, with a rifle. And, uh, then they would bring the foxes home, skin them and stretch them out to dry and after the end of the season, bring them in to the market and sell them. Fox fur was, at the time, uh, in some demand. In the hottest months of the year they would go back to their little home in Mount Gambier, South Australia, where they were raised in a fishing village and they would be itinerant fishermen for 3 months. And it just fascinated me that anyone could, A) live on the Nullarbor Plain, which is an area about the size of Colorado, where maybe 300 people lived. Uh, there's no water, uh, there was, uh, no vegetation other than little greenish blue spine effect bushes, no trees, Nullarbor coming from that Latin, and, uh, red dirt and this incredibly blue sky and the horizon from here to there just no mountains or hills or anything, you could, it was a 360 degree panorama of this bluish greenish bushes, red dirt and blue sky. They had lived there in this area for 8 months out of the year for something like 8 or 9 years and at the end of that, the, uh, fox fur market dried up for whatever reason and, uh, they went to hunting rabbits which entail, which they were selling of course for the meat, but that, that entailed having to have a refrigerated trailer to drag around behind them, which, uh, were able to somehow do that for a year or two. They would get supplied by a thing called the tea and sugar train, which once a week, the train ran every day up in the northern part of, this is in, uh, the middle of Australia, in the center of Australia and the southern part. In the very top of the Nullarbor this train would run from across the entire continent, eventually getting to Perth and once a week instead of it being a passenger train, it would be tricked out to be a grocery store and they would go up and meet the train at one of these spots where it would stop and buy whatever fruit and other things that they couldn't get. I mean, they had enough meat, they were able to hunt for most of their food but they'd also have to get barrels of water and oil for the truck and other staples. So I found the whole idea fascinating and, uh, the, their music just flipped me out, so I started faxing it and calling and talking to them and eventually after 4 years of effort, uh, and six or seven trips to Australia, I was able to finally get a record deal for them in the States, which, uh, we had had two close calls. One of which was with, uh, a record label that Herb Alpert and Jerry Moss had started a county division of A&M Records called Alamo Sounds. And, uh, the fellow running it in Nashville, Garth Fundus, who had been an engineer at Jack’s Tracks and worked with Alan and he preceded Mark Miller and then he eventually became Don Williams' engineer and then producer and was also producing, I think, Trisha Yearwood. He got very interested, he wanted to sign them but then, uh, Alamo Sounds was not doing very good country wise. They had had two acts signed before we came along and before we could get that deal done they discontinued Alamo Sounds in Nashville. The label kept on going and it mainly was famous for getting, uh, Garbage, uh, the band. Uh, they made a licensed deal through someone in England who had signed Garbage for Europe, but Alamo Sounds was able to make a deal to license the tracks back into the United States. So they put their resources into that and pulled the plug on the country label. Then I got Atlantic Records interested, who at that time was run by Rick Blackburn, my old buddy from CBS and he got interested in doing them. By this time the band had done two additional records and, uh, again for Massive Records and Rick wanted to license that but he and the man running Massive were never able to agree on, on a deal, so that went away, and I kept plugging away. None of this for any money, of course, my usual modus operandi was oh, our money will come later, I'll get it done. It just dragged on and on and on and I was about ready to
give up. By this time, Bill and Diane, the parents, had split up and they began to focus on, Nash and Kasey began to focus on making a solo record with her, which, I felt would happen anyway because even though Bill was a really good guitar player and a really good dobro player, um, he wasn't, he was a good singer, but not a great one, but she was world class. And she, I felt, was their ticket anyway, so this evolved into the Kasey Chambers project instead of Dead Ringer Band after the, we had missed out on Alamo sounds in Atlantic. So, I had early on sort of planted a seed with EMI in Australia about Kasey as an artist and had talked to some people there a couple of times to see about maybe keeping an eye on this and maybe this will develop. So, uh, eventually, and it, it did in fact develop. Nash had made a record with Kasey, it was pretty much low fi, almost amateur production, but it showcased her voice and songs very well, and so EMI in Australia decided that they would, uh, take her on and the fellow running EMI was named Tony Harlow, he became enamored of the whole sound and the idea and said look we can, we can take this and we're going to work it with our EMI people and also our sister label, Virgin. We're going to have both of the label's promo people hammering it pop radio to try to get something going on. There wasn't any country radio in Australia to speak of that you could have any sort of sales impact from, but you could if you got something crossed over into pop, which had never happened in Australia to any degree at all, except for Slim Dusty, who was, of course, sort of the Johnny Cash of Australia and who had signed with EMI records in 1950 or something and was there throughout his entire career and did over 100 albums and it sort of transcended genres to become a pu, uh, just a well-known public figure in Australia. And he had sort of crossed over into the pop world with a song called “Pub with No Beer,” which, uh, is, it's nothing, something about, there's nothing so sad as a pub with no beer, which yes, would be. Uh, and, uh, he had never gotten a U.S. deal though he had been confined pretty much all to Australia. There was another fellow named James Blundell, or James Blundel, who had gotten a deal with Capital in America but nothing developed out of it. He had a couple of singles and a video but no album release. And, uh, Keith Urban was just starting to get going in America at that time, this would have been by then, by now it was 2000. And, uh, every label in Nashville had pretty much said well this girl's pretty good and production sounds like a demo, but get her to move up here and we'll have her co-write and we'll get a producer and I was saying, well, you know this, what you are calling a demo, is the masters for her record that's going to be released by a major label in Australia in a few months and I kind of don't think she's going to want to set up shop up here and start all over. And, uh, besides no one offered any incentive to do it other than well we'll have her co-write and I didn't want her to be co-writing other than maybe as an exercise in seeing how it was done in Nashville, but I did want her to get a producer that knew what they were doing and wasn't learning on the, on her expense, even though it was her brother. So, uh, I finally ran into a woman named Evelyn Shriver and her partner in the business, Susan Nadler, who had, uh, become installed as the two top dogs for Elektra, um, for Asylum Records, part of the Warner Brothers family, and they flipped out over Kasey like I had and so eventually they signed her to Asylum Records through Warner Brothers. Uh, all of this is in a book I wrote called Red Desert Sky, my second book, third book, the second being Nashville Music City USA, the first the Townes Van Zandt songbook, but Red Desert Sky was the, uh, subtitle, the Amazing Adventures of the Chambers Family and it was about their lives on the Nullarbor and all of their work and all of the records and all of the things that happened up to 2000 at and it sort of ended with the record deal being signed and the, and it was part of their life story and part of the quest for an American label and all of the things that went on in the 4 years that I had been hustling and trying to get something happening for them. So, uh, then we went to lunch one day with
Susan and Evelyn, this was before the album was released and Nash announced that they were going to go and move to Warner Brothers in LA so that they would work them in the triple A and Americana fields and, I mean, I was, I was so stunned I couldn't even talk. It was probably the biggest boneheaded move I've run across in my entire music history because, first of all that means they were shitting all over the people that had signed them. Second, it was totally ridiculous because Asylum would have worked the records in those markets anyway as a matter of course. Neither of those two markets triple A and Americana had a top end that would, uh, be anywhere near what you can sell as a country artist. A country artist at that time, a big one could sell, four, five, six, seven million records. Americana would be lucky to sell 15,000 and triple A would maybe a little more and it was a dying format at the time. It was kind of vague. So, uh, after a while, I was given my walking papers and, uh, I had hustled up a fellow named Gary Rabin to manage them in Australia because Tony Harlow at EMI had come to me and said we need a manager down here, Nash is managing them down there and he didn't know anything about management and didn't have very good people skills and so they wanted an actual manager and Gary had managed a fellow named Ross Wilson, who had been a very, very big Australian rock act and he was developing an act called the Screaming Jets and, uh, I wound up with him after I had tried to get a fellow named Michael Browning interested, and Michael had been for many years the manager of AC/DC and had overseen their rise to global prominence and I wanted a manager that knew the world market and knew how to, you know, how to make it happen outside of Australia because Australia has got like 22 million people and so if you sell 50,000 records down there you're a huge act whereas, uh, if you could crack out of Australia and into America and the world, you could sell millions of albums and I had sort of mentally pictured Kasey as being someone like a Joni Mitchell or maybe a John Prine that was an iconic, uh, not iconic, but iconoclastic singer-songwriter who could develop a niche big enough to where they could be a world artist and have a song cut maybe here or there and so I, Gary had been looking after them in Australia and I had gotten a fellow named Paul Conroy that ran Virgin Records in Europe to take her on and not ever have to go through EMI in Europe because of the sorry job they had done with The Cactus Brothers and Paul was a much admired and successful and hip record label executive who's had a lot more on the ball than anyone over at EMI. So he had signed her for Europe and Gary was gonna then help, help out with Europe and Australia and I would handle her in America and Gary would come and help out here too. So we had all this set up in advance of the record's release in America and, uh, then they, they fired me, so that Nash could take over management, the brother. And a, a little while after that, they fired Gary and so I said well you know I've worked for you for 4 years and gotten you this record deal, I got them a booking agency and so on and so forth and, uh, where's the money. They had been very nice about thanking me when they fired me but no mention was made of any payment whatsoever. I also shopped them a publishing deal and had Madonna's publishing company interested and they had put an offer of $100,000.00 advance on the table, which they just rejected out of hand. Did not even counter because they were sure they could make a deal involving what Nash calls stupid money, you know, a ridiculous amount of money, which I thought $100,000.00 was pretty good and I figured we could ease 'em up to a hundred and a half maybe, upfront, and I'd be entitled to 15 percent of that, so it would really be a nice thing, but they blew that off. And so when the album did come out in the states they had no publisher and, uh, they had lateraled themselves over to Warner Brothers in LA and then fired their manager and so the label sort of kind of backed away a little. They, up to that point, they were gung-ho, but when they fired me and then fired, uh, Gary later, the labels kind of diverted the resources they had planned to put behind her
into other areas and the whole thing just sort of never really happened in America, but meanwhile, that first album did very well in Australia. EMI and Virgin had been banging away at the pop radio people but had had nothing happening. But the second album, there was a song there called “Not Pretty Enough” that had been on the first rec, that she wrote right at the end of the recording of the first album and really was of a piece and should have probably gone on the first album but it didn't because it came in too late so it wound up on the second album and that record, Not Pretty Enough, and the fact that she had gone to the Australian Country Awards and won three or four awards and she had, uh, piercings and tats and earrings, nine earrings in her ear and looked like a rock and roll refugee and here she was sweeping the County Awards and so the media went ballistic over that and then “Not Pretty Enough” was a song, uh, that put her over the top down there and propelled that album to something like six times platinum. Platinum being I think 75, 70,000 albums and gold being 35,000 and she sold over half a million basically 'cause that single pushed her into pop radio and all the media that came with her winning the awards and getting a U.S. deal and all of that and Warners worked really hard on cracking po- on U.S. radio on that song but they fell just a little short. That was sort of when they kind of began to lose interest and I think along about that time they had already fired me and then they had fired Gary and besides that Nash was making all the decisions even though he wasn't technically the manager. And they refused to sign any deals with anyone so I should have backed away early on when they refused to sign any sort of deal. We had tried to negotiate it and one of the sticking points had been I felt I would be, should be entitled to a small percent of their Australian earnings because her Australian profile had risen dramatically due to the fact that American labels were interested in her and they didn't want to go along with that and they had in fact not signed a record deal with Massive Records who had put out four or five albums by then on them and that one eventually got into litigation and finally Laurie Dunn that ran Massive just got tired of it and said all right, get out of here. Here, here's your lease. Even though they didn't have a deal, they had been functioning as if they were on the label and so that sort of constituted of like a, uh, common law marriage so to speak. So, uh, I did get a book at least out of that and, uh, I had developed contacts in those seven trips to Australia that helped me with my export business, which started in 1996, the same time I found, uh, Kasey, I had gone to MIDEM. This is about the fourth or fifth time I had gone and I was playing my journalism card to MIDEM and getting free admission to the conference and also several times I actually got a free room out of the deal. Had to pay my own airfare, but, uh, I got a p-, room and, uh, got my lodging and my admittance to the conference, which was a pretty hefty fee just to walk in the door there. At its peak they had over 10,000 registrants at MIDEM and this was in ‘96, roughly, about when the, when they were at their zenith. And every time I would go I would gather up a bunch of CDs and things from Nashville artists that I liked and friends and take them over there and just sort of hand them out willy-nilly just to help them get their records into the hands of people that might could do something about it in Europe or, uh, Japan or Australia. So, uh, the Nashville contingent had a, a stand, which we would call a booth at MIDEM and the, this fellow came up to me after, uh, I think the second or third day, MIDEM usually ran four to five days, and said, uh, that record you give me, that Marianne Osiel, I want 100. And I thought, well. So, uh, it turned out this gentleman was named Franco Ratti, R-A-T-T-I, who was one of the leading independent record label and distributors in all of Europe. He was based in Milan, Italy. And so I went back to Nashville and eventually got a hold of Marianne and bought the CDs from her, sold them to Franco, shipped them out and thought well this is pretty cool. So I started selling a few more things to him and then, uh, developed into selling to another account which was in Japan called
Bluegrass and Other Music. And next came a man from Norway, Roald Larsen, who had a company called Rocade. So I was buying things in America and shipping them out to these, these folks and shipping overseas was not new to me. I had, always tried to get things happening for my artists in other countries. So I had been basically just sending them Steve Earle records or Cactus Brothers records or Kimber Clayton records or David Schnaufer Dulcimer records and in fact BOM that became Roots Music Exporters, what I call this new enterprise. Uh, I had been selling, uh, a few things of David's to BOM dating back to from the late '80s. So in '96 I actually just morphed it into a commercial enterprise with my, uh, modus operandi being to try to be a one stop shop for hard to find things. If you were in a foreign country and you couldn't buy something through what then were three or four big distributors, if they weren't handling that particular thing then you had to track them down and it was an arduous process first of all just to find out who had the record and then to enter into some sort of negotiations and then to send the money and hope the artist actually was able to get them in a box and fill out the proper paperwork for exporting and get it over to them so my goal was to be a one stop shop for the hard to find things and, uh, so that's what I became. And originally I thought I would do it just for people in Nashville but I quickly found that people in Europe, particularly, their idea of country music was actual country music with steel guitars and fiddles and country songs and not all this rocked and popped up elements. So, um, a lot of those artists by then had been shucked off by major labels and, uh, I was able to start building a network with the artists and going to them directly and my, my goal was to buy from the artist directly rather than a distributor or a record label. That being, my thought was I can get them cheaper that way plus I would settle all accounts within a week or 10 days of getting the product in to Nashville. I would do all the external part of shipping it. Pack it, ship it, fill out the paperwork, make sure it got through customs and all of that and pay them off within 10 days and this was sort of unheard of in the record business. First of all, if you got paid at all by a distributor, it would be months and you would get a comprehensive statement that was very difficult to understand and they would always have hold back money for reserve this or defective this or whatever and you never get paid as much as you should have and you would have to wait forever to get it. So the idea of getting paid right away was appealing and I was able to get a really good wholesale price and I added a fellow down in Australia and a couple more accounts here and there and then, uh, Garth Brooks made a deal with Wal-Mart to sell his records exclusively through Wal-Mart stores. This was, uh, 2005, I think. I had been doing my little export thing for a while but it hadn't, uh, really taken off until I got into the whole concept of retail exclusives with Garth. Eventually that, he started out with, um, a box set, excuse me, uh, with five or six CDs in it, and, uh, then he put out The Entertainer, which was a 10 box with six DVDs in it at ridiculously low prices because by then he had gotten out of his deal with Capitol. He had basically bought his way out, I guess and he owned every master of every bit of music he'd ever recorded and I'm not sure any other artist could even say that, that they own everything, lock, stock and barrel, maybe. Uh, The Beatles don't, The Rolling Stones don't, Bob Dylan doesn't, uh, but Garth owned everything so he was able to be his own record company, Pearl Records. And Pearl Records made this deal with Wal-Mart and I eventually started buying them off the shelf at Wal-Mart and shipping them mainly to Australian and Germany and, uh, England. And the, the numbers then just went through the roof. I mean I had been maybe doing 1,000 pieces a month and all of a sudden I was doing 3,000 or 4,000 pieces a month, 5,000 pieces a month, each one carrying a nice pay day for me. You can only knock it up so much without losing your customers but I was making a tidy profit per item and I was shipping it for them and, uh, filling out all of the customs paperwork
and at one point it reached really the pallet load stage. I was shipping, shipping several thousand pieces at a time and, uh, down to Australia mainly for Garth 'cause Garth made one little world tour at the height of his first round of being a famous artist and one of the places he had gone was Australia so he had a following there and his records weren't being released. There wasn't any other way to get his music other than through me or somebody else that would buy them from Wal-Mart and I quickly developed a relationship with the regional manager for Anderson Merchandising that stocked all the Wal-Mart stores with books, records, DVDs, magazines, electronic equipment and such. So I was able to actually set it up to where I would buy them direct from Anderson and they would ship them from Amarillo Warehouse right to me. I would send them a wire for the, you know, for the goods and there'd be their stuff. That went on for a while and then they, Wal-Mart decided they wanted me to sell them, to come to their store and buy them through there so they can bill it rather than Anderson, so I did that. And in about 2008 or 2009 Prince made a deal with, uh, Target, where he would put out Lotus Flower 3 with Target being the only place to get it and he did that and, uh, that, that was three albums, two of his and one of his then girlfriend who couldn't sing for anything, but any rate, it was $12.00 for three CDs and nice package, really brilliantly put together and, uh, so. Uh, the man at Target told me that there wasn't going to be any foreign release. Apparently part of their deal with Prince was that they had the worldwide rights even though Target doesn't have stores very many places, Canada and the U.S., and, uh, the big distributor in LA at the time began buying from me because they only had something like two target stores in LA and I had 11 in Nashville and originally it was being shipped directly from Target headquarters, uh, to the store nearest us. The store would order them and they would ship them to there and I'd just go over and buy them, put them in the car and haul them off. And, uh, the, at the height of that we, uh, went over to Target one day with my wife and I, both of our cars and bought 8,000 of these in one fell swoop. Filled up both cars with boxes and boxes and boxes of Prince CDs. We only had to drive a mile and a half, which was a good thing because the entire backseat, trunk and front seat were full of Prince. And, uh, when you're buying at that volume, you kind of have exhausted your credit card limits even though I had two different Target accounts, both of which were giving me a 5 percent discount and I had a sales tax waiver, uh, resale license from the state, but even with all of that, this was way beyond. You know, I put as much as I could on my, uh, Target cards, but in the end I had to give them a check for $95,800.00 and at the customer service counter and you can well imagine the, the k, doing that and what. It was another almost an hour for them to make the calls to headquarters, the calls to the bank, the calls everywhere to make sure that, you know, this first of all they could do this, second that the check was good and all of that, so, um, off we went. And, uh, at the end of the day we had sold in about 2 months out of my house, we sold something like 52,000 Prince albums and eventually we accounted for about 10 percent of the total sales for that album, just one guy out of his house in Nashville of all places selling Prince by the bucket load. And at some point Prince's people put the kabash on the bulk buying process. I think they still had hopes of making an overseas deal and they could see what was going on. So I went to my guy at the Target store near me where I was buying them and said, well what are we going to do and he said, look, here's what you do. You just go around and you clean out all the Prince albums from the shelves at every Target Store in Nashville and there were 12. And that triggers and automatic reorder, so a week later they'll be restocked, go around, buy them all up again and so that was what we did. We eventually, to keep up with demand we had to start going to Knoxville and Memphis and Jackson, buying out of Louisville, and then when I came to visit in Houston I'd make the rounds of a couple Target stores here and then the store manager at
Target that was helping us in all of this said, well, you know, I came here from Atlanta and I can set you up with stores in Atlanta, look up, see who has the most, set you up with them and you just walk into the store, hand them your tax exempt and your credit card and haul off all they have on their shelves without even having to go to the shelves and load them into the cart. So I went to Atlanta for a weekend and hit 12 stores and came back with 5,000 more Prince CDs. Part of the 52,000 came out of Atlanta and so in the end of the day I think we had bought Prince CDs in seven states and I had learned early on that a Tennessee Department of Revenue resale certificate had reciprocity with all other Target stores so I was never having to pay any sales tax and then I was getting a 5 percent discount because of the Red Card. So, you know, we, uh, between Prince and Garth we paid off the mortgage on our house about 7 years early and, uh, it was a wonderful thing, uh, but that was also kind of where it, that was the peak and then the retail exclusive angle sort of started to fade. Artists realized that if they did a retail exclusive with Target then they would piss off every other retailer selling the record and Target and Wal-Mart and Best Buy were the three main ones that were doing these programs realized that there's only so many artists that have the bulk sales potential that that's, that would do this, that would be worth doing it with and, uh, then the artists got wise and for instance when Kiss brought out Sonic Boom, they licensed it overseas but it took them a month for all that to happen and so I was able to sell I think 7,000 pieces of Sonic Boom overseas before they made a license deal and once they did that you can't import in most countries an album from overseas if it's also available through a company in that area and Prince made a license, I mean, uh, Kiss made a license deal with Sony. So Sony has Sony, Paulens, I mean, Sony Netherlands, Sony England, Sony Norway, Sony Australia and so forth. So, that kind of petered out and then it devolved into an exclusive would just mean you got extra tracks that you couldn't get on the normal version or you might have some video attached or it might be, uh, an interview or something, something that would make it different. For Wal-Mart's version would have one thing and Target would have another and the red, general records store would have yet another. So then along with all of that was the whole problem of hard goods, CDs and DVDs and LPs being eaten alive by streaming and so CDs and all these hard goods sales started to sink from about 2009 and just sort of, I lost about 40 percent of my volume the first year and then it just kept trickling down and then the last couple of years when streaming really caught on it's just gone into the toilet and, uh, if I sell 1,000 pieces in a month now it's a hell of a month and I don't even know if I'll get there in the fourth quarter. So that little, uh, gambit, sort of, I'm afraid, run its course. For Wal-Mart's version would have one thing and Target would have another and the red, general records store would have yet another. So then along with all of that was the whole problem of hard goods, CDs and DVDs and LPs being eaten alive by streaming and so CDs and all these hard goods sales started to sink from about 2009 and just sort of, I lost about 40 percent of my volume the first year and then it just kept trickling down and then the last couple of years when streaming really caught on it's just gone into the toilet and, uh, if I sell 1,000 pieces in a month now it's a hell of a month and I don't even know if I'll get there in the fourth quarter. So that little, uh, gambit, sort of, I'm afraid, run its course. It had, I had a good 22 years at it, 21 and I helped a lot of people out because at the same time we were doing the retail thing, we were finding independent artists and picking up their stuff directly and selling that and people like Moe Bandy and Mark Chestnutt, who were off major labels but Gene Watson, a Houston guy, we sold and still sell a whole lot of Gene Watson because people know who he is, he sings real country music and, uh, I can go over to his office and buy them from his manager for wholesale price and put $2.00 or $3.00 on it and ship it out to beat the band. There's still a little business but it's just shriveled up and I don't know if I'll keep, keep the whole thing going. I've also had an Amazon separate company that I call Lomax Global Music that we, uh, had been selling and that's mainly single copies going to U.S. consumers. A few foreign consumers but very few because the ship costs for one item is prohibitive now. A single CD will run you $9.36, the cheapest method. I can't use my huge FedEx discount unless I can get up to, uh, 5 kilos or 11 pounds worth of ship weight and then this special program kicks in where I can get discounts sometimes up to 80 percent off of, uh, uh, the standard rate. But for one piece, an album, one album would be about $15.00 just for an al, just for the shipping because it weighs close to a
pound. So the Amazon thing has also been affected by streaming. Of course Amazon is in on the thick of the streaming part too, but as far as the hard goods section of, of my business goes with Lomax Global Music here and Roots Music Exporters here at the, the volume is just shriveled. Uh, I'm probably going to finish the year at about 8 percent of the revenue that I was pulling in in 2009 and it's almost as hard to sell that 8 percent revenue as it is to sell 100 percent because you're still having to scour all this stuff up, get it, pay for it, box it, ship it. So I don't know if I'm gonna pull the plug on that or not. If I have a really good fourth quarter, which so far it doesn't look like it's gonna be, um, then I'll keep going but otherwise I may just try to get somebody to take it over. You can't really sell it now because of the streaming issue and the, the revenue when you sell somebody your, uh, your figures and they see this downward trend and know that there's really CDs and DVDs aren't coming back, I don't think, except maybe as a niche thing like LPs have come back but they're still a tiny, tiny fraction of the total market, so, there goes that one.

Norie Guthrie: Could you tell me a bit about the Demon Edsel?

John Lomax III: I became aware of Demon Records, oh golly, probably in the ‘80s. It was a label formed by Elvis Costello, his manager, Jake Riviera, a man named James Bedbrook, and, um, a couple of more fellows, I believe, in England, and, uh, they were the label that issued records by Nick Lowe and a lot of other such artists, but they also had a, uh, reissue section that went under the name of Edsel Records. Then they had even one additional reissue section called Diablo. So, uh, I had met this gentleman named Pete Macklin, M-A-C-K-L-I-N, at, uh, I believe one of the MIDEMs, uh, conferences that I attended and at some point in, I guess, ‘90, early ‘96 or late ‘95 he contacted me asking me about finding a particular record label that had operated in Nashville and so I helped chase that down and then we, uh, discussed a situation where I would be the U.S. A & R representative for Demon, uh, and help chase things down and also create compilations and also make suggestions for albums to reissue from them. This was back in the day when a lot of these, a lot of records would be released in the U.S. and wouldn't necessarily be issued a license for use overseas and imports were, um, a tedious process. So I agreed in ‘96 to be the Demon A & R representative for the U.S. and started, uh, creating packages for, uh, for them to reissue in, in, uh, Europe, and then they also had connections with associated labels or relationships, I should say, with labels in Japan and Australia. So the first project I created was the, to take the first two Don Williams albums, which were called *Don Williams Volume 1* and *Don Williams Volume 2*, which had come out on JMI Records with Jack Clement, and my, uh, but were never, were not available anywhere as a package of two albums. You could buy either one in the U.S. but not together, and I wanted to get Allen Reynolds, who had produced the records, and Don and Jack Clement, whose label they were issued on, to make comments and help with the liner notes. In other words, I would use their quotes in the liner notes. I can't remember, but I don't think I got much of anything out of Don Williams, and Jack was still upset that Don had left JMI and gone off to sign with another label. So I didn't get much out of him, but I really, and I did get some nice germane comments from Allen Reynolds, who this was really at the, the starting point for Allen was, uh, the Don Williams records and, of course, he went on to produce Crystal Gayle and Kathy Mattea, Emmylou Harris, Bobby Bare and then wound up producing all of Garth Brooks’ records up to, uh, about 2013 or 14 when Allen retired. So we issued that, and then I started digging around and, uh, realized that a record that T. Bone Burnett had made under the name J. Henry Burnett and the Fabulous B-52s, which I had really admired. It was great Texas roadhouse rock. He came from Fort Worth, and the cover
The photograph was of him and above him was one of those massive, uh, bombers that flew out of, uh, Carswell Air Force Base there in Fort Worth, and I think there was a picture of him, or a picture of his house, or a house with a yard that was nothing but crushed-up rocks. I thought that was pretty Fort Worth. So we got that reissued, and it had come out I believe on a label that no longer existed, but the, uh, parent company, uh, I believe it was what's now Universal, what was then MCA. I think it may have come out on Uni Records, but at any rate, we got that one out and then, uh, I put together a Mark Chestnutt compilation because, uh, he was about to get released from his major label deal, and they were only too happy to get some income from some of his recordings overseas, and so we put together, I don't know, about 10 or 12 of those, which I have a list, which if I haven't sent you I certainly can send. I thought I had it in my laptop, but it's not there. It's on my desktop. Uh, in the end we did about 50 records, and then I had another 10 or 12 ready to go and by, this was the period of 1996 to 2000, but the, uh, the real, uh, kicker for me was when he said listen, uh, we wanna see if we can get a hold of Huey Meaux, who had a label called Crazy Cajun Records, that operated, uh, out of Houston and, uh, Huey had sort of, had never, uh, licensed much of this stuff at all for anyone. So I set about trying to find Huey and, uh, I believe Huey may have been in the pokey at that point, uh, for his, uh, dallying with young women, women way to young to be dallying with, uh, and, uh, rather, uh, stupidly filming these encounters in which he would give these young girls drugs or alcohol and then, uh, proceed to having various sexual activities, which were filmed and kept in a library in a "secret room" in his offices. Uh, I'm not sure if this had happened already or if it happened, no this had happened, uh, already because the label had told me I was not to have any contact with Huey because he was a pervert and, uh, which was a sad thing that I couldn't have contact with him, in terms of going to find him or, uh, communicating with him, but I did actually have some letters and some correspondence with him. So, uh, what happened was it turned out there was an accountant named Aaron Schechter, and Aaron was doing the business for Huey while Huey was, uh, in custody. And so I connected Aaron with the Demon people and pretty soon they worked out an arrangement for Demon to issue Crazy Cajun recordings under the, um, uh, Edsel imprint. And so then I set about, uh, then Aaron flew to England, to London, with a suitcase full of DAT tapes and, uh, turned those over to Demon, Demon's people, to Pete and in return, uh, came home with some money. I don't know how much, if any, of the money ever actually reached Huey but, uh, that's another story. So we had Crazy Cajun, uh, archives, which they then sent me a massive amount of material, some of which I've sent down here, uh, bi, biographical material, photographs and so forth and, uh, a list of the recordings they had done. A huge, thick folder this big with all of the, uh, the artists. Huey had operated beginning in, uh, the Beaumont area where he was a barber. I think he came from Winnie, Texas right outside of Beaumont, and he was a barber, but he had a, a keen ear for music in terms of finding the music and, uh, he also was very, a very sharp operator who realized that if an artist was released from a major label, it generally took them some time to hook up with another label. So he would rush in and do a quick album while they were a free bird so to speak and, uh, he did this with a, a vast number of artists, uh, Ronnie Milsap and Moe Bandy and, uh, golly a whole, a whole bunch of them, and he had also acquired Delbert McClinton's first record from, uh, Major Bill Smith, who was a similar operator independent operator out of Fort Worth. And so we went, and then he had a, a lot of Louisiana music, Warren Storm, Jimmy Donley, who was a singer/songwriter who had some of Fats Domino's, some of his songs got recorded by Fats Domino and was sort of a, uh, undiscovered treasure. A very good artist and a very good songwriter, but one who had just sort of missed out on grabbing the brass ring and, uh, our job then, once we decided on a record, would be the I
would go through all the recordings, which they would send me on CD, just a blank CD with the recordings, and I had the data already in, uh, on paper. I'd listen to all the, uh, available recordings and then, uh, create a track listing, pick the songs, which there would quite often be several dozen or more, uh, recordings, some of multiple takes, figure out which ones to use, and then do a, uh, track listing and then write liner notes. And so the, the first one, I'm not sure which one came first, but I also wrote a long sort of essay to go with the, uh, liner notes which described the whole history of Crazy Cajun and Huey and how this, uh, fit together in other words. So, um, we, uh, set, and then there would be a section about the particular artist and then there were notes about the, the actual tracks, each one. So it was fairly, fairly substantial liner notes, uh, ba, this was back in the day when the liner notes were a matter of course and, rather than an aberration, which they are today. It's hard to even find albums with liner notes other than reissue projects. So, uh, off we went with the arc-, working through the archives of Huey Meaux's recordings and, uh, pretty early on, I got a hold of my son who had moved from Nashville, where he was living, to Houston to, uh, he went here to high school to Strake Jesuit and then continued living here for a while and then had some other adventures here and there, but I got him involved in writing. He showed a very early, uh, talent for writing. So I got him to write liner notes on some of the artists, and, uh, it sort of was passing the torch in a way, because my father had started my writing, my music writing career when I was in college and had gotten me to do liner notes for a project of his on, I believe it was, uh, Blind Willie Johnson reissues, the fella who's most famous for a song “Dark as the Grave,” but very well known blues man among the blues circle. So I got John Nova hitched up writing liner notes for some of the projects. Uh, I wanted to keep a steady flow, and at the time, I was already, I was in the middle, uh, I had just finished managing The Cactus Brothers and that had sorta died out, but I had just begun with Kasey Chambers and with Kimber Clayton. So I was managing them, writing columns for, uh, magazines all over the place, doing stray bios and other things and felt like I needed some, somebody to help carry, uh, carry the load, which he did a fine job. And, uh, I sort of sectioned out him to do blues things and, uh, some of them were Oscar Perry, who was a songwriter that worked with a lot of, uh, Don Robey acts that came out on Duke Records, not Bobby Bland, but some of the others. Uh, we had, uh, I believe enough tracks for a Dr. John album, so he worked on that one. He worked on Warren Storm and, uh, a number of other ones. Uh, so this was going on. And, of course, Huey is probably most famous for being the gentleman who was managing, well, before he started actual management of this group, he, the English invasion had happened, and he was familiar with a guy named Doug Sahm out of San Antonio, and he had a band called the Sir Douglas Quintet, rather Huey named them the Sir Douglas Quintet hoping to convince people that they were an English act when in reality it was a bunch of people from San Antonio, including Augie Meyers and, uh, I think, uh, maybe Flaco Jimenez may have been involved at the time, but Doug had, uh, achieved a little regional notoriety by that point. But when Huey heard “She's About a Mover” and then suggested they become the Sir Douglas Quintet rather than just Doug Sahm, and then he dressed them in the promo photos with an out, outfits that appeared to be, uh, more English oriented, which was, it was kind of amusing, because everyone in Texas knew them, uh, as being San Antonio folks, and, uh, it was a mixture of, uh, Hispanic and, uh, Anglo musicians. So, uh, we had an enormous wealth of Hu, of Sir Douglas Quintet Doug Sahm material and wound up releasing maybe half a dozen different records of all of that, very little of which had been, uh, available overseas. And Huey's other, uh, main artist was Freddy Fender, and Freddy had had, uh, a number of, a little bit of success, but then had gotten busted for marijuana, I believe it was, and, uh, had to serve some time and kinda
lost all his career momentum. So Huey realized, only he was a wonderful singer, uh, and his actually real name I think was Baldemar Her, Huerta, H-U-E-R-T-A, but Freddy Fender was certainly an easier name to, to have attached to an artist and easy to remember for the fans and last name being the same as the guitar manufacturer. So, um, Huey got, uh, Freddy up to Nashville and took him in the studio and recorded a song called “Before the Next Teardrop Falls” that, uh, written by Ben Peters and Vivian Keith, Vivian being a receptionist at I believe the studio, and she was the one who came up with the title. Ben wrote the song, but he was kind enough to put her in as a cowriter, because she had had the initial inspiration, and that is a fabulous title. And that song had been bouncing around Nashville for, I don't know, maybe 5 to 10 years, and it had other recordings of it, but it never really cracked through. But when Freddy put his wonderful vocal on it and Huey did the production, it became a massive hit, huge, uh, pop and country, and it brought Freddy Fender from obscurity to stardom just basically overnight. And, uh, then he went on to have some other hit records for Huey and then later, uh, for other labels, but that recording put him on the map. Uh, I mentioned Huey as a producer. One of the mus, I asked a musician once about Huey's techniques of production in the studio, and he looked at me and said, well, you know, Huey is a good cheerleader, which basically meant he was an enthusiastic supporter but really didn't know much about music per se. He had no musical training at all and, uh, didn't play an instrument but was a very canny operator and, uh, in fact, wound up geting, uh, publishing on a lot of these tracks that were written by the artists, and Huey would just approach 'em and say, well, I'd like to publish this. Here's X amount of cash right now if you wanna sign 'em over to me, and most of the artists did. I mean, they didn't know what publishing was and, uh, they figured cash in hand was better than money down the road, po, possible money down the road. So, uh, and I think the, uh, the most interesting example of this was that he was listed as the songwriter, he actually, he was buying the publishing and the writing credits, so a lot of these songs came out as if they were written by Huey Meaux, which was kind of amusing. Uh, the, the most example was a Link Davis, Jr. album of fiddle instrumentals, which were credited to Huey as the writer, despite the fact that he knew no music and certainly couldn't have written fiddle instrument, instrumentals if you tied him to a tree. So, uh, this went on, and we, uh, my son I think may have done about a dozen, and I, I farmed out two or three to other writers that I would choose based on their background and their perhaps relationships with some of these artists and figured th, better to have an expert than me and then I would pay them a small amount. I was on a retainer from Demon for, uh, this period, and so I would dip into my retainer to, uh, pay for these liner notes, which never really cost a lot of money. No one got paid a lot of money for liner notes, especially not for a small independent reissue label out of Europe. And, uh, this was a, uh, a really, it was, I was paid very fairly and, uh, in the end created, like I say, somethin' like 50 reissues and had a bunch more ready to go. Some of them were themed various artist packages. Uh, Cra, uh, we started with a Crazy Cajun sampler, which was sort of an overarching, uh, disk that had tracks by a number of different artists that we either had already or were going to put out tracks on. And as we went along, I would revise the Crazy Cajun liner notes, just continually trying to polish it more, adding things that might have occurred during this period, in the interim from when I had first it to 2 or 3 years down the road. I would see that something had happened, and so I would work that in. I would send these track listings and, uh, all the notes off to England, where a fella named Val Jennings was the graphics person at Demon. He would then create the cover layout, do all the graphics and design. They, they had the tracks there, so they would then go back to the DAT masters in my track listing and put the albums together and did a fine job. And, uh, these, uh, sold
reasonably well, some better than others, of course, and, uh, everything was just really bubbling along nicely until about 2000 and, uh, I'm not sure who, but maybe Jake Riviera or maybe Elvis Costello or maybe it was one of the other folks, uh, one of the other owners was Lew Difford, whose, uh, brother was Chris Difford in the band Squeeze. So at any rate, Demon decided that they needed to sell the label, that they wanted to cash out so to speak. So they proceeded to put it on the market, and they made a deal eventually. It took a while, because Demon didn't really have a lot of artists signed direct. They were more licensing projects from various places. So it was sort of complicated because each of the licenses might have different timeframe or different, uh, royalty payments and so on. So it didn't happen overnight, but eventually sold to a French company called The Kingfisher Group, and The Kingfisher Group had acquired all of the, uh, Woolworths department stores, and by 2000, Woolworths in the United States had kinda run its course. It was not at all what it was during the '40s, '50s, and '60s and '70s and '80s, but in England, it was still a very viable retail chain, department stores. And the idea was that Kingfisher would then slam all this Demon Edsel product into the Woolworths stores and then have, you know, a vertically integrated sort of operation. Uh, I'm not sure what happened after that, because, uh, Demon, once Kingfisher took over, they fired everyone on the Demon administrative staff and hired a new guy to do the A&R. That fellow's name was Tony Rounce. He – R-O-U-N-C-E. And Tony was based in England, and, uh, I had sent him an email saying, well, here's the projects that are pending, kinda can you put me in the direction of which ones to finish up, which ones you're most interested in. In other words, do some sort of pecking order, because we had, I had track listings and theme packages and a few artists packages ready, pretty much on the runway ready for takeoff. And in the email that I sent to Tony, he responded by basically tellin' me get lost, you're fired, which I found a little, uh, cold that he couldn't at least pick up the telephone to fire me but just did it in an email and not even a devoted email but in answering my email. So Tony took over, uh, doin' the job that I had been doin' for the 4 years, and, uh, I think they fired him within a matter of months. And then after a while, Kingfisher ran into trouble. The Woolworths stores were not doing very well, and I think they had other things that was, I believe, a French company, and they had other problems going on. So the whole operation kinda came to a screeching halt. And they had made the deal originally with Aaron Schecter, Huey's person, uh, for, they had some sort of performance threshold that Demon would have the license until they hit a certain sales point, but, uh, I don't think they ever really hit that point. The, uh, Kingfisher sold it off to somebody, and I think they're now owned by the BBC. I'm not totally sure of that. But at any rate, the projects that I was working on with Crazy Cajun never, uh, never saw the light of day after the first 50 or so that I did. And, uh, so that was sort of the end of the Demon Edsel, uh, adventure for me. I will have to add my favorite story from, uh, my communications with Huey. Uh, he had let me know through an intermediary that there were multi-tracks on some of this. Uh, some of the projects that he had done, the more recent ones were available on multi-track and therefore could be remixed, maybe disco-fied. Disco was happening then. And, uh, in other words, recreated and re, repurposed perhaps as, uh, so I had been in touch with him in, in prison, sending letters back and forth, and, uh, I might've gotten three or four letters from him. Uh, Demon didn't wanna do that, though, when I brought the subject up. They didn't wanna do, uh, go into multi-tracks and recreate packages. So, uh, Huey, all his letters were in pencil, which I guess in prison, that's all you get. Uh, and all of them had the Cajun spelling of the word the, which was T-E-H, or maybe it was just Huey spelling of the word the. But at any rate, it we, they were highly amusing letters, and they all ended with a plea for me to send him money, uh, for use in prison to buy whatever.
But my favorite one was, uh, Huey had been busted before this incident. I don't know. Maybe 20 years before he had been, uh, busted and put in the pokey for transporting, for the Mann Act, which was transporting a minor across the state line for immoral purposes. So, uh, Huey had, uh, in this particular letter was bemoaning that incarceration and saying that, you know, why are they picking, why were they picking on me? All I did was transport a teenage crack whore across the state line. Who has not? And I just fell out of my chair with that, thinking, well, Huey, probably a few million people haven't done such a thing, but, uh, so that was the Huey Meaux chapter. Uh, the other recollection I have of Huey was, long before all this. I had, uh, run into him at South by Southwest before, uh, maybe in the ‘80s and noticed that we were, we were, we were in the elevator together, and it was, uh, air conditioned as if it were a giant building. I mean, it must have been 60 degrees in the elevator, and Huey was sweating. I thought this is kinda odd. This fellow is sweating when it's just freezing, and he had a, a young woman with him. I'm not sure of her age, but I thought it was just peculiar that everyone else was freezing, and Huey was sweating. And now I kinda think, well, you know, this guy's dallying with underage women and maybe scared of what eventually did, in fact, happen to him, which was detailed in a *Texas Monthly* piece Joe Nick Patoski that described the scene at Huey's office, uh, which, in Sugar Hill Studios, which is still functioning out in, uh, on Brock, B-R-O-C-K, Street, and I believe Beyoncé did some early work there. But, uh, the staff was sitting around the office one day and all of a sudden, it was just like a SWAT team burst in the door, guns drawn, telling everybody to raise up their ar, hands and their, and herding them all into a side office and then guarding them while they went and found what was Huey's secret room that the staff was even unaware of. That was where he wa, he had an actual, uh, it, I don't know what you call it, but a chair or some sort of, uh, device equipped like a woman would see with stirrups when she would go into the doctors for a gynecologi, gynecological exam, and, of course, he had the, uh, walls, I mean, the shelves were covered with his, uh, videos of the various dalliances. And so that was, uh, when he was busted and hauled off to the pokey, and, uh, he was able to get one of the top defense attorneys in Houston. I'm not sure if it was Dick DeGuerin or, or who, but it was a really high-powered lawyer. Huey had stashed away a fair amount of money, I believe. So, uh, the lawyer went to, uh, the various parties and had worked out some sort of arrangement which called for Huey to pay a very stiff fine but serve a very short sentence. Unfortunately, Huey decided he was gonna take it on the lam, and he took off. He jumped bond and went off. And for a while, they didn't know where he was, but, uh, I kinda thought, well, he's probably gone off into the, you know, into the wilds of Louisiana and is holed up somewhere in the swamps, and they'll never find him back there, 'cause no one, he would have connections there, and no one would rat him out. But it turned out, he had gone to Nuevo Laredo and holed up in a Holiday Inn or something, and I think it was maybe on the Mexican side. But at any rate, they had found phone records and tracked him down through phone records and hauled him off. And that was why he actually had to go to prison and spend 3 or 4 years, I think, then a halfway house, and then he was back, but he, uh, never really regained his stature in the music business. He had one last blast with, uh, "Rockin' Sidney" and "Don't You Mess with My Toot Toot" that he got into the middle of. And that was a, another fairly substantial hit, but that was kinda Huey's last hurrah. And I stayed in touch with Pete Macklin. He was just a charming fella. He, he ha, had been in the business for many, many years, always in sales and marketing and kept his hair in a Beatle cut even in the '90s and beyond and had the most fabulous stories about all the English rockers. And so, uh, we stayed in touch, and then later on, I worked an arrangement with him for, to license my Rocky Hill recordings. So that's pretty much the Demon Edsel chapter in a, in a nutshell.
Norie Guthrie: Do you wanna talk about the, uh, Rocky Hill chapter?

John Lomax III: Uh, we could, yeah. Rocky, uh, I had become aware of Rocky through friends when I was living here in 1971. I was doing the, uh, *Space City News*. Uh, I was the music editor, and people kept saying you've got to hear this guy. He's fabulous. And I knew his history, because I actually had two albums that he had been on with a previous group called the American Blues. And they were based, Rocky was from Sulphur Springs, Texas and then had moved to Dallas and was the older brother of Dusty Hill, Dusty and Rocky. So, uh, they had a band called the American Blues, which went around, and they had dyed, their gimmick was they dyed their hair blue. And they would go and play around Texas. It was a trio with Rocky, Dusty, and Frank Beard, of course, Dusty and Frank later becoming the rhythm section for ZZ Top. So the American Blues had put two albums out, but nothing much had happened. Rocky got disgusted with the whole thing, and I think Frank and Dusty, they all decided to move from Dallas to Houston. Rocky wanted to go learn to play the blues serious, uh, seriously play the blues, so he signed on to play bass for Lightnin' Hopkins for a while. Frank and Dusty hooked up with Billy Gibbons and found, somewhere along the line found Bill Ham, who became their manager, and ZZ Top went on to fame and glory. Uh, Rocky did not. So in 1971 or '2, like I said, uh, I, uh, had been hearing about Rocky Hill and everyone saying, ah, that you'll love this guy. You gotta see him. So I went to see him, and, uh, was just floored. I mean, the guy was a spectacular guitar player and remains to this day my favorite electric guitar player. And, uh, he was a big burly guy. He's kind of built like an offensive lineman for a college football team with his big chest and huge arms and massive strength. So he was able because of that to, uh, use the heaviest gauge strings you could possible get and run them so high up above the neck that could literally roll a marble under them, and then he would ab, was able to bend those strings with his, just with his hands without a slide piece or anyway, bend these and get more string play than I had heard anyone get. And it gave him this really, really lovely tone, this very majestic kinda tone that no one else was able to get. I mean, I saw people try to play his guitar with slide pieces, and they couldn't bend the strings down like he could with his bare hands. And he would play a Strat straight into the amp, no gimmicks, no foot pedals, nothin'. He would create this sound that I never really heard anyone else create, this majestic tone that he was able to get. And he had also by that time pretty much absorbed the blues. And every great blues man's repertoire, he had absorbed and could spin it out. And also had the ability to listen to part of a song and before it was half done, he knew exactly what to do and could jump and start playing with it and then take off into these various guitar solos and just really, really great. And so, uh, I got to hear him a few times. He would play at Anderson Fair on Blue Mondays, and they later became Blue Wednesdays, but he, that was one of his, uh, regular gigs. And, uh, so we got to know each other a little bit, and, uh, at some point, he was called by the fella Kevin Eggers, who managed, uh, who was involved with Townes Van Zandt throughout his career. Kevin was doing, uh, had somehow gotten a Johnny Winter album assignment, and he wanted Rocky to come up and play, and Rocky wanted to drive up. He hated to fly. He wanted to drive up, and he had his girlfriend with him, Ramona, Ramona York, a big, tall, black haired, lovely, lovely, uh, woman, who was one of the few who wouldn't put up with Rocky, and when he would give her a hard time, she'd just slap him across the side of the face and tell him, holler at him, and he would back off. He was a pretty aggressive, pretty, uh, he lacked a lot of social skills, let's just say. So Rocky wanted somebody with him. He didn't wanna drive up there with Ramona by himself, so I just kinda
went along not so much to help with the driving, but just to ha, be a buffer, and that was my first trip to Nashville in ninety, in '72. So we got to know each other a little more, and he started telling me his tale of woe, which was that he, uh, had no money. He was working with Bill Ham, who was the manager for ZZ Top, but he didn't feel like Bill was treating him right and Bill didn't have, he wasn't a star, and ZZ Top was and would I help him out. And I said, well, okay, and, uh, I think the first problem was he was in arrears to the IRS, and they were about to come take away whatever he had, which was basically a car and some guitars and clothes. It wasn't really a lot of money. I think it was $7 or $800.00 maybe, and I just paid it off for him. And I said okay, we're gonna manage, I'll manage you, and we should hands and off we went. And so the first step for me was to get him in the studio because I didn't feel like he had been, uh, there wasn't, wasn't a record out. Uh, there were some recordings out of him, but there were none that were really, uh, very good that showed his abil-, his skill. So I envisioned making a record that would be, showcase his guitar playing, and also he had a few songs. So we went over to Rock Romano's studio and got a bass and drummer and did some, did some work just for me to see if Rocky's chops were up and help him get used to recording again and just for me to kinda see if this was worth continuing on a larger scale. And so, uh, everything sorta went okay in terms of, uh, the tracks. We had Doyle Bramhall, Jr. playing drums, and there was, they did one track that was really gorgeous, an old blues thing, but Doyle had a drinking problem and, in fact, had smuggled in a bottle in to the studio unbeknownst to me and at one point simply passed out in the middle of the take on the drums, cratered over, and so we decided we probably wouldn't take him, uh, up there. We wanted to record in Dallas, and I'm not sure exactly why, but I believe, uh, it was felt the studio scene was better there. They had more places. And long story short, we got, uh, we got Rocky up there to Dallas. I was working with a fella named Danny Brown, who had engineered some Lightnin' Hopkins records, and I had met him through my dad, who was helpin' Lightnin' in, during that period. And we, uh, we had a false start with some musicians that came down from Tulsa. We thought we were gonna get the A team of Carl Radle and, uh, all these other guys that were workin' with me, Leon Russell, but we, instead they sent down the B or C team, and they didn't really, they didn't really work, so we had to send them back to Tulsa. And then we were able to get Delbert McClinton's backup band, who was off the road, Lewis Stephens on keyboards and Darrell Norris on drums and, uh, I'm not sure the third person, but we had, then we had our, we had our core, uh, bass player, uh, in there too. And we went over to a studio in Garland and had Phil York, who was one of the top engineers, if not the top engineer in the area, and as of 2 or 3 years ago is still working, but he was a wonderful engineer. We got eight tracks down of which Rocky wrote, uh, three, and I had, uh, three tracks from David Olney, who was a singer/songwriter from Nashville. I adored his, his work, and, uh, a couple of Townes tracks. I was still involved with Townes at that time, and the idea was that I would be the publisher of these songs of Townes and David and Rocky, and I would be the co-producer with Danny Brown and, uh, we would make this record with Rocky as the artist, and we would find a major label, and I would become a mogul. This was all so perfectly set up. I was the publisher, the co-producer, and Townes, I had, you know, it would help Townes. It would help David. It would help Rocky. And, uh, so we got to the point where we had these eight songs, and we, uh, and it, the recording, once we got into the studio with Delbert's band just went really quickly. They were pros, and they knew what to do, and in 2 days, we had the eight tracks. We put a rough mix on them, because, uh, they were going off to do, on the, back on the road, and we wanted to sort of listen back to the roughs and see what we needed to do to finish up this, see if we had enough, maybe record somethin' else later. And Rocky went back to Houston, went back
to Bill Ham and signed a new deal. So there I was, I had, this was in 1977. I had, uh, a half-finished album, but I had no artist. So, uh, that was not a good thing and position to be in, and, uh, I played it for a people that liked it, but I couldn't legally do anything. This fellow was now signed, and Bill Ham didn't want any part of that album because he wanted to record Rocky himself. So, um, there you went. And sure enough, Bill recorded Rocky later and covered several of the songs that we had done and made an album with Rocky full of horns and backup singers and all this other production stuff, which I felt was overproduced. The album that I had done was basically the Rocky Hill guitar album with, uh, minimal backing, 'cause I wanted to focus on that guitar, and we would just turn him loose. He did an 8-minute version of “Waitin' Around to Die,” one of Townes's songs. Uh, we did the, the David Olney work and several of Rocky's, including his, his version of “Sam Bass,” the old outlaw from Texas. And, uh, but I had no way to do anything with it, so we never actually finished it. My partner in Dallas somehow either lost or allowed to get destroyed or sold to Bill Ham or something the masters. The multi-track masters vanished. He was supposed to send them to me and never did, and I had, all I had was a cassette of the rough mixes. So fast forward to about 2010 or '11, I sent, I got that cassette and went and had it digitized. It was still, still good, uh, no problems with it. But we had, then we put it up and got it on digital, and I sent a copy over to Pete Macklin in England, who I thought would like it, and he did. He was a real fan of rock stuff and guitar work, and, uh, he had, by then, morphed over to a label called Floating World. And so he agreed to license the record and put it out in Europe. I gave him the rights to the record everywhere but in the U.S. and then my thinking was then, uh, it would create a huge, uh, demand overseas, and I could take it to a major label in the U.S. and put it out and get my money back. I had spent maybe $40,000.00 in 1977 on this project. Uh, great engineers and studios and players weren't cheap, and we were payin' everyone cash. So, uh, Pete it out in, uh, I guess, I don't know, about 2013, 2012 as, uh, *Texas Guitar Legend* or, yeah. I wanted to call it somethin' else, but at any rate, I wrote the liner notes, told the whole story and scrounged up pictures from Rocky's widow and found some things and, including one of Rocky and Muddy Waters, and we put it out. They did a bang up job. The same fellow, Val Jennings, that had been at Demon was at Floating World. He did the graphics. And we put it out, and, uh, nothing happened. I mean, well something happened. It sold maybe into the hundreds over the course of the last 5 years. And, uh, I ne, couldn't raise any demand for Rocky. By this time, ZZ Top's career arch had come way down. I mean, they were still out there, still playing, but they were playing much smaller venues. They weren't getting on the radio. They had gone through two or three record companies after their initial success. And uh, you know, there wouldn't have been a hu, huge amount of demand for a reissue of a 1977 ZZ Top record in Europe by that time, because the original records had all gone through and had been available. So this was a record by the brother of the ZZ Top bass player, and that just didn't, didn't fly to speak of. I've let Demon, uh, Floating World keep the record for the time being even though the license term is up. I can get it back at any time, but frankly, I don't know who'd want it. Uh, I have a few copies left. I tried to sell it on Amazon and sold maybe six or eight, and I get royalty statements from Demon showing in the last year they had sold five, and I was entitled to, my royalty was barely enough to buy a pint of Guinness in a pub in England. So, uh, Rocky had died meanwhile before all the Floating World and the reissue had died, he had died of, uh, some sort of internal ailment and, uh, uh, so I was dealing with his widow, but one thing that did happen was that Andy Langer in Austin, I had sent him this project and, uh, he was then writing for the *New York Times*, uh, Texas edition, which I think has since been shuttered. But he wrote a piece about it for the *New York Times*, and I had put it up online, uh, on, uh, Amazon, and, uh, so on,
actually on TuneCore, the digital version of it. And, uh, the article came out in the *New York Times*, and it generated quite a bit of money actually. Well, quite a bit considering. Probably, I don't know, $3 or $4,000.00, which I split half and half with, uh, Rocky's widow. And, uh, so I made a little money back, and the, but the important thing to me was the album had following gotten out. People could hear Rocky at what I felt, at his peak, and, uh, they did a bang up job on the graphics. It was a very nice-looking project, and I'm still proud of it and all. I wish it had sold more, but it didn't. And, uh, it would have maybe, if I had gotten it out 25 years before then or in the, even in the '80s. But that was the Rocky Hill story. Uh, there are many other chapters, but that was the one that tied in with Pete Macklin, and that was the only, uh, time we actually got any recording done. And, uh, Rocky went back to Bill Ham, as I mentioned. Then he and Bill got at odds again. In fact, I believe the story was that Rocky had stood up and picked up Bill's desk and dumped it on him in his chair and stormed out. And even after that, Bill kept trying to help Rocky and, in fact, I had more try at trying to help him. And then Bill and I together tried to co-manage him and never worked, because Rocky was just simply messed up, drugs, alcohol, and neurotic and mental issues and whatnot. But it was that classic case of the person wantin' to pick up the balloon on the ground, and each time they reached down, they'd kick it away, further away. And Bill actually had Rocky set up for a world tour. He had sent him on a pr, a publicity tour and was ready to launch the album, which he had gotten out on Virgin. And, uh, then Rocky came down with yellow jaundice, and, uh, all of that went away, and that was his last real, real shot to, uh, make headway. But I really don't think even if he had have gotten that out and got on the tour, I think he would have found some way to self-destruct. It's just sad, because it just taught me, once again, that enormous talent is really the, the ante to get into the game, but what you do with that ante and how you manage, um, your talent and how you deal with it and how you act is probably even more important than having great skill. You have to also know how to relate with others. You have to learn how the business is done, and you have to do a whole lotta things. But talent gets you into the game, but that's all, all it gets you. And then, of course, you have to maintain that talent, and you have to go out and deliver in a live setting, but it's not just about talent. It's about what you do with that talent, so very sad. Rocky, I hope you're hearing all this and know that I did my level best to help you, and you wouldn't let me.

Norie Guthrie: So how do you see your work in the music industry fitting into the overall Lomax family music history?

John Lomax III: Well, uh, at some point I guess in my 20s, I really started to realize the scope of what I, what the Lomax family had already done at that point. My grandfather, of course, starting in 1908 with the field recordings, but actually I can date his interest initially in music to somewhere in the mid-1880s, when he was a teenager, when he was sitting there at home at night hearing the cowboys sing on the Chisholm Trail as they went up and camped out. They lived in, outside of Meridian, Texas, which happened to be located on one of the major branches of the Chisholm Trail for the cattle drives. The cattle drives kind of were about 20 years they were a big thing until the railroad got all the way down to Texas and you didn't have to drive cattle up to Kansas or somewhere else to, uh, meet, meet the buyers and have the market. So he would hear this, uh, these cowboys singing to the cattle in the middle of the night to keep 'em calmed down and at some point, started slipping out of the house and in the, in, at night, house had, uh, slipped by a kerosene lantern, they didn't have any electricity back then. And, uh, he was a teenager so this would have been in the mid-1880s, and they started writing the words down, and somehow
Lomax worked out a way to remember the melodies. That was the starting point, it wasn’t until 1908, that he began to actually go do field recordings. He had a, a recording gear that he was able to put, it was a mass, one of those massive cone shaped, uh, items that had two parts, the base of it and then the, the recording cone. So he would strap the cone up to the pommel of the saddle and the rest of the gear to the back, and ride around on horseback lugging this gear in search of songs. And when he found something, he would unpack all this and set it up and make recordings, field recordings beginning in 1908 and of course he eventually did, I believe the Library of Congress has said that he alone did 5500 songs. Uh, songs, uh, stories, kids play songs, all kinds of things, not just songs, but whatever he thought was worth preserving. Uh, no one else was doing this at the time and so a lot of this might well have been lost forever. Uh, one of the early songs he found was the “Buffalo Skinners,” which has gone on to be one of the most famous western songs of all time, and has been recorded by a long list of artists, um, household named artists. Uh, and, it, hey it had several variances, one of which was “The Hills of Old Mexico.” Woody Guthrie recorded that variant and long about sometime in the, uh, period when Johnny Cash was at Sun Records, he recorded it as “The Hills of Old Mexico,” but then there was a variant of it that had to do with, uh, lumberjacks. The basic theme being a, a summer job that went horribly wrong and, in this case, resulted in a murder, or rather casual murder as it turned out, but a murder nonetheless. So grandfather started doing that and then, uh, in 1908 in most of the early things he found, or a lot of them actually, came out in *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, which later was short and the title was shortened to *Cowboy Songs and Subsequent Editions*. Uh, then, uh, Alan, his younger son, sort of continued that sort of work and, in, uh, after my grandfather passed, but actually he, let's see, Alan came onto the picture in 1933. He was at that point 17 years old and was almost graduated from the University of Texas at 17, but he dropped out of school to go out on this second major recording expedition that my grandfather embarked on, that, uh, resulted in the songs that you hear in *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, and that, that particular recording expedition, uh, was organized by my father, um, partly because, uh, he had graduated from UT and gone off to Harvard Business School to get a Master's, but this was by then in 1929 or '30, and, uh, the Depression put an end to that. He had to drop out of Harvard, he came back and eventually took a job with a reconstruction finance corporation going around auditing banks, which would not have been a fun thing in the Depression. But he, meanwhile his mother, Alan's mother, my grandfather's wife, Bess Brown Lomax, who had been his business partner and main support died. Uh, she was, I think 50, and died of something that really hasn't ever been properly diagnosed or explained. And the Depression hit, my grandfather had moved to Dallas, taken a job with a bank selling, you know, touting, uh, his investments to various friends of his, all of which lost their money when the Depression hit. So grandfather was in a, in a low end. He had lost his wife, his, uh, he'd lost a lot of money for his friends in the crash. He had, uh, had had two different times when he had been thrown out of the University of Texas, where he had been working for various, uh, political things, nothing to do with his job or his performance, but he got involved with, he was first thrown out by the Ferg, Paul Ferguson for, who was trying to basically take over the University of Texas, and make his own little toy out of it, and, uh, he booted my grandfather out, and then of course was later impeached, although his wife then became the Governor, and, uh, Paul Ferguson stayed, uh, in touch with Ma Ferguson, as you might imagine, and he didn't really go away as he should have. He was impeached for a number of different, uh, misdeeds. And the second time it was, uh, another, uh, battle, a political battle. This was with, I believe, Lutcher Stark, who was Chairman of the Board of Regents, and he wanted to take the university under
direction and didn't agree with my grandfather. So in 1933, then because of all of this and my
grandfather started having some real health issues, depression being one of them. I mean this
man had lost his wife, he'd lost all his friends' money, he developed these health problems, lost
his job at the bank and couldn't go back to the University of Texas. So my dad convinced him to
go on another folk collecting trip, but this time to broaden the scope from cowboy songs to all
sorts of songs. And then Alan came on board. My dad couldn't go out with them, but he sort of
set it all up and also arranged for a number of different speaking engagements during the course
of the tour, which helped fund the tour, 'cause grandfather could go out and give lectures, sell
copies of *Cowboy Songs*, and a couple of subsequent books that came out on the same subject
mainly. And, uh, then he would give these lectures in which he would usually sing a song or two
to illustrate and, or maybe more, to illustrate the, uh, the songs and tell the story of how he found
them and what happened and the circumstances. So they took off on this trip. They got all these
songs together and that came out in *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, uh, which has gone
through subsequent editions and, uh, has far greater variety and far more songs than ever came
out and *Cowboy Songs* and all its various editions. So, uh, Alan joined the team at that point and
then eventually branched out and started doing his own collecting, and, uh, he added another
several thousand more songs, uh, – oh, and I should mention also, in 19, in the ‘33, I guess, or
‘32, they got the book contract with Macmillan, my dad and, uh, his dad went up to New York
and, uh, or maybe were on a lecture tour and got this book contract for the *American Ballads and
Folk Songs*, and also worked out a deal with The Library of Congress. And the deal involved
them, uh, basically starting The Library of Congress, Library of Recorded Sound, and my
grandfather who then would have the use of state of the art equipment and the discs from which
the recordings were made, they were able to fit a recording machine that weighed something like
400 pounds, and they had it custom built into the trunk of a Model A Ford. So that was the studio
and he got the discs. They were actually recording literally direct to disc with the needle going
around, digging the grooves as they recorded. So if you, uh, if somebody was in the middle of
the song and messed up then you had a disc that was unusable and you had to throw it away and
start over. So that required quite a bit of, uh, pre-production so to speak, rehearsing song. I mean
here they are, they're out in the middle of, of all over, there's, that trip took them, I think it was
something like 16,000 miles in 2 or 3 months, and they were, first they had to find someone in
these various communities. Sometimes they had leads and tips from correspondents, sometimes
they didn't. They would have to find an artist who had songs of interest and listen to those, and
then set up a session with the artist and the song, you know, the person, the song source, set this
up and then sort of rehearse 'em a little bit to make sure they could get through it without, uh,
gumming it up. And so, they, that's what they did. They came back with, after this massive trip,
which was on roads that were not particularly good, this being 88 years ago, there was of course
no interstate highways. There were, were a few highways at all that were paved and they, uh, had
all sorts of mechanical problems with the car, with the gear. This was, uh, the, the very early, this
was, believe it or not, state of the art equipment in, in 1933, was this 400-pound machine. So
obviously they were, they had to, they couldn't go to somebody's house up in the holler, or up on
top of a hill, they had to bring the artist down to the car. So they did all that and Alan then went
on to record people in, uh, he went overseas during the red scare, because his roommate, John
Henry Faulk, had gotten blacklisted by the, the awful AWARE Incorporated people who were
calling people communists with little or no evidence, or any other, uh, backing, uh, any, without
real reason. And they decided that if you had ever gone to a meeting of the Communist Party
then you were of course a communist. And the Communist Party in the United States back then
was a, you know, was a viable sort of party. They had lots of people involved with 'em, and they were always trying to recruit people, so they would have meetings and I think John Henry had gone to one out of curiosity or something, but he was then the top radio personality in New York City. He was right on the verge of moving from radio into television, and he was blacklisted and couldn't get a job anywhere. I think he eventually got a job somewhere in, with a radio station in Montana. But, uh, he sued, he sued AWARE Incorporated for defamation and various other things, and Louis Nizer took on the case and they, uh, sued AWARE Incorporated and eventually won the lawsuit, but by then AWARE Incorporated and the whole McCarthy communist thing had sort of gone away and, and AWARE Incorporated at least had bankrupted out, so even though he got $1 million settlement he never saw any money out of it, but he did get his name restored and he wrote a book about it called *Fear on Trial* that eventually became a movie. But when this happened in, I guess 1950, Alan realized that he was probably next, so he took off and went to England and then recorded a lot of things up in Scotland, all over the Hebrides and then on into the continent, carrying on the same sort of tradition. Uh, and continued doing that and established the global jukebox, which was a system and his vision would be a system of being able to hear a musical phrase, and putting it into a computer and it would spit back all the antecedents or other songs that used this phrase in it, musical phrase, not lyrics, which was an idea well ahead of the computing capability that was available at the time. Now it wouldn't be a problem and now in fact the global jukebox is still, still a viable entity. My cousin, his daughter, Anna Lomax Wood, is still trying to get the funds to carry this through, because you can imagine the massive amount of work that has to be done. You're talking about trying to get all the songs in the world put into one source and then be accessible. It's online and available for people to use even, uh, today, even though, uh, Alan has been gone for quite a while. Uh, they were able to, uh, get it online and, uh, it's, it's just a staggering thing to think about that you can research music of a, you can hear a phrase that you might hear in America, and find that it has all these antecedents in Asia or Europe or Africa. And, uh, I mean it's just a, a magnificent idea and, uh, one that is hopefully, eventually we'll be fully realized. I would mention at one point, too, that the Grateful Dead became of this and helped, uh, with some of the financing through their Rex Foundation, which I didn't know until years later, Alan, Alan one time called and asked me if I had ever heard of the Grateful Dead, and this was probably in the late ‘80s, and I said, well, yes of course, uh, I've actually been to four of their shows, and I really like 'em. So, uh, Alan carried the, sort of took what my grandfather was doing and what he was helping grandfather do and kept doing that, but he also recorded in the West Indies, uh, and, uh, wrote numerous books of which, uh, his most famous was probably *Folks Songs of North America*, and wrote a memoir recent, uh, right before he died, uh, *Land Where the Blues Began*. So he carried it on. My father picked up the, the, uh, legacy and went in a sort of different direction. He eventually, he moved to Houston after the war, he was in the Navy, never went overseas. They said he was too old, he enlisted, he was 34, so he wound up being, uh, a physical training instructor, and, uh, actually was one of the rare examples of a person who enlisted as a, at the lowest level of Navy, uh, hierarchy and worked his way up to being an officer, a lieutenant junior grade, which is very unusual for those not involved in combat. But they moved to Houston after the war, they bought a house, uh, in West University on Vanderbilt Street ironically. And, uh, he had several different jobs, but eventually became a land developer. He and his partner would go out and buy raw land, build the houses, rent them out, then sell them. And that was his, uh, vocation and it turned into a very good one. He, uh, building houses in Houston in the ‘50s and ‘60s, was the right time and the right place. And, uh, he also though, his passion still remained
music, and he started going out and singing the songs that he had learned from his father. And he never was really comfortable with a group, so he would just stand up and sing 'em. That was the way his dad had done it. No, uh, instruments, so just acapella. And later on, managed Lightnin' Hopkins for about 10 years. And I think we talked some about that, but, um, so he took the legacy sort of in a different direction. He also discovered, uh, an unpublished manuscript of his father, and, uh, that was, uh, he kind of tidied that up. It had been lost and thought to be lost forever, but the grandfather, uh, my dad, tidied that up a little bit and was able to get it published through Bill Wittliff at an Encino press, which was a small press out of Austin. And, uh, Bill did the, uh, the drawings that went with the book and it was a limited-edition sort of, sort of publication. So, uh, he carried on my grandfather's work. This came out probably in the ‘60s I think. Uh, and then he did his performing. He, he was on several, I think one, at least one maybe more of the Kerrville Folk Festival recordings, he sang there a little bit, but mostly he sang for libraries and civic groups and, uh, wasn't much for folk clubs. He wasn't much for going into nightclubs or actually pursuing this as, uh, a vocation. He performed in some clubs opening up shows for Lightnin' Hopkins, but mostly it was, uh, small civic groups. He had also, uh, he just, he loved to sing and he would ride around on his bike and if he saw somebody out on their porch that he knew, he'd just walk up and start belting 'em out. And, uh, he would sing at the drop of hat and tell these stories. He had thing big old booming baritone voice and it was fairly, uh, well-muscled, probably 6'1, 190, but really well, uh, well built. He had built himself up so he had a, a very powerful physique and a powerful presence, which, uh, which really lent itself to the, the stories and the songs. And, uh, he, he did record, uh, one album for Folkways, uh, John A. Lomax, Jr., Sings American Folk Songs, and then later he recorded an album called The Tex-i-an Boys, T-E-X dash I dash A-N, Tex-I-An Boys, which came from a song, with four or five of his folklore buddies. So he did make a record with a band, but primarily he sang by himself and in fact he even wrote a long paper called “The Case for the Unaccompanied Folk Singer,” which explained exactly why he didn't choose to, uh, record with people or sing with guitar accompaniment, or learn to play the guitar, or have a band. So, uh, he sort of, by this time going out in the field was not really as critical as it was in the early days, because there were a lot of studies around and a lot of other people had started doing all this. So the field recording aspects sort of had, had gone away. He did find a few songs here and there, one of which I put on the Folk album, “The Ballad of Bobby Kennedy,” that he and a University of Texas professor named Mody Boatright, put together, mostly Mody, but my dad refined it and developed it into a song. I think Mody had written it just sort of as, as a goof. And unfortunately, they finished the song 2 weeks before Robert Kennedy was assassinated, so it never saw the light of day until I put it out on the Folk album early this year. So then, uh, I was aware of all of this and didn't know what really to do with myself until I started writing about music, and that was sort of my entry point into music was, uh, writing about it, starting with the liner notes project my father did and then later I did some live reviews of shows, reviews of live shows at, uh, the University of Texas. So The Daily Texan, actually is the first, uh, place where my writings ever published, other than the liner note project. So, uh, then when I came to Houston and started writing for Space City News as the Music Editor and later Mockingbird and a paper called Abraxas, that came along and was short lived, successors to Space City News, which I think ended in about 1972. So that sort of made me feel like I was a, uh, a Lomax and that I was doing something. Part of what the family has done really has been not just field recordings, but finding music they considered important, and preserving it, and also getting it available to people and telling people and promoting that music, and trying to call attention to that music. And as long as I can remember
from my youth, beginning in my early teenage years, I always really loved to get a record and
turn people onto it, and have 'em come over to the house and listen to it on the record player. Uh,
early Ray Charles stuff, I remember being involved with, and Bobby Blue Bland's two Duke
albums, uh, that, uh, Joe Scott produced with the full orchestra and it was, they were just Two
Steps from the Blues, I think was one and "I Pity the Fool," just spectacular. Those records have,
they were, they have been in print ever since, that's how good they are. And Bobby was at his,
you know, at his, in his youth and golly they just, they hold up to this day. So and I would, you
know, why you gotta hear this, could, or, you should listen to this, listen to this. So, uh, I would
play this. So I was sort of doing the same thing they were doing on the side of promoting music
that I felt was interesting and important or at least worth listening to. And, uh, so it's Space City
News, I was doing the same thing. I did a whole lot of record reviews, probably, I don't know,
100, maybe 150 or 200 during the year and half run of, of the, that I was the music editor. And,
uh, so then when I went up to Nashville, I continued writing about music and in '76 was when I
started managing artists, which I did of course with Townes first. And the management career
went on with various artists until 2001, when I was unceremoniously dumped by Kasey
Chambers, and then I relapsed briefly in 2007, and took on a girl named Sunny Sweeney, a
Texas gal who had done a record that we had been exporting, uh, and, uh, we exported a whole
lot of 'em, and nobody had ever heard of her, but it was a wonderful little record called
Heartbreakers Hall of Fame. And so, uh, after I got her set up with a booking agency and, uh,
helped get her into co-writing situations with a number of established writers in Nashville, and
then helped get Big Machine Records interested in her, and then she dumped me so that her
husband could manage her, and that would have been 2007 or '08, I think I did that about a year
and I swore off management then, and I've been able to, uh, to hold to that, uh, and, uh, not
relapse again, and do not plan to. So I had the management thing going and I had the writing
thing going with various publications. By then I had written, I started writing columns in 1980,
with The Nashville Gazette, and had continued doing that ever, up to this year. So I had 37 years
of writing little chatty newsy columns about what's happening in Nashville. About half for U.S.
magazines and about half for ones overseas in mainly England and Australia, but also, I've
written a few for publications in France, and even Japan translated by someone else of course. So
I had the writing, I had the management, and then in '96, the Demon work. So that was another
way to get music out and around the world and turn people onto to things that I thought were
worth listening to. So, uh, and then in '96, was when I started Roots Music Exporters, which was
yet another way to get music around the world, which was mainly trying to be that one stop shop
for hard to find music, that hard to find if you're not in the United States. And even then,
sometimes hard to find, because you had to go direct to the artist, 'cause they were putting
records out on their own rather than through the larger label. So those were the mains areas of
my activities, which I like to think, and I hope others would agree, that this was extending the
Lomax tradition on into the 21st Century. And, uh, then passing the torch to my son, on the
Demon Edsel liner note projects, which really helped get his writing career going. And by this
time, uh, by today in 2017, he has had a, a good career. Uh, he went back to Houston after, uh,
he moved off after he went to Strake Jesuit, had a number of adventures in England and then
went and lived in a kibbutz, and worked in Israel, and then, uh, came back to Houston and got a
job with the Houston Press as the music editor, and did that for, I think 7 years as music editor,
of which for most of that time, he was writing a column every week on Houston music, what's
happening in Houston, which after 7 years, 6 years I guess, amounted to over 300 columns on
Houston music and musicians, and the history. And so, he's carrying on the tradition that way.
Uh, he left, then he, uh, he got tired of being the music editor, and went over to just being a reporter. He wanted a, a broader scope and a broader canvas of things to write about, so he became a, a reporter. And then, uh, was lured away by a magazine called Houstonia, which wanted to become the Texas Monthly of Houston, and it was, uh, a monthly slick rather than a weekly free tabloid. It was, uh, monthly and it was slick paper and really nicely done graphically. But he, they, uh, Houstonia sorted devolved into, uh, a magazine that was not very, uh, that was not really interested in reporting hard news or getting serious, but doing things like the 40 best hamburgers in Houston, the 12 best tacos in the east side of real, best of realtors in Houston, the Houston's best back surgeons, and these were fluffy pieces, some of which would be paid for by various, the subjects of the article and he got into, uh, a squabble with them over that and he reused something that he had written for them in a book he wrote, and they sued him and they had all this huge imbroglio over that. And so he wound up getting fired only to get a job with the real Texas Monthly as a senior editor where he's been for the last 2 or 3 years, writing about a number of things, not necessarily music, but, but writing about culture in, uh, things that he finds interesting, and puts in the online version as well as the print version. So there we are into the fourth generation and by now in 2017, that means that Lomaxs have been involved in finding and presenting and preserving music steadily from the middle of the 1880s to the present, which is closing in on 150 years and four generations. I don't know of any other family that can say that and I'm very proud that I was able to pick up the torch and carry it forward and then hand the torch onto him, although I'm, I'm not done yet, uh, hopefully. But, uh, all of this was finally put in one place with the article that appeared in Texas Music Magazine this month, or actually it's a quarterly so it's the fall issue, which is called “The John Lomax Legacy” in which details the contributions of four generations of John Lomax. We, I wanted to include Alan and Bess, my Aunt Bess Lomax Hawes, who was also active in music and, but her, her family and Alan's daughter felt like, well everyone already knows about them, so why don't you just do it about your side, so I did. And that's just been published and they did a beautiful job with something like 25 photographs and it runs over 11 pages. I wrote most all of it except for John Nova, who wrote his section, and then looked over the over, the overall project. I, I put it into four parts, well, I put it into a beginning, and then each of the four of us, and then a wrap up at the end, and he did the part on himself. So I just feel like well, maybe this is what I'm here on earth to do, scatter music about the globe and that's what I've been trying to do and hopefully others will feel that I've done that. About 3 or 4 years ago, I became aware of an outfit in Nashville called Sister Cities, which is, uh, actually an international organization. There's probably a chapter in Houston, I would be very surprised if there isn't. And Sister Cities tries to link a city in one country with a city in another, and they then, uh, engage in a formal relationship, which then lends itself to exchanges, student exchanges, uh, and also business exchanges. So, uh, the Sister Cities in Nashville, at the time had, I believe about six Sister Cities. One in, uh, Japan, one in Canada, one in Germany, one in, uh, Belfast, one in, uh, France, one in, uh, Mendoza, South America, one in China. So, uh, but nothing in Australia. And a fella who was on the Board and another fella named, uh, the, the Board, the two peop-, people on the Board, Gary Jackson and Steve Haggard, whom I had met in our, uh, Friday pub sessions, which, uh, we used to, and still, try to gather up folks and go to the pub every Friday. So they had mentioned that Gary was trying to get a Sister City relationship established with Tamworth, Australia, which is in New South Wales, and which bills itself and has not been challenged as the country music capital of Australia. Primarily because they have a massive festival there every January, January being in Australia, being the summer months, and holiday season. And so, uh, they have this conven-, uh,
this gathering which, uh, it's gone under various names, but it basically it, uh, it's just a huge thing like the CMA Music Festival, but it's in Australia, and it runs for about 10 days and 40,000 or 50,000 people come from all over Australia. And every Australian country artist pretty much has to be there. If you don't then their next year at every show you do, you'll get ragged by the fans going right weren't you in Tamworth? I didn't see you there and I went there, blah, blah, blah. So, and it culminates with the Golden Guitar Awards presented by the CMAA Country Music Association of Australia, which I had joined in 1998, despite the fact that I lived in America. I was allowed to join as a professional member, because I was involved in the Australian music industry both in terms of my management and also my export activities. I'm not sure there was anyone else in America that was, uh, a professional member of the Australian Country Music Association. Of course, I've been a member of the U.S. CMA for many, many years. So Gary told me he had been in touch with a lady there about trying to bring about a twinning between us and Tamworth, which I thought was a wonderful idea, being the two country music capitals. Tamworth was a small city, much smaller than Nashville, but if you looked at the size of Tamworth in relation to the overall size of Australia in terms of population, it wasn't that different a ratio between Nashville and the U.S. population. Besides that, Sydney was taken, Melbourne was taken, Perth was taken, Adelaide was taken, and you really couldn't have two different relationships in the same country. So none of those cities would be very interested in making – Brisbane was taken, all of the major cities in Australia had already twinned with other, other, uh, cities in the United States. So Tamworth had a Sister City organization and they had, I believe, uh, two Sister Cities, one in England and with their namesake city, Tamworth in England, and one in New Zealand, I believe, in a city named Gore. So, uh, a long story short, I found out from Gary this was going on and Gary was a, and was and is, a would be musician and his main goal was to try to get a way to play down in Australia, 'cause he was sure he would be a big star there. Steve Haggard was, uh, another musician and producer who was producing Gary on these custom records, and he was kind of along for the ride, but I realized that neither of them had been to Australia, and neither of them knew anyone there, where as I did. So I joined Sister Cities, was made a Board member, and set about trying to bring this relationship together, and my first step was to get a fella named Jeff Walker, a native Australian, who had been in Nashville for many, many years, involved in helping us. He had connections down there as well, uh, and even a few more than I did, and, uh, also a man named, uh, Bob Saporiti, who had risen to be the head of Warner Bros. Nashville at one point, and then when they did the merger with AOL and Warner shucked off a lot of their top level executives, he kind of got the golden parachute, so he was not with Warner, but he had been to Australia several times. He had connections down there and had been the man who had actually signed Keith Urban to his first record deal. So we got a good quote, through him we got a good quote out of Keith. We had a number of meetings, developed a little committee. The people in Australia realized that we were serious and it was obviously to their benefit to twin up with Nashville, a much bigger city and a much more prominent music capital. So after, uh, 2 or 3 years, I think in 2012 or may '13, we actually were able to bring this about and Tamworth and Nashville became Sister Cities. And, uh, that, I'm very proud of that, because, uh, it has resulted in a number of back and forth, uh, trade and student missions between the two countries, and it's just a way to bring people together on different parts of the world. Um, so we're now, uh, we added that city to our list and, uh, they came to Nashville two or three times, and participated in Fan Fare and had a booth set up and from their tourism department, trying to lure people down there to go to the festival. And, uh, so that has been, uh, a relationship that's ongoing and I'm
very proud of being a part and helping to bring that about. Um, one thing I don't think I
mentioned earlier was, I can look up the exact year, but, uh, in the last maybe 6 or 7 years ago, I
was given the Country Music Association Jo Walker-Meador International Achievement Award,
which has to do with, it was more to do with my export activities than my writing. There was a
separate award given for journalists, which I have not won, but would like to. But, uh, I won the
Jo Walker-Meador Award named after the lady who ran the Country Music Association for
something like 30 years, recently passed away and who was responsible really for guiding
country music from the low level up to its position of prominence. So it was a seriously major
thrill to win an award, first of all, but one named after this woman who had really put Nashville
on the map really in country music. And it had been won by several others that, that I knew,
including this gentleman, Bob Saporiti, who by then had begun putting out records under the
name of Reckless Johnny Wales, which he had originally starred as an artist and after he got
chucked off by Warner's, he went back to that. Another fella named Tony Byworth, who was, uh,
a prominent journalist, still is, uh, he's now retired, but there were people that I had worked with,
uh, in trying to bring country music out into the world of Nashville and country seems to be a
little land lock so to speak in that they rarely pay much attention to the world outside of the
United States and Canada. And I believe it was a very, uh, shortsighted of them, even though
they have had made attempts to broaden country music to a global music. Once you get out of
the United States, aside from Australia and Ireland and England, a little in England, there's not
much interest in country. It would be maybe, in the U.S. it runs from 10 to 15 percent of the
global, of the total market, and in Europe it might be 1 percent, uh, across Europe. Of course,
Europe being composed of all these separate markets, which operate as independent entities or
rather, they're sort of like states, but they're not, they're separate countries. So each market is
different, whereas in the U.S. we kind of then that one global, one countrywide market for
record, country or other recordings. So that's, uh, in that particular year, Taylor Swift did not win
a CMA Award, nor did a number of other famous artists and I really like to tell people, yeah,
Taylor didn't win one, but I did. And, uh, but's it's, it was a nice little, uh, uh, glass globe on a
base. It's lovely looking and it's the biggest honor, uh, I've ever gotten. Uh, the, the high part of
my life, other than, my wife whom I met, by the way at Anderson Fair, at a Rocky Hill show,
Melanie Wells, who, uh, went to Rice and was just here for her 50th, uh, class reunion, and then
was a nurse in St. Thomas, I mean at St. Luke's, it was, uh, in the OR during a lot of the early
heart transplant procedures. And convinced her to move to Nashville, and we've been married
26 years. In addition to my son, John Nova, then I have a daughter named Amanda Lomax by
my second wife, Jean, Jean Pierson Lomax. Uh, she is a freelance photographer of considerable
skill and also works for, for Four Seasons Hotel in Washington, D.C. in the reservations
department, and is coming to see us on Tuesday for Thanksgiving. Uh, in fact she is going to be
put in charge of sorting through thousands of slides and other photographs that I have with the
idea of being to shuck off anything unusable and organize the rest, which would be a project that
will take her some time. Hopefully she'll stay with us for the rest of the year if she's in between –
Four Seasons gives employees of her, I think she's been there 10 years, and they are allowing her
a full year of sabbatical, up to a full year and she can still go back there as of, with all her
benefits and step right back into her position in the reservations department. She's trying to
morph over into a professional photographer for full time rather than part time. She's been, uh,
professional for a number of years, but she's now trying to step out, and plus I think she's getting
a little worn out with Washington, D.C., which she lives in the center, lived in the center of town
and had to put up with all of that.
Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

John Lomax III: And I think she's ready for a little bit smaller – she's interviewing with a company in Chapel Hill, which would be a lovely place to work and live.

Norie Guthrie: Well, I wanna thank you so much for coming in today and taking the time to, well, actually not today, let's redo that.

John Lomax III: Three sessions.

Norie Guthrie: We did three sessions.

John Lomax III: Yeah. I'm just honored and thrilled to participate and to be able to go back through my career and life and have stuff for the record, and, uh, I'm, it's something I've wanted to do and now here it is. You have it, and, uh, hopefully I'll be able to look it over at some point, but it's just been a lovely experience and I want to thank you very much for, for doing this with me.

Norie Guthrie: Well, thank you so much.